BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The English We Speak
Understood the assignment

This is not a word-for-word transcript.

Feifei
Hello and welcome to The English We Speak, where we explain expressions used by fluent English speakers so that you can use them, too! I'm Feifei, and I'm joined by Georgie. How are you? What have you been up to this week?

Georgie
Well, something that's really exciting is that I went to a costume party, um, the theme was 'fairytales', and my friend came as a fairy. She wore these amazing purple wings, she got her makeup and hair done professionally, and she looked incredible. She really understood the assignment.

Feifei
Oh wow, that sounds fun! But what do you mean she 'understood the assignment'? Assignments are usually something we do at school, like essays and coursework, but you're talking about a costume party.

Georgie
Yes. That's because 'understood the assignment' is now being used as a slang phrase, meaning that someone did something very well – they exceeded expectations. So, at the party I went to, lots of people didn't really make much of an effort, but my friend went out and bought accessories, she did her makeup…

Feifei
Right, so she knew what she had to do to impress people, and she achieved that. She understood the assignment.

Georgie
Yes, exactly.

Feifei
Oh, interesting. Well, I'd like to hear some more examples to fully understand the phrase.

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Examples
I told my wife I wanted to eat something unusual and special for my birthday, and we had the most amazing meal in the craziest restaurant I've ever been to. She really understood the assignment.

We're hoping to get our bathroom redone this year, and we just got the designs through, and the designer really understood the assignment. It looks so amazing and so relaxing. I can't wait to get it done.

I asked the band to write a catchy, three-minute pop song with an unforgettable chorus, and they totally understood the assignment. I can't get it out of my head!

Feifei
OK, I think I've got it now. I asked you to teach us an expression that you might not find in a typical dictionary, and you really understood the assignment.

Georgie
That's a great example, Feifei, and thank you! One thing to note is that we usually hear it in the past tense. And that's because it's used to comment on what someone has done after it has happened as a way to compliment or praise them.

Feifei
Great. And another expression you might hear when someone does really well at something is that they 'go above and beyond'.

Georgie
Oh yes. 'Go above and beyond' means that a person does more than is required for the task.

Feifei
OK, let's recap. We learnt the expression 'understood the assignment', which we can use to praise someone when they knew exactly what they had to do, and did it well.

Georgie
Thank you for joining us. Goodbye!

Feifei
Bye bye!

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