
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The English We Speak

It won't wash

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

This is not a word-for-word transcript

Neil

Hello, I'm Neil...

Feifei

... and I'm Feifei and this is The English We Speak.

Neil

What's in that bag, Feifei?

Feifei

Oh this – it's a box of the best washing powder there is – Dazzlebright non-bio washing powder!

Neil

And why will I need that?

Feifei

Well, at the meeting earlier – when John suggested we all wore suits to work – you said his idea **won't wash** with the team – so here's some washing powder to help you make it wash.

Neil

It's a kind thought – but I won't need it. When I said **it won't wash** I meant his idea is unconvincing and won't work.

Feifei

Ah – So you don't need my washing powder then?

Neil

No thanks. You see, this phrase originally referred to *fabrics* that were not good quality and wouldn't last long when they were washed. But now it's about someone's *idea* or suggestion not lasting very long because people won't believe it or accept it.
Let's hear some examples...

Examples

Your excuses for not finishing your essay **won't wash** with me – you've missed your deadline and that's that.

The boss's idea to work an extra hour everyday **won't wash** with the team – they'll be furious.

Just saying you've got a cold **won't wash** with your fans – they've paid a lot of money to come and see you perform.

Feifei

That's the expression **it won't wash** which really means it won't work – or nobody will believe you. Of course, I do know this phrase Neil.

Neil

So why did you bring in the washing powder?

Feifei

Well I know how scruffy our team members are – and if we do have to start wearing suits, they will all need a good wash. Erm, did you have curry last night?

Neil

Yeah – why do you ask?

Feifei

There's a big yellow stain on your jumper – just there. Here, why not test out use my Dazzlebright washing powder – 'it makes your old clothes look like new!'

Neil

Hmm, thanks.

Both

Bye.