

BBC Learning English
6 Minute English
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Reaching for the sky



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

Callum: Hello Rob.

Rob: Today we're talking about tall buildings – very tall buildings in fact.

Callum: I suppose we could call them **skyscrapers** – because they're so tall they almost touch the sky.

Rob: They do. Many countries compete with each other in trying to earn the title of having the tallest building in the world. And this month, London has opened its newest structure but unfortunately it's not going to win the world record for being the highest.

Callum: No, but it is now the European Union's tallest building standing at 310 metres tall.

Rob: That's high enough for me. I haven't really got a head for heights! Anyway if you don't know what this new building is called we'll tell you in a moment but not before I've set today's question for Callum.

Callum: I suppose this is going to be about height?

Rob: Yes, that's the long and short of it! According to the Guinness World Records, the first ever skyscraper was built in the USA, but in which city? Was it in:

- a) New York
- b) Chicago
- c) Detroit

Callum: I don't know this but I'm going to go for a: New York because there are many famous skyscrapers in New York. So I'm going to go a: New York.

Rob: Well, I'll let you know the answer at the end of the programme. But let's talk more about London's newest building, which has just opened to the public, and is called The Shard.

Callum: The Shard. That's because of its shape. The structure narrows as it gets higher and comes to a point at the top. From a distance, with the sun reflecting on it, it looks like **a shard** – or a sharp, broken piece of glass, which is what a shard means.

Rob: Yes, and the steel structure is covered in glass which means that if you are inside you get a fantastic view over London.

Callum: And if you don't mind **forking out** lots of money you can go to the viewing platform on the 72nd floor for a birds-eye view of the city. That's what these people did – what did they think of it?

The Shard visitors:

I'm just a bit blown away to be honest.

It's what we needed really, isn't it, against other capitals.

I've been on the London Eye and look how much higher up we are.

Rob: Well, The Shard seems to have **the wow factor** for those people. In other words, they were very impressed. The first woman said she was 'blown away' or amazed by the experience.

Callum: Someone else mentioned it was much higher than the London Eye – that's another famous **landmark**. And somebody else commented that it was what London needed – but why?

Rob: A good question. A new skyscraper can create good publicity for a city – it's an image that is seen all around the world and it can show a city as being **prosperous** and modern.

Callum: Yes, Dubai in the United Arab Emirates is a good example of this. It boasts the world's tallest building – the Burj Khalifa – standing at 828 metres tall. 'Burj', by the way, is Arabic for tower. Other countries such as China, Malaysia and the USA all boast towers much taller than The Shard.

Rob: Of course, the engineering involved is impressive. But what do you put inside these towers? Most contain luxury living accommodation, a hotel, offices, and, of course, an **observation deck** – that's a viewing platform.

Callum: But there is a problem for The Shard. At the moment only 20% of the office space is **leased** – which means only 20% is rented out. Jack Sidders from the Estates Gazette newspaper has his reasons for this:

Jack Sidders, of the Estates Gazette newspaper:

What they are trying to do is create an entire quarter here, to make it into more of an established office location but, you know, maybe if you're a tenant, economy's very dodgy, that added bit of risk, maybe that will put people off.

Rob: So, the owners of The Shard want to make it an **established** office location – so, therefore, a good recognised location for business – but the current economic situation could be putting off tenants from moving in.

Callum: Yes, he said described the economy as **dodgy** – a slang word for uncertain or risky.

Rob: That's not the view of Boris Johnson, the Mayor of London. He's proud of the new building and, together with other new constructions, he's optimistic about the future. See if you can hear the names of some other London landmarks he mentions:

Boris Johnson, Mayor of London:

You've got the Walkie Talkie going up, The Cheese Grater, the stuff that wasn't happening four years ago, all those cranes stopped moving four years ago; they're back on the scene now.

Callum: Some interesting names for buildings there – The Walkie Talkie and The Cheese Grater! This is, of course, because of the shape of the buildings, which look like the objects they are named after. I suppose these names make it easier to identify the buildings.

Rob: Yes but I think I'd be quite embarrassed to tell people I work in The Cheese Grater! OK, well it's time now to reveal the answer to today's question.

Callum: Ah yes. You asked me, according to the Guinness World Records, the first ever skyscraper was built in the USA but in which city?

Rob: Yes, was it in:

- a) New York
- b) Chicago
- c) Detroit

Callum: And I said New York.

Rob: And you are wrong I'm afraid. The world's first skyscraper was the Home Insurance Building in Chicago. Built between 1884 and 1885, the so-called "Father of the Skyscraper" towered all of ten storeys and was just 42 metres tall.

Callum: Not much of skyscraper by today's standards, is it really?

Rob: Indeed. OK, well, it's almost time to go but before we do, Callum could you remind us of some of the words we have heard today.

Callum: Yes. We heard:

skyscrapers

a shard

forking out

the wow factor

landmark

prosperous

observation deck

leased

established

dodgy

Rob: Thanks Callum. Well, that's all we have time for today. Please join us again soon for 6 Minute English from bbclearningenglish.com.

Both: Bye.

Vocabulary and definitions

skyscrapers	very tall buildings with many floors
a shard	a piece of broken ceramic, metal, glass, or rock, which usually has sharp edges
forking out	spending a lot of money on something
the wow factor	a quality that makes someone feel excited or surprised when they first see something
landmark	a famous building
prosperous	wealthy and successful
observation deck	a viewing platform in a tall building
leased	let or rented out
established	recognised and accepted because of its location or long-term existence
dodgy	uncertain or having risks

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