

1 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

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.



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2 Finding, recording and learning collocations

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, Julie **made her way** home. What an exciting **life** he **led**! At times Julie 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. Julie 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.

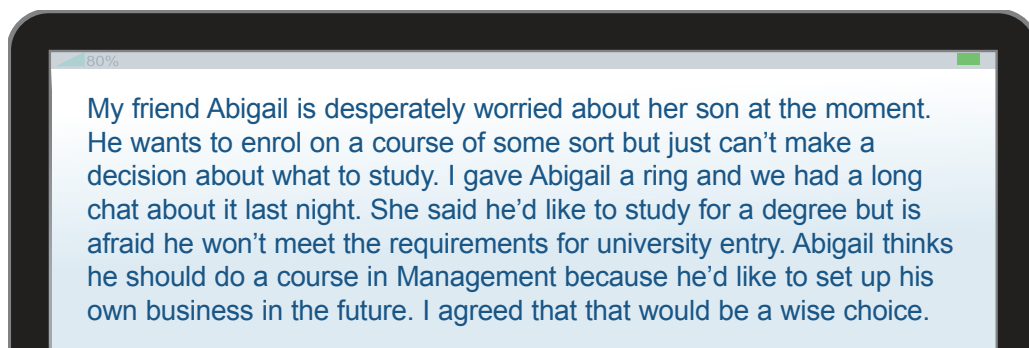
Please tell me if I'm **getting in your way**.

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

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

Exercises

2.1 Underline 11 collocations in this text.



2.2 Match the beginning of each sentence on the left with its ending on the right.

- | | |
|----------------|----------------|
| 1 She's having | her duty. |
| 2 She's taking | a lecture. |
| 3 She's giving | a party. |
| 4 She's making | an exam. |
| 5 She's doing | good progress. |

2.3 Correct the eight collocation errors in this text. Use a dictionary to help you if necessary.

In the morning I made some work in the garden, then I spent a rest for about an hour before going out to have some shopping in town. It was my sister's birthday and I wanted to do a special effort to cook a nice meal for her. I gave a look at a new Thai cookery book in the bookshop and decided to buy it. It has some totally easy recipes and I managed to do a good impression with my very first Thai meal. I think my sister utterly enjoyed her birthday.

2.4 Look at this entry for the verb *lead* in the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. What collocations could you learn from this entry? Underline or highlight them. Then write one new sentence for each of them.

lead CONTROL **E** /li:d/ *verb* [I or T] (led, led) to control a group of people, a country, or a situation: *I think we've chosen the right person to lead the expedition.* ◦ *I've asked Gemma to lead the discussion.* ◦ *Who will be leading the inquiry into the accident?*
 ● **lead sb by the nose** INFORMAL to control someone and make them do exactly what you want them to do

See also **Unit 3, Using your dictionary.**

Over to you

Use a dictionary to find three or four other good collocations for each of these words:

desperately pain wise run

Write the collocations you find in an appropriate way in your vocabulary notebook.

3 Using your dictionary

A good learner's dictionary will give you information on collocations. Sometimes the information is highlighted in some special way. In other cases, the examples used in the dictionary include the most common collocations.

In the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (CALD), common and useful collocations are given in **bold type**. Look at the CALD entry for the word *pain* and note how useful collocations are highlighted in bold.

pain **E** /peɪn/ *noun* [C or U] **1** a feeling of physical suffering caused by injury or illness: *Her symptoms included abdominal pain and vomiting.* ○ *Are you **in** (= suffering from) pain?* ○ *She was in **constant** pain.* ○ *These tablets should help to **ease** the pain.* ○ *I felt a **sharp** pain in my foot.* ○ *He's been suffering various **aches and pains** for years.* **2** emotional or mental suffering: *It's a film about the pains and pleasures of parenthood.* ○ *The parents are still in great pain **over** the death of their child.*

- **a pain (in the neck)** *INFORMAL* someone or something that is very annoying: *That child is a **real** pain in the neck.*

