
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The English We Speak

In black and white

The logo for BBC Learning English, featuring the letters 'BBC' in a white box above the words 'LEARNING ENGLISH' in white text on a teal background.

This is not a word-for-word transcript

Feifei

Hello and welcome to The English We Speak with me Feifei...

Rob

...and me Rob. Hello. So Feifei have you heard the news?

Feifei

The news? What news?

Rob

We're all going to get a big pay rise!

Feifei

A pay rise? But Rob are you sure? I haven't heard anyone else talk about it.

Rob

Yes, yes, I'm sure. Look at this leaflet here... it says it there in black and white.

Feifei

In black and white? But it's in colour – look, it says 'ten per cent' in red letters.

Rob

I don't mean it's printed in black and white – if someone says it's 'in black and white' they mean it's official – it's been printed or written down – so there is no dispute!

Feifei

So you're saying it's not gossip – it's true?

Rob

Yes, yes – I have proof of the pay rise on this piece of paper here.

Feifei

OK, well let me read it while we hear some more examples of this phrase...

Examples

I have it here in black and white – I've got the job!

I'm not going to start celebrating until I've seen the deal in black and white.

We didn't believe the bank's offer of a loan until we saw it in black and white.

Feifei

So, when something is in black and white it is clearly written down so it is believed to be true. But why in 'black and white' and not in 'red and blue' for example?

Rob

Well, it comes from the early days of printing when news and information was printed in black ink on white paper. Once something was printed it was official.

Feifei

OK – but hold on Rob – I've read this leaflet and it doesn't say we're getting a 10% pay rise – it just says we *deserve* a 10% pay rise – so no pay rise for us Rob.

Rob

What? Are you sure?

Feifei

Yes – look, it says it there – at the top – in black and white!

Rob

Oh I didn't see that.

Feifei

It just shows you – even if something is in black and white – you need to be able to read it first!

Both

Bye!