
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The English We Speak

Grind someone's gears



This is not a word-for-word transcript.

Feifei

Hello and welcome to The English We Speak, where we explain phrases used by fluent English speakers so that you can use them, too! I'm Feifei, and I'm joined by Georgie. How are you doing?

Georgie

Well... I'm feeling calm now, but this morning, all the trains to work were cancelled so I had to get the bus instead! It really grinds my gears when that happens without warning or explanation.

Feifei

Oh, tell me about it! Well, 'grind someone's gears' is the expression we're looking at in this programme. Train cancellations without warning grind your gears, Georgie. So, what does that mean?

Georgie

Well, if something grinds your gears, it really annoys you. What grinds your gears Feifei?

Feifei

When people eat really crunchy things sitting next to me in the office, that really grinds my gears.

Georgie

Yeah, I can understand that one. Now, this phrase is usually used in the present simple to talk about things which generally annoy you. So you can start a sentence with 'It grinds my gears when...' or you could say 'that really grinds my gears'.

Feifei

Yes, you wouldn't usually hear it in other forms like 'it ground my gears' or 'it was grinding my gears' to talk about things that happened once. Use it for things which happen often. Let's hear some more examples.

Examples

Every evening when I go home, there's just so many tourists in the train station, it really grinds my gears. They get in the way with their suitcases, and I'm in a rush and I just want to get home.

OK, I'll tell you what really grinds my gears. When people have got something for the dishwasher and they don't put it inside, they put it next to the dishwasher, so someone – me – has to come along and put it in for them.

So, I go to this coffee shop with my friend, and every time I go there, it's like they've increased the price again. It really grinds my gears.

Georgie

Now, there are some other useful phrases to use when things annoy you. A 'pet peeve' is a noun and it's something that annoys you. They're usually quite personal, so for example, one of my pet peeves is people calling me without saying they're going to call me.

Feifei

Whereas I don't mind it when people do that. Another phrase we can use is 'it drives me up the wall'. It drives me up the wall when Neil crunches his apples all the time in the office.

Georgie

Yeah, that is so annoying. OK, let's recap. We learnt 'grind someone's gears' which means annoy someone. Thanks for joining us! Bye.

Feifei

Goodbye.