Online dictionaries are very useful because you can search for a lot more information very quickly. The Cambridge Dictionary (dictionary.cambridge.org) provides definitions as well as more examples including the key word and links to the SMART Thesaurus. The SMART Thesaurus gives synonyms, related words and phrases of the word you are looking up. Here is the entry for 'advice' in the Cambridge online dictionary.

advice

noun [U] • **UK**  /ədˈvaɪs/ • **US**  /ədˈvaɪs/

A2 an opinion that someone offers you about what you should do or how you should act in a particular situation:

Steven **gave** me some good advice.
 I think I'll **take** your advice (= do what you suggest) and get the green dress.
 Can I give you a **piece** of advice?
 I need some advice **on** which computer to buy.
 [+ to infinitive] My advice is **to** go by train.
 We went to Paris **on** Sarah's advice.

More examples

The centre provides expert advice for people with financial problems.
 I decided to follow her advice and go to bed early.
 The service offers young people practical advice on finding a job.
 I've always valued her advice.
 You should get some legal advice before you take any further action.

A good dictionary will also tell you if a collocation is formal or informal. For example, CALD indicates that **to take somebody up on an offer** is an informal collocation (**accept an offer** would be a more formal alternative).

offer **E** /ˈɒf.ə/ **(US)** /ˈɑː.fə/ *noun* [C] when someone asks you if you would like to have something or if you would like them to do something: *"If you like I can do some shopping for you."* *"That's a very kind offer."* ○ *I must say the offer **of** a weekend in Barcelona quite tempts me.* ○ *INFORMAL* One day I'll **take** you **up on** (= accept) that offer.

Tip

When you buy a dictionary, make sure it gives good, clear information about collocations. When you look up words, if you don't know the collocations, highlight them in your dictionary or transfer them to your vocabulary notebook.

Exercises

3.1 Answer these questions about collocations and dictionaries.

- 1 How does the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* show collocations?
- 2 Which five collocations can you see in the top box on the opposite page?
- 3 Why is an online dictionary particularly useful?
- 4 What information does the online Thesaurus usually show?
- 5 How does the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* indicate that a collocation is informal?
- 6 Look at the dictionary that you normally use. Does it indicate collocations? If so, how?
- 7 Look up *pain* in your own dictionary. Which of the collocations on the left-hand page does it either highlight or illustrate in example sentences?
- 8 Look up the noun *offer* in your own dictionary. What collocations can you find? Does the dictionary indicate whether the collocations are formal or informal? If so, how?

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

to alleviate pain to cause pain to complain of pain
 to ease pain to experience pain to feel pain to inflict pain
 to lessen pain to be racked with pain to relieve pain
 to soothe pain pain subsides to suffer pain

making others experience pain	the experience of being in pain	making pain go away

3.3 Look in a good learner's dictionary. What collocations do you find there for the word *ache*?

Over to you

Look up two or three words that you have recently learnt, using a good learner's dictionary. Write down any interesting collocations that are shown for those words.

4 Types of collocation

There are many different types of collocation. Here are some examples.

A Adjectives and nouns

Notice adjectives that are typically used with particular nouns.

Emma always wears red or yellow or some other **bright colour**.

We had a **brief chat** about the exams but didn't have time to discuss them properly.

Unemployment is a **major problem** for the government at the moment.

Improving the health service is another **key issue** for government.

B Nouns and verbs

Notice how nouns and verbs often go together. The examples below are all to do with economics and business.

The **economy boomed** in the 1990s. [the economy was very strong]

The company has grown and now employs 50 more people than last year.

The company has expanded and now has branches in most major cities.

The two **companies merged** in 2013 and now form one very large corporation.

The company **launched the product** in 2012. [introduced the product]

The price increase **poses a problem** for us. [is a problem]

The internet has **created opportunities** for our business. [brought new opportunities]

C Noun + noun

There are a lot of collocations with the pattern *a ... of ...*.

