
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The English We Speak

A recipe for disaster



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Feifei

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

Rob

...and hello, I'm Rob. Err, Feifei what are you doing?

Feifei

I'm making a cake – a chocolate cake - obviously!

Rob

Why are you making a chocolate cake?

Feifei

It's Helen's birthday. What's wrong with that Rob?

Rob

Well, for a start we are in a radio studio not a kitchen. Also, you've only got five minutes before she arrives – and you're putting salt in the cake mix not sugar.

Feifei

Ooops!

Rob

It's a recipe for disaster!

Feifei

A recipe for disaster? No, look, it's a recipe for a chocolate cake Rob.

Rob

That might be – but a recipe for disaster means a combination of things that will, at some point, go wrong and cause harm, damage or in this case, humiliation – in other words it will end in trouble.

Feifei

So the phrase isn't about cooking? Oh dear Rob, this wasn't the recipe I wanted to follow!

Rob

No. Let's hear some examples of this phrase in action – and we can work out how to limit the damage.

Examples

My doctor says drinking too much, not exercising enough, and having a stressful job are a recipe for disaster. He says I might die young!

I'm not looking forward to the party. Having my wife and ex-girlfriend in the same room will be a recipe for disaster!

Watch out on the road tonight – all that rain followed by freezing temperatures is a recipe for disaster.

Feifei

So put another way, 'a recipe for disaster' is a phrase that means someone's actions will result in things going badly wrong. So what problem is my cake making going to cause, Rob?

Rob

Well can't you see there's cake mix on the table – the cake won't be ready in time – and it'll taste disgusting with all that salt in it.

Feifei

Oh calm down – do you want to taste the cake mix?

Rob

Oh go on then.... Mmmm, actually it's not too bad. And there's not much mess. Perhaps it's not a disaster – but maybe we shouldn't give it to Helen. Shall we keep it for later?

Feifei

Ha ha – it looks like this has been a recipe for success!

Rob

For once Feifei, you might be right! Bye!

Feifei

Bye.