
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The English We Speak

White / blue-collar worker



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This is not a word-for-word transcript

Callum

Hello and welcome to The English We Speak. I'm Callum.

Feifei

And I'm Feifei.

Callum

Feifei, what kind of workers are we – would you describe us as blue-collar workers or white-collar workers?

Feifei

Well, looking at our clothes, you are a T-shirt-no-collar worker and I'm a yellow-with-polka-dot-collar worker. How about that?

Callum

Come on, Feifei, you know that this has nothing to do with fashion! It's about colours and what they represent when we're talking about the world of work.

Feifei

I know - just joking. A blue-collar worker is an expression we use to describe someone who does manual work. Someone who works in a factory, for example, who wears a uniform.

Callum

In the early 20th century, they usually wore clothing which was sturdy, cheap and didn't show dirt easily. Their uniform was made of blue fabric like denim.

Feifei

People who worked in offices, doing administration or managerial tasks - clerks for example - were referred to as white-collar workers. It's because of the white shirts they wore.

Callum

And this way of describing people's jobs has continued – even though people often wear whatever colour collar they like!

Feifei

You can also say blue-collar job or white-collar job.

Examples

When the company went bankrupt many white-collar workers found themselves looking for blue-collar jobs.

Some popular folk songs reflect the aspirations and struggles of blue-collar workers.

Feifei

Well, we have two colours there but it's good to point out that you might also hear the expression pink-collar worker, which refers to low-paid jobs performed mostly by women - jobs such as a secretary or a nurse.

Callum

But pink-collar worker and other classifications with colours are less common. The ones most used are blue-collar and white-collar.

Feifei

What a pity! I quite like striped-dark-blue-and-pale-yellow-designer-collar worker.

Callum

You might like that, but nobody would understand what you meant. But don't worry, you look good in white or blue. It brings out your tan, works well in contrast with the colour of your eyes... and with your hair...

Feifei

Oh, stop it Callum!

Both

Bye!