

What's worse than the sound of fingernails on a blackboard?

Researchers have found why fingernails down a chalkboard sound so bad. But tell us what noises drive you up the wall

Open thread
guardian.co.uk, Friday 4 November 2011 13.12 GMT



Fingernails scratching a blackboard. What sounds can you not bear? Photograph: Jane Yeomans/Getty Images

Musicologists studying people's responses to the noise of fingernails on a blackboard, which so many people find excruciating, have found that it matches frequencies found in human speech to which the ear has evolved to be particularly sensitive.

Though it must be many people's least favourite sound, there are surely plenty of other candidates: the buzz of a mosquito, the whine of a toddler, whatever noise your alarm clock makes. What bugs you the most? If you're able to find audio clips of your worst sounds – or better still, record them live and upload them to the web using, for example, audioboo.com – give us the link and we'll try to post them above the line.

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Comments in chronological order (Total 191 comments)

S Staff

C Contributor



Footloose84

4 November 2011 1:20PM

I can't take the sound of people who chew and snap their gum very loudly.
It's very low class.

Recommend? (41)

Responses (0)

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[Sipech](#)

4 November 2011 1:20PM

A Massachusetts accent

Recommend? (20)

Responses (0)

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[BobTheCobra](#)

4 November 2011 1:21PM

But tell us what noises drive you up the wall

These days its the phrse, "And now over to our business editor. . . "

Recommend? (21)

Responses (0)

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[StevieND](#)

4 November 2011 1:21PM

But tell us what noises drive you up the wall

Ed's voice.

Actually, two Eds' voices.

Recommend? (26)

Responses (0)

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[davidabsalom](#)

4 November 2011 1:22PM

The laughter of children.

Happy little gits.

Recommend? (103)

Responses (1)

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[nottydave](#)

4 November 2011 1:23PM

If you want an auditory treat, take a fork and scrape the end of its prongs on the bottom of a saucepan.....far worse than fingernails on a blackboard!

Recommend? (28)

Responses (1)

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[conanthebarbarian](#)

4 November 2011 1:24PM

Other people's whining kids by a mile. Both kids and parents should be put down without appeal.

Recommend? (68)

Responses (1)

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[nansikom](#)

4 November 2011 1:26PM

>>But tell us what noises drive you up the wall<<

Liverpool fans telling us every year for at least the last decade that it's going to be 'our season' - that's a pretty annoying sound!

Recommend? (10)

Responses (0)

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[Definatelystashark](#)

4 November 2011 1:27PM

I hate the sound of music.

Von Trapp? Von Crapp more like.

Recommend? (21)

Responses (0)

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[buddednip](#)

4 November 2011 1:27PM

As a partially hearing person with goodish bass perception (but baddish everything else)

I am often disturbed by the deep rumble of a very heavy vehicle passing by because the sound is on the very edge of my hearing and you can feel it more than hear it. It is very similar to the feeling generated by earthquakes.

Recommend? (18)

Responses (0)

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[doughcnut](#)

4 November 2011 1:30PM

Had enough of "Go Compare"

Recommend? (99)

Responses (3)

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[NutFree](#)

4 November 2011 1:30PM

" I'm on the bus/ train" (at max decibels down a mobile phone)

Recommend? (32)

Responses (0)

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[groovemaneuvers](#)

4 November 2011 1:33PM

- 1) Celine Dion
- 2) Whingy kids
- 3) Irish folk music
- 4) David Cameron's voice (similiar to No. 2)
- 5) Cold Play
- 6) Creep by Radiohead (your girlfriend's good looking get over it)

and for balance, nice sounds:

- 1) Funk*
- 2) Soul*
- 3) Disco*
- 4) a freight train in the night
- 5) Birds singing
- 6) Brummie accents

* Too many to mention

Recommend? (30)

Responses (0)

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[KinkyChristian](#)

4 November 2011 1:33PM

Republican party politicians.

Any Republican party politician.

Mind you the voices of all politicians drive me bonkers but Republicans are the worst.

Probably the self-righteous Greens are second.

Come to think of it, that's what both Republicans and Greens have in common. They're both so damned self-righteous and certain that they are right and everyone else is either dim witted or evil.