As Max read the lies about him, he felt **a surge of anger**. [literary: a sudden angry feeling]

Every parent feels **a sense of pride** when their child does well or wins something.

I felt **a pang of nostalgia** when I saw the old photos of the village where I grew up.

D Verbs and expressions with prepositions

Some verbs collocate with particular prepositional expressions.

As Jack went on stage to receive his gold medal for the judo competition you could see his parents **swelling with pride**. [looking extremely proud]

I was **filled with horror** when I read the newspaper report of the explosion.

When she spilt juice on her new skirt the little girl **burst into tears**. [suddenly started crying]

E Verbs and adverbs

Some verbs have particular adverbs which regularly collocate with them.

She **pulled steadily** on the rope and helped him to safety. [pulled firmly and evenly]

He **placed** the beautiful vase **gently** on the window ledge.

'I love you and want to marry you,' Dylan **whispered softly** to Madison.

She **smiled proudly** as she looked at the photos of her new grandson.

F Adverbs and adjectives

Adjectives often have particular adverbs which regularly collocate with them.

They are **happily married**.

I am **fully aware** that there are serious problems. [I know well]

Harry was **blissfully unaware** that he was in danger. [Harry had no idea at all, often used about something unpleasant]

Exercises

4.1 Complete each sentence with a collocation from A.

- 1 Come to my office ten minutes before the meeting so we can have ...
- 2 With her lovely dark hair Ella looks best when she wears ...
- 3 In your essay on the influence of TV, don't forget to discuss these ...
- 4 There is some crime in our town but it isn't ...

4.2 Replace the underlined words with a collocating verb from B.

- 1 We are going to introduce an exciting new product in June.
- 2 The economy was extremely high 30 years ago.
- 3 The new university they are planning will provide a lot of job opportunities.
- 4 There are always some problems when two companies join together but I think it will be worth it in the long run.
- 5 The increase in oil prices certainly creates a problem for us.
- 6 The company got bigger and has now added children's clothing to its product range.

4.3 Choose the correct feeling from the box to complete each sentence.

anger	horror	tears	nostalgia	pride	pride
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- 1 Most older people feel a slight pang of as they think back on their schooldays.
- 2 Grace's father was filled with when he saw that she had dyed her beautiful black hair blonde.
- 3 When Daniel saw how harshly the poor were treated by the wealthy landowners he felt a surge of
- 4 Swelling with, Jack watched his daughter pick up her violin and play.
- 5 When she saw her exam results, Kate burst into
- 6 If people have a sense of in their town, they are more likely to behave well there.

4.4 Look at E and F and choose the correct adverb to complete these sentences.

- 1 Perhaps it's a good thing that Liam's unaware of what people really think of him.
- 2 I am aware that there will be problems whatever we decide.
- 3 Stella smiled as she watched the children playing happily in the garden.
- 4 My grandparents have been married for 45 years.
- 5 Place the glasses in the box – they're very fragile.
- 6 William whispered in Anna's ear that he would always love her.

4.5 Which of the sections A-F on the opposite page would each of these collocations fit into?

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| 1 make a decision | 6 roar with laughter |
| 2 blissfully happy | 7 a key factor |
| 3 tread carefully | 8 prices rise |
| 4 a surge of emotion | 9 a ginger cat |
| 5 acutely embarrassing | 10 burst into song |

Over to you

Make a page in your vocabulary notebook for each of the types of collocation listed on the opposite page.

5 Register

Often, collocations rather than individual words suggest a particular register. For example, phrases using *pretty* meaning *fairly* sound informal when used with negative adjectives (**pretty awful, pretty dreadful, pretty dull**), and are typical of spoken English.





A Spoken English

Here are some more collocations which are almost exclusively found in spoken English.

