

CAMBRIDGE

English Collocations **in** Use

How words work
together for
fluent and
natural English

Self-study and
classroom use

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Contents

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Acknowledgements | 3 |
| To the student (and the teacher) | 4 |

Learning about collocations

- 1 What is a collocation?
- 2 Finding, recording and learning collocations
- 3 Using your dictionary
- 4 Types of collocation
- 5 Register

Grammatical aspects of collocations

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| 6 Intensifying adverbs | <i>highly unlikely, utterly ridiculous, strongly object</i> |
| 7 Everyday verbs 1 | <i>make a mistake, do your best, do damage</i> |
| 8 Everyday verbs 2 | <i>go bald, become extinct, fall ill</i> |
| 9 Everyday verbs 3 | <i>have fun, take action, pay a compliment</i> |

Special aspects of collocation

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 10 Synonyms and confusable words 1 | <i>close a meeting, antique furniture, only child</i> |
| 11 Synonyms and confusable words 2 | <i>gain power, achieve your goals, defeat an opponent</i> |
| 12 Metaphor | <i>sunny smile, ideas flow, heated discussion</i> |

Topics: Travel and the environment

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| 13 Weather | <i>strong wind, blanket of fog, river bursts its banks</i> |
| 14 Travel | <i>tiring journey, aisle seat, family-run hotel</i> |
| 15 Countryside | <i>surrounding countryside, well worth seeing</i> |
| 16 Towns and cities | <i>lined with shops, sprawling city, volume of traffic</i> |

Topics: People and relationships

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 17 People: character and behaviour | <i>have a vivid imagination, lose your patience</i> |
| 18 People: physical appearance | <i>slender waist, immaculately groomed</i> |
| 19 Families | <i>distant cousin, expecting a baby, stable home</i> |
| 20 Relationships | <i>casual acquaintance, love at first sight</i> |
| 21 Feelings and emotions | <i>lasting happiness, worried sick, emotional wreck</i> |

Topics: Leisure and lifestyle

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| 22 Houses, flats and rooms | <i>move into a flat, spacious living room</i> |
| 23 Eating and drinking | <i>nourishing meal, spoil your appetite, dying of hunger</i> |
| 24 Films and books | <i>film critic, go on the stage, renew a library book</i> |
| 25 Music | <i>give a performance, go on tour, strum a guitar</i> |
| 26 Sport | <i>go snowboarding, take a penalty</i> |
| 27 Health and illness | <i>catch a cold, vigorous exercise, be taken ill</i> |

Topics: Work and study

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| 28 Computers | <i>forward a message, e-mail bounces</i> |
| 29 Study and learning | <i>do research, attend a lecture, first draft</i> |
| 30 Work | <i>high-powered job, hand in your notice</i> |
| 31 Business | <i>set up a business, launch a product, rival company</i> |

- 32 Academic writing 1: giving opinions *key factor, challenge a theory, carry out research*
 33 Academic writing 2: structuring an argument *make reference to, argue convincingly, research suggests*

Topics: Society and institutions

- 34 Laws and punishments *break the law, bend the rules, fair trial*
 35 Crime *hardened criminal, juvenile crime, tackle crime*
 36 News *hit the headlines, hold talks, take hostage*
 37 Money *squander money, price soars, go cheap*
 38 War and peace *war breaks out, restore order, call a truce*
 39 Global problems *irreparable damage, eradicate poverty, earthquake hits*

Basic concepts

- 40 Time *save time, ungodly hours, from dawn till dusk*
 41 Sound *break the silence, excessive noise, almighty bang*
 42 Distance and size *within commuting distance, painfully thin*
 43 Colour and light *bright colour, beam of light, shed some light on*
 44 Texture *choppy sea, soft pillow, ice melts*
 45 Taste and smell *fragrant perfume, have a taste, smell danger*
 46 Number and frequency *significant number, come to a total of, rare species*
 47 Movement and speed *prompt payment, painfully slow, lose your balance*
 48 Change *make an adjustment, break a habit, change the subject*
 49 Ways of speaking *brief chat, raise a subject, drop a hint*
 50 Ways of walking *pace up and down, wander aimlessly, faltering steps*

Functions

- 51 Starting and finishing *promising start, bring something to an end*
 52 Talking about success and failure *make a breakthrough, fail miserably*
 53 Talking about cause and effect *cause alarm, adverse effects, have a major impact*
 54 Remembering and sensing *vaguely remember, blot out a memory, have a feeling*
 55 Agreeing and disagreeing *settle a dispute, agree to differ, heated argument*
 56 Talking about beliefs and opinions *firmly believe, colour someone's judgement*
 57 Deciding and choosing *arrive at a decision, have second thoughts, tough choice*
 58 Claiming and denying *make the point that, contradictory evidence*
 59 Liking and disliking *have a liking, state a preference, take offence*
 60 Praising and criticising *offer your congratulations, speak highly of*

Key 126

Index 159

I What is a collocation?

A

A collocation is a pair or group of words that are often used together. These combinations sound natural to native speakers, but students of English have to make a special effort to learn them because they are often difficult to guess. Some combinations just sound 'wrong' to native speakers of English. For example, the adjective *fast* collocates with *cars*, but not with *a glance*.

| We say ... | We don't say ... |
|--|--|
| fast cars fast food | quick cars quick food |
| a quick glance a quick meal | a fast glance a fast meal |

Learning collocations is an important part of learning the vocabulary of a language. Some collocations are fixed, or very strong, for example **take a photo**, where no word other than *take* collocates with *photo* to give the same meaning. Some collocations are more open, where several different words may be used to give a similar meaning, for example **keep to / stick to the rules**. Here are some more examples of collocations.