Recommend? (8)

Responses (0)

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[Murphy57](#)

4 November 2011 1:34PM

There `s a programme about Essex on TV. Not only are the accents awful to listen to, looking at those people covered in spray tan has a fascinating eeriness about it. Surely not all Essex folk are like that!

Recommend? (12)

Responses (0)

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[groovemaneuvers](#)

4 November 2011 1:35PM

Response to doughnut, 4 November 2011 1:30PM

Had enough of "Go Compare"

It's in my head now

Recommend? (10)

Responses (0)

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[UndyingCincinnatus](#)

4 November 2011 1:35PM

The sounds of Luton at night.

I really need a job somewhere else...

Recommend? (7)

Responses (0)

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[rosieh2](#)

4 November 2011 1:36PM

The screeching sounds trains make

Polystyrene

Someone cracking their knuckles

A fork being scraped against a plate

Lots of things.

Recommend? (23)

Responses (0)

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[bluejewel](#)

4 November 2011 1:36PM

leaf blowers that go on for hours. Why can't the fat lazy gits use a broom?

Recommend? (32)

Responses (0)

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[LucyQ](#)

4 November 2011 1:37PM

People screaming inanity into their cell phones while on public transit are really

annoying, it's as if they can't learn to quietly txt.

Recommend? (41)

Responses (1)

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[Damtthetal](#)

4 November 2011 1:38PM

Musicologists studying people's responses to the noise of fingernails on a blackboard,

which so many people find excruciating, have found that it matches frequencies found in human speech to which the ear has evolved to be particularly sensitive.

Another breakthrough triumph from the Department of Blindingly Obvious Studies.

Recommend? (11)

Responses (0)

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[Zakelius](#)

4 November 2011 1:39PM

Anything from Glee is likely to push me over the edge.

Recommend? (19)

Responses (0)

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[nansikom](#)

4 November 2011 1:39PM

Response to LucyQ, 4 November 2011 1:37PM

Wow, something on which I am in total agreement with LucyQ. Must go and see my doctor ... :-0

Recommend? (11)

Responses (0)

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[nottydave](#)

4 November 2011 1:39PM

Aaaaaaarrrrrrrrrrrrrggggggghhhhhhhh!

Who mentioned Go Compare?

.....I'm off to get a fork.....

Recommend? (34)

Responses (0)

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[chappelle](#)

4 November 2011 1:40PM

My flatmate's singing - no capacity to hit the right notes (not just flat or sharp but completely different notes), seemingly arhythmic and unable to remember more than the first five words of any tune so just repeats them with each repetition a slightly less tuneful version of the last.

And his selection is shit too.

I hate the sound of posh, braying drunks too which is a bit unfortunate living near to so many student residences.

Fingers down blackboards are relatively harmonious in comparison to the above.

Recommend? (17)

Responses (0)

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monders

4 November 2011 1:40PM

Birds flapping their wings makes me want to boak.

Recommend? (5)

Responses (0)

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kthxbye

4 November 2011 1:41PM

Waking up at 3am to the sounds of cats sounding like hysterical crying babies from creatures from hell.

Recommend? (7)

Responses (1)

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TigerDunc

4 November 2011 1:41PM

People chewing loudly. Shut your cake hole or be a long way away from me.

People playing tinny music on their phones on public transport.

A lot of things.

Most things actually.

I'm grumpy and knackered and need alcohol flavoured with beer, oral sex and 12 hours sleep.

Then I might cheer up.

Recommend? (41)

Responses (1)

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DigbyChickenCeasar

4 November 2011 1:42PM

anything by Andrew Lloyd-Webber. I actually rate fingernails on blackboards as being more pleasurable than his entire oeuvre.

Recommend? (26)

Responses (2)

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AnneOnymous

4 November 2011 1:43PM

The high-pitched squeal of the wheels on Toronto's subway cars.

A pneumatic drill.

A cement mixer.

Recommend? (3)

Responses (1)

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[csprrr](#)

4 November 2011 1:43PM

the sound of one hand clapping

Recommend? (10)

Responses (0)

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[koichan](#)

4 November 2011 1:44PM

Blackboards don't affect me much at all.