<p>I'm bored stiff¹ in this lesson!</p>  <p>¹ extremely bored</p>	<p>You badly need a haircut!</p> 	<p>I'll have a think about it and let you know.</p> 	<p>Give me a ring² when you get home.</p>  <p>² give me a phone call</p>
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B Formal English

Some collocations are typical of formal English and are most likely to be found in an official, often legal, context, such as in notices.

<p>Passengers must not alight from the bus whilst it is in motion.</p>  <p>[get off the bus]</p>	<p>CYCLISTS must dismount here</p>  <p>[get off their bicycles]</p>	<p>Trespassers will be prosecuted</p>  <p>[people who go onto someone's land or enter their building without permission will be taken to court]</p>	<p>Please dispose of unwanted items in the receptacle² provided</p>  <p>¹ throw away ² container used for storing or putting objects in</p>
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C Newspaper English

Some collocations – particularly ones that use short, dramatic words – are found mainly in newspapers. In most cases they would not normally be used in everyday conversation.

<p>COMPUTER FACTORY TO AXE JOBS</p> <p>[make staff redundant]</p>	<p>AIRLINE SLASHES PRICES</p> <p>[cuts prices drastically]</p>	<p>Government spending will rocket this year</p>
<p>POLICE CRACK DOWN ON SPEEDING</p> <p>[start dealing with it in a more severe way]</p>	<p>POLICE QUIZ 16-YEAR-OLD IN MURDER ENQUIRY</p> <p>[ask questions]</p>	
<p>FLU OUTBREAK HITS SOUTHERN EUROPE</p>		

D Business English

Some collocations are characteristic of business English.

- to **submit a tender** [present a document offering to do a job and stating the price]
- to **raise capital** [get money to put into a business]
- to **go into partnership with** someone [agree to start or run a business with someone]
- to **start up a business**

Exercises

5.1 Underline formal (F) or informal (I) collocations in these sentences (one per sentence) and put F or I in the brackets at the end.

- 1 Cyclists should dismount before crossing the footbridge. ()
- 2 Never dispose of batteries and similar items by throwing them onto a fire. ()
- 3 The students were all bored stiff by the lecture. ()
- 4 Passengers must alight from the bus through the rear door. ()
- 5 The grass badly needs cutting. ()
- 6 Please place all used tickets in the receptacle provided as you leave the building. ()

5.2 Underline typical news/media collocations in these newspaper clips.

1 **OIL COMPANIES SLASH PRICES**

There was good news for motorists today as pump prices were lowered by the major oil companies.

3 **FLOODS HIT CENTRAL REGION**

Towns and villages in the Central region were battling against floods tonight as heavy rain continued.

2 **DETECTIVES QUIZ
BUSINESSMAN OVER
MISSING TEENAGER**

Senior detectives interviewed a man who has been named as prime suspect in the case of a missing 18-year-old who is feared to have been abducted.

4 **CAR FIRM TO AXE 200 JOBS**

The Presco car firm has announced that 200 workers will be made redundant at its Kenton factory. The job losses are the result of falling profits.

5.3 Rewrite the headlines in exercise 5.2 using collocations more typical of ordinary conversation, as if you were telling a friend the news. Start each answer with 'Have you heard ...?' Use a dictionary if necessary.

5.4 Match the beginning of each sentence on the left with its ending on the right to make typical collocations used in business English.

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| 1 We raised | partnership to develop a new range of products. |
| 2 They submitted | capital to expand the business. |
| 3 They went into | a business to supply sports equipment to schools. |
| 4 We started up | a tender for the new stadium. |

5.5 Choose a formal or informal collocation as instructed at the end of each sentence. Use a dictionary if necessary.

- 1 She was *dead* / *extremely keen* to meet the new coach. (informal)
- 2 We will be *boarding the aircraft* / *getting on the plane* in about ten minutes. (formal)
- 3 Mr Trotter *paid for* / *bore the cost of* the repairs. (formal)
- 4 I *withdrew from* / *dropped out of* my university course after a year. (informal)
- 5 The marketing manager *launched into* / *embarked upon* a detailed explanation of her new strategy. (informal)