

BBC Learning English  
6 Minute English  
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*Annoying office habits*



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NB: This is not a word for word transcript

**Rob:** Hello, I'm Rob and this is 6 Minute English. I'm joined this week by Jennifer.  
Hello Jennifer.

**Jennifer:** Hello Rob.

**Rob:** Now Jennifer, we're here in our brand new building, New Broadcasting House.  
It's quite impressive isn't it?

**Jennifer:** Oh yes, it's fantastic, really modern and very spacious too.

**Rob:** Yes, but come on, there must be something about the place that you find  
annoying?

**Jennifer:** Yes. Like every office, I think, there are lots of unwashed coffee cups left on  
desks and rubbish lying around. I really hate that.

**Rob:** Ah you see, not everything is perfect. Someone else's office habits can be a real  
irritation – or sometimes we say it's something that **gets under our skin**. Well,  
you are not alone – a new survey has revealed the most annoying habits, and I'll  
be sharing them with you soon and explaining some related words and phrases.  
But first, I have a question for you.

**Jennifer:** That is annoying – I always have to answer one of your questions!

**Rob:** You love it really! Now, do you know what the annoying habit of *onychophagia* is  
commonly known as? That's *onychophagia*.

- a) Picking your nose
- b) Biting your nails
- c) Talking very loudly

**Jennifer:** Those are all very bad habits but I'm going to go for a) picking your nose.

**Rob:** Well, I'll let you know the answer at the end of the programme. Now let's get back to those annoying habits that some people have in the workplace – or the office. The Institute of Management recently questioned 2,000 managers to find out their **pet hates** of office workers. Pet hates are the small annoying habits that really irritate someone.

**Jennifer:** So, this survey asked the managers what annoyed them about their staff?

**Rob:** No, it was about what managers believed annoyed their workers about each other. Here is what one office worker thinks:

**Office worker 1:**

*Tapping of feet, noise, tapping of desk, just anything like that. I like quiet so I sometimes work with headphones in.*

**Jennifer:** *[Tapping on desk]* Hmm, tapping on your desk like this can be so annoying. In fact, any kind of tapping, because it is so **distracting** – in other words it breaks my concentration.

**Rob:** Well, that man decided to wear headphones to block out the sound. But for the person doing the tapping, how can they **kick the habit** – or stop doing it? Having a bad habit could be the sign of concentration or nerves or even boredom. So we should have some sympathy!

**Jennifer:** I do, but one thing I don't have sympathy for is this habit being described by another office worker. See if you can hear what it is?

**Office worker 2:**

*Total jargon, yeah, yeah, it's the whole language, invented to, sort of, put you off your game in a way. It's completely exclusive and I don't even think half the management know what they are talking about!*

**Rob:** Yes, talking in **jargon** – these are words and phrases used by managers that don't really have any meaning outside the workplace. It's sometimes called 'management speak'. And it's this issue that is near the top of the list of the most annoying office habits. Jen, does your boss use any jargon?

**Jennifer:** I couldn't possibly say, he might be listening – but there are phrases that get used generally. Have you heard of '**thinking outside the box**' to mean to think imaginatively with new ideas instead of traditional ones?

**Rob:** Yes and what about '**going forward**' to mean in the future; and '**to touch base**' meaning to discuss progress. I think workers get irritated by this jargon because it's not how someone would normally speak.

**Jennifer:** OK Rob, what's top of the list for annoying habits?

**Rob:** Well, the biggest **bugbear** – another way of saying irritation – is arriving late for meetings. That is annoying when you have made an effort to be **punctual** – on time.

**Jennifer:** I think some people are late because they're having a **water-cooler moment** – you know, standing by the water-cooler discussing something trivial about what was on TV last night. That's so annoying. You'd never catch me doing that!

**Rob:** Of course not, Jen. But if every office worker has a bugbear about their colleagues, who can sort out this tense office atmosphere and make everyone more **tolerant** – or willing to accept their habits?

**Jennifer:** Charles Elvin is the Chief Executive of The Institute of Leadership and Management. Let's find out who he thinks is responsible for this:

**Charles Elvin, Chief Executive of the Institute of Leadership and Management:**

*Managers are part of the workforce too and their obligation is to try and address some of these issues. And to make sure they have those challenges that they've got, the things that annoy people, are addressed, that they're resolved, that people can air their grievances properly. So it's very important for managers to understand what people don't like, but also managers don't like a lot of this stuff as well.*

**Rob:** Charles Elvin thinks that managers have a responsibility – or an obligation – to address the problems. And he says people should be able **to air their grievances**, that means people can speak out about what annoys them.

**Jennifer:** Well, I can tell what annoys me most about you...

**Rob:** ...sorry Jen, we're out of time. Let me just tell you the answer to today's question. Earlier I asked if you knew what the annoying habit of *onychophagia* is commonly known as?

- a) Picking your nose
- b) Biting your nails
- c) Talking very loudly

**Jennifer:** I said a) picking your nose

**Rob:** That is disgusting, but you are wrong. Onychophagia is the medical term for biting your nails. OK, well, finally before we go, Jennifer could you remind us of some of the words we have heard today.

**Jennifer:** Yes. We heard:

**gets under our skin**

**pet hates**

**distracting**

**kick the habit**

**jargon**

**bugbear**

**punctual**

**a water-cooler moment**

**tolerant**

**to air your grievances**

**Rob:** Thanks Jennifer. Well, that's all we have time for today. Please join us again soon for 6 Minute English from [bbclearningenglish.com](http://bbclearningenglish.com)

**Both:** Bye.

## Vocabulary and definitions

to get under your skin	to annoy, irritate or bother you
pet hates	small things that you particularly find annoying
distracting	causing you to stop concentrating on what you are trying to do
to kick the habit	to stop doing something that is bad for you
jargon	words and phrases that only make sense to people doing the same kind of work
bugbear	something that annoys or irritates you
punctual	on time
a water-cooler moment	a time when work colleagues get together by the water-cooler and discuss trivial matters such as something they saw on television
tolerant	showing willingness to accept someone else's behaviour or habits
to air your grievances	to complain, protest

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