

Stop Saying “Big”: Spacious, Enormous or Substantial?

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Full episode script · English

118 lines

Study task: Listen again and notice the expressions you studied.

Martin, I think I have found the perfect apartment.

That sounds exciting.

It has a big living room, a big balcony and a big amount of natural light.

Julia, the apartment may be perfect, but that description is not.

What is wrong with big?

Nothing.

But you have used it three times, and each time you mean something slightly different.

I suppose this is becoming a vocabulary lesson.

A substantial vocabulary lesson.

Substantial?

We will come back to that word.

Welcome to Your English Toolbox and Practice Arena Five-Minute English.

I am Martin.

And I am Julia.

Today we are replacing big with three more precise words: spacious, enormous and substantial.

Let us begin with the living room.

There is plenty of space to move around.

It feels open and comfortable.

Then the living room is spacious.

Spacious means having plenty of space inside.

We normally use it for places such as rooms, houses, offices, cars or gardens.

A spacious kitchen.

A spacious apartment.

A spacious waiting room.



Exactly.

So spacious does not simply mean physically big.

Correct.

A room can be quite large but still feel crowded.

Too much furniture.

Or too many enormous suitcases.

We are not discussing my suitcases again.

Not today.

The important idea is that spacious describes the experience of having enough room.

Yes.

If a place feels open and comfortable, spacious is often better than big.

Now let us talk about the balcony.

How large is it?

It is almost the same size as the living room.

That sounds enormous.

Enormous means extremely large in size, quantity or degree.

It is much stronger than big.

An enormous building.

An enormous crowd.

An enormous amount of work.

And you can also make an enormous mistake.

Even if the mistake has no physical size?

Exactly.

Enormous can emphasise the degree or seriousness of something.

So an enormous balcony is surprisingly large.

Yes.

But a spacious balcony focuses more on the comfortable space available.

The same place could be both spacious and enormous.

It could.

The words overlap, but they create different pictures.



Spacious says, "There is plenty of room."

Enormous says, "This is extremely large."

Now we need substantial.

You said the apartment receives a big amount of natural light.

Yes.

Sunlight enters through six windows.

Then you could say that the apartment receives a substantial amount of natural light.

Substantial means large in amount, value, importance or effect.

It is more formal than big or enormous.

We often use it with nouns such as amount, difference, increase, investment, meal and evidence.

A substantial amount.

A substantial improvement.

A substantial investment.

And a substantial meal is large enough to satisfy you.

Exactly.

It is not just a big plate.

It is a considerable and satisfying quantity of food.

Could I say a substantial living room?

It is possible, but it would sound less natural in an everyday apartment description.

Spacious is the clearer choice there.

Yes.

Collocation matters.

English words prefer particular partners.

Spacious room.

Enormous building.

Substantial amount.

Perfect.

Time for a quick challenge.

Choose spacious, enormous or substantial before I answer.

Situation one.



This hotel room has plenty of space for four people and their luggage.

Spacious.

Situation two.

The company made a large financial investment in new technology.

Substantial.

Situation three.

A whale appeared beside the boat.

It was unbelievably large.

Enormous.

Final situation.

The new windows created a large and noticeable improvement in the room.

A substantial improvement.

Excellent.

Now describe something around you.

Is your room spacious?

Is the building enormous?

Or have you made substantial progress with your English?

Quick recap.

Spacious means having plenty of room inside.

Enormous means extremely large in size, quantity or degree.

And substantial means large in amount, importance, value or effect.

On the episode page at yourenglishtoolbox.com, you can compare every sentence with Spanish, German, French or Farsi.

Seeing the same idea in both languages helps you notice small differences that a simple word list cannot show.

The direct link is waiting for you in the episode description.

Now, Julia, are you going to rent this apartment?

I am still thinking about it.

What is the problem?

The apartment is spacious, and the balcony is enormous.

That sounds perfect.

Unfortunately, the rent is also substantial.



That is a very precise reason to keep looking.

And a very expensive vocabulary lesson.

See you next time, friends.

Goodbye.

