
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Meet the flavourists



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

In this programme we're finding out all about food flavours. Although everyone knows what food they like the taste of, the science behind flavours is complex. Flavour involves much more than tasting with the tongue – it's also influenced by how food looks, smells, and even how it's described.

Neil

In this programme we'll be meeting the flavourists – scientists who combine different natural and artificial ingredients to create the flavours we love to taste in our food. And of course, we'll be learning some new vocabulary as well.

Sam

Sounds delicious, Neil, but first I have a question for you. No-one really knows why but certain flavours seem to work well together. Some scientists think classic combinations like lemon and lime, or strawberries and cream are so popular is because their chemicals overlap in special ways. Sometimes this creates new, interesting and unusual flavours. So, what weirdly popular combination was invented by British chef, Heston Blumenthal? Was it...

- a) dark chocolate and sea salt?
- b) milk chocolate and chilli? or,
- c) white chocolate and caviar?

Neil

Well, I've tried sea salt and chocolate and I think it tastes great, so I'll say a).

Sam

OK, Neil. I'll reveal the correct answer at the end of the programme.

Neil

Nowadays, the flavour industry is big business. Flavourists work in high-tech laboratories and every new ice-cream, crisp or toothpaste flavour is the result of years of scientific research. But it wasn't always like that.

Here's food historian, Dr Nadia Berenstein, describing the beginnings of the flavour industry in the 19th century to Ruth Alexander, presenter of BBC World Service programme, The Food Chain...

Dr Nadia Berenstein

There's really only a handful of people and maybe a **dozen** or so companies that are really involved, and at that point they really are kind of working with secret recipes that were kept very secure, and sometimes passed down within families from father to son, so it really seemed like a **guild** structure from the Middle Ages at that point.

Ruth Alexander

Was it seen as some kind of **dark art**?

Dr Nadia Berenstein

Yes, the term black art does come up in some of the early writing of people who were producing flavours at this point.

Sam

To begin with, there were only around **dozen**, that's twelve, companies experimenting with food flavours. The recipes they used were kept secret and only shared with family or trusted friends. Dr Berenstein compares these companies to a **guild** - an organization of people who do the same job or have the same interests.

Neil

Because it was so secretive and mysterious, people saw making flavours as a **dark art** - a method of achieving something in a clever but dishonest or wicked way. But this all changed after the Second World War, when the invention of processed food which could be bought in supermarkets, and kept fresh at home in the fridge, increased the demand for new and exciting flavours.

Sam

Here's Dr Berenstein again, explaining the work of present-day flavourists to BBC World Service programme, The Food Chain...

Dr Nadia Berenstein

So, essentially becoming a flavourist today is still an **apprenticeship** process. There's no academic path to it, right. Your training is **on-the-job**, working alongside a master flavourist at a flavour and fragrance company, or at some of the bigger food companies will have their own flavour divisions. It's a scientific profession for sure. You have to know a lot about chemistry, but it is a creative profession. At the very heart of this industrial food system, there are these craft **artisans** who are essentially designing molecule by molecule, the flavours that shape the way food is made to taste.

Neil

Today's flavourists learn their art by serving an **apprenticeship** – a period of time spent working for a skilled master, often for low payment, in order to learn their skills. Although a background in chemistry is important, you can't study flavours at university – the training happens **on-the-job**, at your place of work, while you are working.

Sam

Dr Berenstein calls flavourists craft **artisans** – people doing skilled work with their hands, and she describes their creations as the marriage of science and art.

Neil

Yes, I love the idea of the flavourist as a magician, adding a pinch of this flavour, or a drop of that oil to create the perfect, magical taste! I wonder if that's what British chef, Heston Blumenthal, was trying to do...

Sam

In my question, I asked what popular flavour combination was invented by chef, Heston Blumenthal?

Neil

I said it was a) dark chocolate and sea salt. So, was I right?

Sam

Well, it's true that sweet and salty flavours go together well, but the correct answer was... white chocolate and caviar, a combination described by Swiss master flavourist, François Benzi, as "weird but wonderful". Right, let's recap the vocabulary we've learned, starting with a **dozen** which means twelve.

Neil

Something described as a **dark art** refers to a method of achieving something in a clever but dishonest way.

Sam

A **guild** is an organization of people who do the same job.

Neil

An **apprenticeship** is the period of time an apprentice spends watching and working with a skilled master in order to learn their skills.

Sam

When you do something **on-the-job** it happens in the workplace, while you are working.

Neil

And finally, an **artisan** is a person doing skilled work with their hands. Once again, our six minutes are up. Bye for now!

Sam

Bye!

VOCABULARY

dozen

twelve

dark art

method of achieving something in a clever but dishonest, wicked or magical way

guild

organization of people who do the same job or have the same interests

apprenticeship

period of time spent working for a skilled master, often for low payment, in order to learn their skills

on-the-job

happening at a place of work, while you are working

artisan

person doing skilled work with their hands

QUIZ

1	Which of these is a popular flavour combination?	
a)	pineapple and caramel	I'm sorry, that's wrong!
b)	mango and red wine	I'm sorry, that's wrong!
c)	strawberries and cream	Well done! That's correct!

2	How many is a 'dozen'?	
a)	8	I'm sorry, that's wrong!
b)	10	I'm sorry, that's wrong!
c)	12	Well done! That's correct!

3	Which word means 'a person doing skilled work with their hands'?	
a)	artisan	Well done! That's correct!
b)	artist	I'm sorry, that's wrong!
c)	art	I'm sorry, that's wrong!

4	Why would someone choose to enter into an 'apprenticeship'?	
a)	to learn professional skills from a master	Well done! That's correct!
b)	to make lots of money	I'm sorry, that's wrong!
c)	to join a guild	I'm sorry, that's wrong!

5	When does 'on-the-job' training happen?	
a)	at night, after work	I'm sorry, that's wrong!
b)	when you are working	Well done! That's correct!
c)	before you start work	I'm sorry, that's wrong!

6	What is a 'profession organization of people who do the same job' called?	
a)	a team	I'm sorry, that's wrong!
b)	a club	I'm sorry, that's wrong!
c)	a guild	Well done! That's correct!