
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Welcome to the 'metaverse'



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Sam

Hello. This is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Sam.

Neil

And I'm Neil.

Sam

On Saturday mornings I love going to watch football in the park. The problem is when it's cold and rainy - I look out the bedroom window and go straight back to bed!

Neil

Well, instead of going to the park, why not bring the park to you? Imagine watching a live version of the football match at home in the warm, with friends. Sound good, Sam?

Sam

Sounds great! – but how can I be in two places at once? Is there some amazing invention to do that?

Neil

There might be, Sam - and it could be happening sooner than you think, thanks to developments in VR, or virtual reality. According to Facebook boss, Mark Zuckerberg, in the future we'll all spend much of our time living and working in the 'metaverse' – a series of virtual worlds.

Sam

Virtual reality is a topic we've discussed before at 6 Minute English. But when Facebook announced that it was hiring ten thousand new workers to develop VR for the 'metaverse', we thought it was time for another look.

Neil

Is this programme, we'll be hearing two different opinions on the 'metaverse' and how it might shape the future.

Sam

But first I have a question for you, Neil. According to a 2021 survey by gaming company, Thrive Analytics, what percentage of people who try virtual reality once want to try it again? Is it:

- a) 9 percent?
- b) 49 percent? or,
- c) 79 percent?

Neil

I guess with VR you either love it or hate it, so I'll say b) 49 percent of people want to try it again.

Sam

OK, I'll reveal the correct answer later in the programme. But what Neil said is true: people tend to either love virtual reality or hate it. Somebody who loves it is Emma Ridderstad, CEO of Warpin', a company which develops VR technology.

Neil

Here she is telling BBC World Service programme, Tech Tent, her vision of the future:

Emma Ridderstad

In ten years, everything that you do on your phone today, you will do in **3-D**, through your classes for example. You will be able to do your shopping, you will be able to meet your friends, you will be able to work remotely with whomever you want, you will be able to share digital spaces, share music, share art, share projects in digital spaces between each other. And you will also be able to integrate the digital objects in your physical world, making the world much more **phygital** than is it today.

Sam

Virtual reality creates **3-D**, or **three-dimensional** experiences where objects have the three dimensions of length, width and height. This makes them look lifelike and solid, not two-dimensional and flat.

Neil

Emma says that in the future VR will mix digital objects and physical objects to create exciting new experiences – like staying home to watch the same football

match that is simultaneously happening in the park. She blends the words 'physical' and 'digital' to make a new word describing this combination: **phygital**.

Sam

But while a 'phygital' future sounds like paradise to some, others are more **sceptical** – they doubt that VR will come true or be useful.

Neil

One such sceptic is technology innovator, Dr Nicola Millard. For one thing, she doesn't like wearing a VR headset – the heavy helmet and glasses that create virtual reality for the wearer – something she explained to BBC World Service's, Tech Tent:

Dr Nicola Millard

There are some basic things to think about. So, how do we access it? So, the reason, sort of, social networks took off was, we've got mobile technologies that let us use it. Now, obviously one of the barriers can be that VR or AR headsets - so VR, I've always been slightly **sceptical** about. I've called it 'vomity reality' for a while because, frankly, I usually need a bucket somewhere close if you've got a headset on me... and also, do I want to spend vast amounts of time in those rather **unwieldy** headsets? Now, I know they're talking **AR** as well and obviously that does not necessarily need a headset, but I think we're seeing some quite **immersive** environments coming out at the moment as well.

Sam

Nicola called VR 'vomity reality' because wearing a headset makes her feel sick, maybe because it's so **unwieldy** – difficult to move or wear because it's big and heavy.

Neil

She also makes a difference between VR - virtual reality- and **AR**, which stands for **augmented reality** – tech which adds to the ordinary physical world by projecting virtual words, pictures and characters, usually by wearing glasses or with a mobile phone.

Sam

While virtual reality replaces what you hear and see, augmented reality adds to it. Both VR and AR are **immersive** experiences – they stimulate your senses and surround you so that you feel completely involved in the experience.

Neil

In fact, the experience feels so real that people keep coming back for more.

Sam

Right! In my question I asked Neil how many people who try VR for the first time want to try it again.

Neil

I guessed it was about half – 49 percent. Was I right?

Sam

You were... wrong, I'm afraid. The correct answer is much higher - 79 percent of people would give VR another try. I suppose because the experience was so **immersive** – stimulating, surrounding and realistic.

Neil

Ok, A, let's recap the other vocabulary from this programme on the 'metaverse', a kind of **augmented reality** – reality which is enhanced or added to by technology.

Sam

3-D objects have **three dimensions**, making them appear real and solid.

Neil

Phygital is an invented word which combines the features of 'physical' and 'digital' worlds.

Sam

A **sceptical** person is doubtful about something.

Neil

And finally, **unwieldy** means difficult to move or carry because it's so big and heavy.

Sam

That's our six minutes up, in this reality anyway. See you in the 'metaverse' soon!

Neil

Goodbye!

VOCABULARY

three-dimensional (3-D)

having the three dimensions of length, width and height, making objects appear real and solid, not flat

phygital

combining the features of physical and digital worlds to create a new type of experience

sceptical

doubtful that something is true or useful

unwieldy

difficult to move or carry because it's so heavy, large or strangely shaped

augmented reality (AR)

technology which augments (adds to) the ordinary physical world by projecting virtual pictures, text or characters on top

immersive

stimulating the senses and surrounding someone so that they feel completely involved in an experience