

BBC Learning English

6 Minute English

TV addicts



NB: This is not a word for word transcript

Rob: Hello, I'm Rob.

Cath: And I'm Cath.

Rob: And this is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. Today we're talking about a very popular subject - television. Now Cath, I have to ask you, are you a big TV **addict**?

Cath: I don't think I'm a big TV addict but you know if there's a really good series on I do get a bit addicted to it.

Rob: Well Cath, you're quite unusual actually because watching TV has become one of our most popular pastimes, and in the UK television has recently been celebrating a special birthday. More on that in a moment it's now time to find out how much you really know about television. Let's see if you can answer this question. According to an official survey how many hours a week on average does someone in the UK watch television? Is it:

- a) 20 hours
- b) 30 hours
- c) 40 hours

Cath: I can't believe the average would be 40 hours a week. I'm not very good at maths but that's a lot every day isn't it.

Rob: It's a popular pastime.

Cath: It is a very popular pastime. OK, I'm going to do what I always do and go for the middle one – 30 hours a week.

Rob: 30 hours. Well, we'll see if you're right at the end of the programme. We know that people around the world love to watch TV but did you know it's the UK where the first regular public broadcast began 75 years ago.

Cath: So that's the special birthday you mentioned. Daily TV broadcasting began back in 1936 – and who was the broadcaster?

Rob: It was us – the BBC! The British Broadcasting Corporation. But of course it had taken years of developing and experimenting before people could watch television at home.

Cath: And the development of this new **medium** was the result of work by many inventors, people like John Logie Baird and Philo Farnsworth. So let's hear from the BBC's Nick Higham about the early days of television...

Nick Higham, BBC

Ready on vision, and sound. Vision and sound are on. (Whistle) The station goes on the air...

They thought of calling it photo telegraphy, seeing by wireless or the electric telescope. They settled for television, and the world was never the same again.

Rob: So we just the sound of the first TV programme going on-air and then Nick Higham explaining other names that were considered for this new invention.

Cath: Such as photo **telegraphy** – telegraphy is about transmitting messages over a distance electronically, so in this case transmitting pictures. Another suggested name was electric telescope – I quite like that.

Rob: It's a good name isn't it; but inventors decided **to settle for** – or agree on – the name television and as Nick Higham said, the world was never the same again. Now so much of our life and what we talk about is influenced by what we see on TV.

Cath: But 75 years ago when the regular TV broadcasts started, what was shown on television was quite limited.

Rob: It was, as we can hear now from Television historian, John Trenouth. Listen out for the word he uses to describe radio...

Television Historian John Trenouth

Well it was an hour in the afternoon and an hour in the evening. And it was a whole range of material. Bearing in mind that nobody really knew what television programmes should be, and so all sorts of things were tried. And one of the things they were very keen to do was to try things that could not be done on the radio, or as they called it at that time the wireless. So ballet was one thing that was tried; and various demonstrations, which included a demonstration of chrysanthemums, the start of the sort of TV gardener; a gentleman who came in and talked about the fact that he'd built a model of the Golden Hinde from matchsticks...

Rob: So the BBC broadcast just two hours of television a day but those two hours had a whole range of material.

Cath: Yes, there was variety including ballet, gardening demonstrations, building models.

Rob: Interesting stuff! These were **visual** things that couldn't be done on the radio – or wireless as it used to be called. But it was all very **experimental** because nobody really knew what should be shown in a television programme.

Cath: Of course if you wanted to watch all these lovely new programmes you needed to have a new piece of furniture in your living room – the TV set.

Rob: But there were only an estimated 400 TV sets in UK homes which could receive this first broadcast. They weren't cheap and some people were suspicious of this **mystical** new device.

Cath: There were lots of strange ideas about this new piece of equipment and some people thought it was a two-way medium!

Rob: Yes, people actually thought that people inside the TV set could see them at home so they put a cloth over the screen!

Cath: Now that would be an incredible invention, wouldn't it! Anyway, **manufacturers** – the people who made the sets – did eventually put doors on the front which could be closed when someone had stopped watching TV.

Rob: I don't think we get TV sets with doors on now but the technology has certainly developed at an incredible rate. Now in the UK we can get TV sets with huge screens and with pictures in **high definition** and 3-D. You can even watch TV on your mobile phone!

Cath: And the number of channels we can watch has also expanded, particularly with the development of satellite television. Now we are **spoilt for choice**, it's no wonder the British spend much of their time watching TV.

Rob: Ah, but how much Cath?! Earlier I asked you a question. According to an official survey how many hours a week on average does someone in the UK watch television?

Cath: And I said 30. So was I right?

Rob: Yes you were, fantastic, well done!

Cath: Oh good!

Rob: OK Cath, we've just time for you to remind us of some of the vocabulary that we've heard in today's programme.

Cath: OK, we had:

addict

medium

telegraphy

to settle for

visual

experimental

mystical

manufacturers

high definition

spoilt for choice

Rob: Thanks Cath and thank you for listening. Please join us again for another programme soon. Bye.

Cath: Bye!

Vocabulary and definitions

addict	someone who cannot stop doing something (usually something harmful like taking drugs but also time-consuming activities like watching TV)
medium	a method of communication, such as radio, TV or newspapers
telegraphy	a method of sending messages over long distances using radio or electric signals
to settle for (something)	to accept something less than you hoped for
visual	relating to what can be seen
experimental	new or being tried for the first time
mystical	relating to powers that we cannot understand
manufacturers	companies that produce things
high definition	a new, high standard for TV quality
spoilt for choice	a phrase meaning to have too many options or things to choose from

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