
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The English We Speak

Close, but no cigar



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ENGLISH

This is not a word-for-word transcript

Neil

Hello and welcome to The English We Speak, I'm Neil and joining me is Feifei...

Feifei

Hi there everyone.

Neil

In this programme we have an expression you can use when someone has almost succeeded – but not quite. Now Feifei, could you just pass me that lighter, please?

Feifei

Lighter? What on earth are you doing with that cigar? You can't smoke in here!

Neil

It's a clue. You have to guess what the expression is.

Feifei

Oh OK. Is it 'to smoke like a chimney?'

Neil

Close, but no cigar.

Feifei

OK, is it 'no smoke without fire?'

Neil

Close, but no cigar.

Feifei

Oh, I give up!

Neil

I've told you twice already – it's 'close, but no cigar.' If someone almost succeeds – but not quite – you can say to them 'close, but no cigar.' Here are some examples.

Examples

A: How old do you think I am?

B: 36?

A: Nope – 35. Close, but no cigar.

Five of my numbers came up in the lottery. Close, but no cigar.

They hit the post in the last second of the game. Close, but no cigar!

Neil

So, there we go. If someone almost succeeds, but doesn't quite, we can say to them 'close, but no cigar.'

Feifei

Right, well you can put that cigar away now we've finished.

Neil

Actually, it's a really good one – shame to waste it.

Feifei

Neil!

Neil

Uh oh!