BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The English We Speak
One size fits all

This is not a word-for-word transcript.

Feifei
Hello and welcome to The English We Speak, where we explain phrases and expressions used by fluent English speakers so that you can use them too. I'm Feifei.

Phil
And I'm Phil. Hi Feifei, I've got the new team t-shirts – have this one. They're one size fits all.

Feifei
But this is enormous? One size fits all? I'm not sure it does.

Phil
Ok, but it does help us tell people about the expression 'one size fits all'.

Feifei
It's sounds like something you use to talk about clothes.

Phil
Yes, that's where it comes from. Clothes are sometimes sold as one-size-fits-all. It's sold as one size, and it's supposed to fit everyone.

Feifei
Well, I'm not sure it works for these t-shirts, but I can imagine it working for something like a hat. We don't just use it to talk about clothes, do we?

Phil
No, we don't. It's become more general. 'One size fits all', is often used to describe a way of doing something where everyone is treated in the same way. A training programme for a company might be described as one-size-fits-all – everyone does the same training. A one-size-fits-all approach to problem-solving means trying to solve every problem the same way.

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Feifei
Yes, and in the same that one-size-fits-all clothes don't always fit everyone, this expression is sometimes used negatively. For example, we might describe something as 'one-size-fits-all' to suggest that it ignores the needs of individuals or a particular situation

Phil
Let's hear some more people using the expression 'one size fits all'.

Examples
Me and my cousin are such different people. I mean, I always try to find creative ways to deal with problems. But he always takes a one-size-fits-all kind of approach.

I need to order some new computer software for the office. Everybody uses things slightly differently. They've all got different requests but I'm hoping we can get something that's one size fits all, that we can all use.

When I go to the barbers' it doesn't matter what I ask for, they give me the same haircut. It's one size fits all in there.

Feifei
We've been learning the expression 'one-size-fits-all' to describe something where people or situations are all treated the same.

Phil
Yes, other expressions that are similar is 'off-the-peg' or 'off-the-shelf'. They can be about clothes – meaning standard sizes that haven't been fitted or tailored. But we can now use these to talk about products or ways to solve problems. 'An off-the-shelf solution' or 'off-the-peg solution' is a standard way of doing things – it hasn't been adapted to a specific situation.

Feifei
OK. That's it for this programme but join us again next time. We have lots of different ways to help you learn English because when it comes to learning a language, one size doesn’t fit all.

Phil
See you next time!

Feifei

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Bye bye!

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