
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The English We Speak

Catch-22



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Feifei

Hello and welcome to The English We Speak. It's Feifei here...

Rob

...and hello, it's Rob here too. Oh Feifei, why the glum face?

Feifei

I didn't get it.

Rob

Get it?

Feifei

I didn't get the job.

Rob

Oh yes yes, the job – you went for a new job – one you really really wanted. One that you said would be perfect for.

Feifei

Clearly I am not. Look at this rejection letter – it says I did not have enough experience – how dare they! But if I don't do the job, how do I get the experience?

Rob

Oh dear, it sounds like catch-22.

Feifei

Catch-22? Is that some kind of qualification I need?

Rob

Nope, it just describes a situation where you can't win. Basically, you can't do one thing until you have done another thing which you can't do until you have done the first thing.

Feifei

So it's an impossible situation.

Rob

It is. Let's hear some examples of this phrase in action...

Examples

I need my parent's car, but my mum says I need permission from my dad, then my dad says I need permission from my mum. I can't get permission from either. So I'm in a catch-22 situation.

To apply for a short-term student visa to study English in the UK, you have to be able to speak some English but you want to come to England to learn English! It's catch-22 for many potential students.

Feifei

You're listening to *The English We Speak* and Rob has told me I'm in a catch-22 situation – that's a situation I cannot win.

Rob

Yes Feifei, so you can't get a new job without some experience of doing it but you can't get the experience with doing the job. So it's catch-22!

Feifei

It's a strange phrase Rob.

Rob

Yes, it comes from the title of a book - *Catch-22*, written by Joseph Heller in 1961 which describes bureaucratic constraints on soldiers in World War II.

But look Feifei, don't be too sad about the job, you've got plenty of experience for doing this job.

Feifei

That's because I've been here for 40 years!

Rob

But we respect you for expertise, especially in one task.

Feifei

What's that?

Rob

Making the tea. Now could you put the kettle on please?

Feifei

Oh, I really need a new job.

Rob
Bye.