You must **make an effort** and study for your exams (NOT ~~do~~ an effort)

Did you **watch TV** last night? (NOT ~~look at~~ TV)

This car has a very **powerful engine**. It can do 200 km an hour. (NOT ~~strong~~ engine)

There are some **ancient monuments** nearby. (NOT ~~antique~~ monuments)

Sometimes, a pair of words may not be absolutely wrong, and people will understand what is meant, but it may not be the natural, normal collocation. If someone says *I did a few mistakes* they will be understood, but a fluent speaker of English would probably say *I made a few mistakes*.

B Compounds and idioms

Compounds are units of meaning formed with two or more words. Sometimes the words are written separately, sometimes they have a hyphen and sometimes they are written as one word. Usually the meaning of the compound can be guessed by knowing the meaning of the individual words. Some examples of compounds are **car park**, **post office**, **narrow-minded**, **shoelaces**, **teapot**.

It is not always easy to separate collocations and compounds and, where they are useful for learners or an important part of the vocabulary of a topic, we include some compounds in this book too.

Idioms are groups of words in a fixed order that have a meaning that cannot be guessed by knowing the meaning of the individual words. For example, **pass the buck** is an idiom meaning 'to pass responsibility for a problem to another person to avoid dealing with it oneself'. We deal with idioms in detail in the book *English Idioms in Use* in this series.

C Why learn collocations?

Learning collocations is a good idea because they can:

- give you the most natural way to say something: *smoking is **strictly forbidden*** is more natural than *smoking is **strongly forbidden***.
- give you alternative ways of saying something, which may be more colourful/expressive or more precise: instead of repeating *It was **very cold and very dark***, we can say *It was **bitterly cold and pitch dark***.
- improve your style in writing: instead of saying *poverty **causes crime***, you can say *poverty **breeds crime***; instead of saying *a **big meal*** you can say *a **substantial meal***. You may not need or want to use these in informal conversations, but in writing they can give your text more variety and make it read better: this book includes notes about formality wherever the collocations are especially formal or informal.

Exercises

1.1 Read A and B and answer these questions.

- 1 What is a collocation?
- 2 Which of these words does *fast* collocate with: *car*, *food*, *glance*, *meal*?
- 3 Which of these are compounds: *computer*, *narrow-minded*, *teapot*, *ancient monument*, *car park*?
- 4 What do we call expressions like *pass the buck* and *be over the moon*?

1.2 Make ten collocations from the words in the box.

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|-----------|----------|-------------|-----------|-------|----------|
| an effort | ancient | bitterly | make | breakfast | cold | dark |
| engine | forbidden | mistakes | have | make | meal | monument |
| pitch | powerful | strictly | substantial | TV | watch | |

1.3 Are these statements about collocations true or false?

- 1 Learning collocations will make your English sound more natural.
- 2 Learning collocations will help you to express yourself in a variety of ways.
- 3 Learning collocations will help you to write better English.
- 4 Using collocations properly will get you better marks in exams.
- 5 You will not be understood unless you use collocations properly.

1.4 Put the expressions from the box into the correct category in the table below.

| | | | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|----------------|------------|-----------------------|
| make a mistake | a storm in a tea cup | live music | checkpoint | key ring |
| pull somebody's leg | heavy snow | valid passport | teapot | bitterly disappointed |

| compound | collocation | idiom |
|----------|-------------|-------|
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1.5 Underline the collocations in this text.

When I left university I made a decision to take up a profession in which I could be creative. I could play the guitar, but I'd never written any songs. Nonetheless I decided to become a singer-songwriter. I made some recordings but I had a rather heavy cold so they didn't sound good. I made some more, and sent them to a record company and waited for them to reply. So, while I was waiting to become famous, I got a job in a fast-food restaurant. That was five years ago. I'm still doing the same job.



A

Finding collocations

There are two main ways in which you can find collocations.

- You can train yourself to notice them whenever you read or listen to anything in English. Look at the collocations that are worth learning from this short text in English.

After **giving** Mark **a lift** to the airport, Cathy **made her way** home. What an exciting **life** he **led**! At times Cathy felt **desperately jealous** of him. She **spent her time** doing little more than **taking care of** him and the children. Now her sister was **getting divorced** and would doubtless be **making demands on** her too. Cathy had promised to **give** her sister **a call** as soon as she got home but she decided to **run** herself **a bath** first. She had **a sharp pain** in her side and hoped that a hot bath might **ease the pain**.

TIP

Get into the habit of making a note of any good collocations you come across in any English text you read.

- You can find them in any good learner's dictionary.
For example, if you look up the word *sharp* you will find some of these collocations:

a sharp pain
a sharp bend/turn
a sharp contrast/difference/distinction
a sharp rise/increase/drop

TIP

When you look up a new word make a point of noting it down in several different collocations.

B

Recording collocations

The best way to record a collocation is in a phrase or a sentence showing how it is used. Highlight the collocation by underlining it or by using a highlighting pen.

For example: I don't have access to that kind of secret information.
Or: Jim gave me a very useful piece of advice.

C

Learning collocations

Learning collocations is not so different from learning any vocabulary item. The key things are to:

- regularly revise what you want to learn
- practise using what you want to learn in contexts that are meaningful for you personally
- learn collocations in groups to help you fix them in your memory. You might group together collocations relating to the same topic. Or you might group collocations based on the same word, for example:

I must **find a way** to help him.

Can you **find your way** back to my house?

I **learnt the hard way** that Jack can't be trusted.

Please tell me if I'm **getting in your way**.

You must **give way to** traffic from the left.

I've **tried every possible way** to get him to change his mind.