But the squeaking from rubbing two bits of polystyrene together? *dies*

Recommend? (29)

Responses (0)

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[SuperClive](#)

4 November 2011 1:44PM

Response to davidabsalom, 4 November 2011 1:22PM

The laughter of children is fine, but that orchestrated kids cheering you get in adverts?

Drives me round the bend.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5r9xmfHn410> is the nearest I can get to it without finding disturbing videos of junior cheerleaders.

Recommend? (10)

Responses (0)

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[duplicatebook](#)

4 November 2011 1:44PM

Beethoven played on period strings - sets my teeth on edge

Recommend? (0)

Responses (0)

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[howardmarch](#)

4 November 2011 1:45PM

Chris Evans

Recommend? (10)

Responses (0)

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[kendrew](#)

4 November 2011 1:46PM

The 21st Century; god awful is that. Babel and then some.

Recommend? (1)

Responses (0)

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[julianabanana](#)

4 November 2011 1:46PM

The noise of people eating apples. The noise of people eating apples on public transport. The noise of people eating anything on public transport. The noise of people eating. The noise of people.

Recommend? (44)

Responses (1)

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[halfmanhalfslug](#)

4 November 2011 1:46PM

Gideon Osborne's voice.

Unless it's screaming his final breath in a pit of agony and despair, in which case it would be MUSIC TO MY EARS.

Recommend? (27)

Responses (0)

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[Zakelius](#)

4 November 2011 1:47PM

[Response to conanthebarbarian, 4 November 2011 1:24PM](#)

[conanthebarbarian](#)

4 November 2011 1:24PM

Other people's whining kids by a mile. Both kids and parents should be put down without appeal.

People whining about other people's kids. Ta-daaa!!

Recommend? (6)

Responses (1)

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[howardmarch](#)

4 November 2011 1:47PM

More seriously, the type of crying noise babies make when they've just woken up still makes me cringe, even though it ceased to be my problem many years ago.

Recommend? (5)

Responses (1)

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[BrianWhit](#)

4 November 2011 1:48PM

[Response to doughnut, 4 November 2011 1:30PM](#)

The confused.com advert is far worse

<http://www.youtube.com/user/CaraConfused#p/u/0/nZH6kslt30Y&kw=confused+com+Exact>

Recommend? (10)

Responses (0)

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[Sipech](#)

4 November 2011 1:48PM

"The 20:14 to Southampton Central and Bognor Regis is delayed by approximately...."

Recommend? (13)

Responses (0)

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[HandandShrimp](#)

4 November 2011 1:51PM

But the squeaking from rubbing two bits of polystyrene together? *dies*

You sod! I've just had shivers up my spine.

Recommend? (17)

Responses (0)

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[kakerlakk](#)

4 November 2011 1:52PM

my 9 month old grinding her brand new teeth

eeeeeeee!!!!

Recommend? (6)

Responses (0)

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[hitch21](#)

4 November 2011 1:52PM

Stepping on that landmine in 'Nam and hearing the click...

Otherwise my girlfriend filing her nails puts my teeth on edge

Recommend? (10)

Responses (0)

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[happylikesquirrel](#)

4 November 2011 1:53PM

The word 'wowcher'.

shudder

Recommend? (9)

Responses (0)

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[LabMonkey](#)

4 November 2011 1:53PM

People who, while chewing food, insist on making smacking, schloping noises with their tongue. Chewing gum is bad enough, but sitting near to a certain family member who is eating a tangerine is a fecking nightmare.

Recommend? (27)

Responses (0)

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[speedkermit](#)

4 November 2011 1:54PM

[Requiem for the 259,000 Quails Culled at a Farm in Toyohashi, Pt. 2](#) by MERZBOW

Recommend? (6)

Responses (4)

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[HandandShrimp](#)

4 November 2011 1:55PM

Alarms that trigger after a power cut and left unattended in the dark of the night. (Have contemplated getting up and deploying a baseball racquet on them)

Recommend? (9)

Responses (0)

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[Noodsy](#)

4 November 2011 1:56PM

Nadine Dorries MP, both when she is speaking and when she is writing.

I cringe every time.

Recommend? (28)

Responses (0)

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