
A question from Alexander in Russia:

What is the difference between *rainy* and *showery*?

Catherine Chapman answers:

Hello Alexander and thanks very much for your question! Well, the English language has lots of weather-related vocabulary – that’s probably because the weather in the UK is so changeable! So, let’s look at the two adjectives that you’ve asked about – that’s *rainy* and *showery*. When we say something like,

It’s a very rainy day today

we mean it’s raining a lot – probably for most of the day, with only the odd break here and there in the rain, or maybe no breaks at all. But when we describe the weather as *showery*, what we mean is that usually it rains for a while, then it stops raining for a while and then it starts again and off-and-on rain through the day.

When we talk about the whether in English, we generally use a mixture of adjectives and nouns and we have a few standard expressions as well. Here are some more words and expressions related to wet weather:

drizzle (n) / *drizzly* (adj) – very soft, light rain, which usually continues for a long time

pouring (adj) – raining very heavily

sleet (n) – freezing rain; a mixture of rain and snow together

It’s chucking it down! – It’s raining really heavily

Nice weather for ducks! – It’s raining very heavily

Now here's some vocabulary for hot weather:

boiling (adj) – very hot

sweltering (adj) – very hot

scorching (adj) / *a scorcher* (n) – extremely hot

a heatwave (n) – a period of extremely hot and dry weather that lasts for several days or even weeks

Now here's some vocabulary for cold weather:

chilly (adj) – quite cold

freezing (adj) – very cold

bitter (adj) / *bitterly cold* – extremely cold

frost (n) / *frosty* (adj) – this is the name for the layer of ice crystals that forms on exposed objects when the weather's very cold. This often happens overnight, and when you wake up in the morning everything's white!

icicle (n) – the kind-of pointed stick of ice which is formed by the freezing of dripping water.

Now for wind, we can say:

breeze (n) / *breezy* (adj) – a light wind, and is often quite refreshing when the weather is hot

blowy (adj) – quite windy

blustery (adj) – wind blowing in short but strong and frequent bursts

high winds – strong winds

Northerly / *North wind(s)* – this refers to wind direction, but it means where the wind comes from, not where it's blowing to. So *North wind* blows from the North.

It's a bit wild out there! – we can say this when it's very windy and rainy.

There's several phrases also that you can use when you want to ask about the weather. Here are some of them:

What's it like outside?

And another one:

What's the weather like?

Here's another one:

Is it raining?

Is it snowing?

Is it sunny out there?

And finally,

Have you seen the weather forecast?

And if you want to answer this question, by talking about the weather in general, there's a few adjectives that go with the word *weather* which you can use. You can say,

*It's **beautiful** weather*

Another way to say this is,

*Oh it's **lovely** weather today*

If the weather's not so good you can say,

*It's **horrible** weather today*

And if it's raining and windy and cold you can say,

*Oh it's **foul** weather today!*

Well, I hope my answer's been useful, Alexander, and that the weather in Russia is lovely today!

Catherine Chapman has a BA (hons) in Communication Studies, CTEFLA, DELTA and a Masters Degree in Educational Technology and ELT with Manchester University (UK). She has taught EFL, EAP and IT skills in several countries, worked in ELT management and has developed web-based ELT/EAP materials projects in institutions including Istanbul Technical University (Turkey) and Newcastle University (UK). She now works as an ELT Writer for BBC Learning English.