
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The English We Speak

Take a back seat



NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript

Feifei

Hello, it's Feifei and Rob here with today's The English We Speak.

Rob

Feifei, keep your eyes on the road! Look where you're going.

Feifei

OK, OK! Rob is making me drive around while we present today's programme. Rob, why *exactly* am I driving my car?

Rob

Well, I really wanted you to understand the phrase we're going to learn today. But I'm going to leave it all to you.

Feifei

So what are you going to do then?

Rob

Oh nothing. I'm just going to take a back seat today. You carry on, I'll just watch.

Feifei

Take a back seat? Hmm – so you're going to let me take control – do all the work – while you sit there and watch?

Rob

Yes – look, I'm just sitting here – on the back seat.

Feifei

Oh I get it! 'To take a back seat' is an idiom that means to give up control and let someone else take responsibility.

Rob

That's it Feifei. Let's hear from some other people who are 'taking a back seat'...

Examples

Mary was happy to take a back seat and let Jim run the meeting.

I'm going to take a back seat this year and let you decide where we go on holiday.

Now he's getting older he's decided to take a back seat in running the company.

Feifei

So, to take a backseat means to choose not to take control and let someone else be in charge. Rob, does this mean you're just being lazy?

Rob

Of course not, Feifei. It just means I'm letting you have a turn at being in charge – I trust you – although... What are you doing?!

Feifei

Letting you take the back seat while I show you how to really drive!

Rob

Feifei! Watch out for that roundabout... and that traffic light... aren't you driving a bit fast?

Feifei

Rob – don't be such a back seat driver!

Rob

A what?

Feifei

A back seat driver – someone who offers unwanted advice – someone who tells the driver how to drive. But we'll leave that expression for another day!

Rob

OK OK – but you are going really fast – can I take the front seat now?

Feifei

Stay where you are!

Both

Bye.