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Chris: Hi Helen. Wow, what's that?

Helen: This is a present for you, Chris. 一个小礼物。

Chris: A present for me? Oh, that's very kind of you!

Helen: Here you go.

Chris: A new dictionary - how nice! That's such a lovely present, and it's not even my birthday. But hang on, why have you stuck all these pieces of string onto the book?

Helen: There are strings to your present. 我把好几根绳子夹在字典里。

Chris: Erm, I see. Do you mean there are certain conditions that come with this present?

Helen: Yes, strings to your present!

Chris: Ah, you mean there are strings attached.

Helen: I see – so it's an expression in English?

Chris: That's right. Having strings attached doesn't actually mean you need to stick pieces of string to the book. You can just tell me what the conditions are.

Helen: Oh, OK. Well, the conditions are that I can borrow your dictionary whenever I need to use it. 我的附加条件是我可以随地地用你的字典。怎么样?

Chris: That's absolutely fine. You can borrow it anytime.

Helen: Great! Do you have any headphones I can use too? I want to listen to my mp3 player. 能借借你的耳机吗?

Chris: Yes, here you go.

Helen: Thanks. Are there any strings attached?

Chris: No, you can use the headphones for as long as you like - no strings attached.

Helen: Wonderful, thanks very much.

Chris: Let's take a listen to some examples of how strings attached or no strings attached can be used:

Examples

Make sure you read all of the contract before you sign it, there could be strings attached.

We're giving away our brand new toy to the first fifty customers who visit our shop - no strings attached.

Helen: So it can be a warning about whether there are restrictions to something or not. 这个短语就是警告别人这里有附加条件。

Chris: That's right. When something has strings attached, it often means there are hidden commitments and you should find out what they are.

Helen: That's good to know. 这个短语仅仅是在说到钱的时候才能用吗?

Chris: It can often be used when talking about financial agreements or negotiations, but it can also be based on personal relationships too, like when you gave me the present. Here's another example:

Example

A: My brother said I could use his car this weekend, no strings attached.

B: Really? That's a nice thing to do.

A: Well, he does owe me a favour after I washed the car last week.

Chris: So Helen, now that you've finished with your mp3 player, can I listen to it?

Helen: You can, but there are strings attached.

Chris: Oh, OK. What are they?

Helen: 我的 mp3 里只有古典音乐。

Chris: Oh no, I hate classical music!