

---

# BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

## The English We Speak

### Red tape



BBC  
LEARNING  
ENGLISH

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

---

**Feifei**

Hello Rob. You look so busy, what are all these papers?

**Rob**

Oh, Feifei, I have to get a permit to build an extension to my house. It's a very small bit of building work but I have to fill in all these forms.

**Feifei**

What is this one for?

**Rob**

Well, this one here is for my local council. I need to apply for planning permission. And then they want lots of supporting documents to make sure it fits in with building regulations.

**Feifei**

It sounds exhausting.

**Rob**

It is. I hate red tape. If I could cut through this red tape it would be brilliant!

**Feifei**

So your problem is red tape? Say no more, Rob! The solution is in my bag! Ah, here they are!

**Rob**

A pair of scissors and blue tape?

**Feifei**

Yes. You use the scissors to cut through your red tape and... if you don't like red tape, use blue. I love the colour blue!

**Rob**

Thank you, Feifei. You're a good friend. But in English we call the rules and processes required to get official permits - which usually seem to be pointless - 'red tape'.

**Feifei**

Ah, bureaucracy! So let's hear some examples of how this expression is used.

**Examples**

Small firms won't be subject to new regulations under a government plan to cut red tape and boost the economy.

Andrea almost gave up studying abroad. The amount of red tape to get a visa was unbelievable!

**Feifei**

I think most people hate bureaucracy, Rob.

**Rob**

I'm not surprised. Some people say this expression might come from the 16th century, when bundles of documents were held together with red tape. I hate all these forms!

**Feifei**

Well, it's the 21st century now and we still have red tape. Good luck with your red tape, Rob. I'm off to paint the town red!

**Rob**

Oh, no more idioms with red for me today please.

**Both**

Bye.