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ENGLISH

COLLOCATIONS

How words work
together for fluent
and natural English

Self-study and
classroom use

Second Edition

IN USE

Advanced

Felicity O'Dell
Michael McCarthy

Experience
Better
Learning

ENGLISH COLLOCATIONS IN USE

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together for fluent
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Advanced

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swarm of bees, flurry of activity, stroke of genius

bear little resemblance to, polar opposites, draw a comparison between

give it one's best shot, abortive attempt, hard slog

not lose any sleep, to be brutally honest, be on the go

make a commitment, give a straight answer, miss the point

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Using this book

What is a collocation?

Collocation means a natural combination of words; it refers to the way English words are closely associated with each other. For example, *pay* and *attention* go together, as do *commit* and *crime*; *blond* goes with *hair* and *heavy* with *rain*.

Why learn collocations?

You need to learn collocations because they will help you to speak and write English in a more natural and accurate way. People will probably understand what you mean if you talk about *making a crime* or say *there was very hard rain this morning*, but your language will sound unnatural and might perhaps confuse. Did you mean that there was a lot of rain or perhaps that there was a hailstorm?

Learning collocations will also help you to increase your range of English vocabulary. For example, you'll find it easier to avoid words like *very* or *nice* or *beautiful* or *get* by choosing a word that fits the context better and has a more precise meaning. This is particularly useful if you are taking a written exam in English and want to make a good impression on the examiners. In advanced level exams, marks are often specifically awarded for the appropriate handling of collocations.

At an advanced level an appreciation of collocation can also be helpful in terms of appreciating other writers' use of language. Skilled users of the language may choose to create effects by varying the normal patterns of collocation, with the aim of either startling or amusing their audience. This technique is particularly popular with poets, journalists and advertisers. From an appreciation of the way in which creative writers play with language, you may then even want to move on to use words in more original ways yourself. You are more likely to be able to do this effectively if you have assimilated the standard patterns of language use presented in this book.

How were the collocations in this book selected?

The collocations presented in this book were mainly selected from those identified as significant by the CANCODE corpus of spoken English, developed at the University of Nottingham in association with Cambridge University Press, and the *Cambridge International Corpus* of written and spoken English (now known as the Cambridge English Corpus). We also made extensive use of the *Cambridge Learner Corpus*, a corpus of student language which showed us what kind of collocation errors learners tend to make.

These corpora show that there are many thousands of collocations in English. So how could we select which ones would be most useful for you to work on in this book?

Firstly, of course, we wanted to choose ones that you might want to use in your own written and spoken English. So, in the unit *Health and medicine* we include, for example, **shake off a cold** and **respond well to treatment** but not **grumbling appendix**, which is a strong collocation, but one which – we hope – most of you will not feel the need for.

Secondly, we decided it would be most useful for you if we focused on those collocations which are not immediately obvious. **A pretty girl**, **a modern car** or **to buy a ticket** are all collocations, but they are combinations which you can easily understand and produce yourself without any problems. So we deal here with less obvious word combinations, for instance, **flatly contradict** (not ~~strongly~~ contradict) and **bitter enemies** (not ~~serious~~ enemies).

Some of you may have already used our *English Collocations in Use* targeted at intermediate learners. In general, we have tried to avoid focusing on collocations that we dealt with in that book. An exception is with collocations that the *Cambridge Learner Corpus* highlighted as causing frequent problems for students, even in advanced level exams. We felt that it would be useful to draw attention to such collocations again, even if we had dealt with them previously.

Idioms can be seen as one type of collocation. We deal with them separately in *English Idioms in Use*, and so do not focus on them here.

How is the book organised?

The book has 60 two-page units. The left-hand page presents the collocations that are focused on in the unit. You will usually find examples of collocations in typical contexts with, where appropriate, any special notes about their meaning and their usage. The right-hand page checks that you have understood the information on the left-hand page by giving you a series of exercises that practise the material just presented.

The units are organised into different sections. First we start with important information relating to learning about collocations in general. Then there is a section focusing on different types of collocation. The rest of the book deals with collocations that relate to particular topics such as *Student life* or *Film and book reviews*, concepts such as *Sound* or *Difficulty* and functions such as *Cause and effect* or *Comparing and contrasting*.

The book has a key to all the exercises and an index which lists all the collocations we deal with, and indicates the units where they can be found.

How should I use this book?

It is strongly recommended that you work through the six introductory units first, so that you become familiar with the nature of collocations and with how best to study them. After that, you may work on the units in any order that suits you.

What else do I need in order to work with this book?

You need a notebook or file in which you can write down the collocations that you study in this book, as well as any others that you come across elsewhere.

You also need to have access to a good dictionary. At this level we strongly recommend the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* as this gives exactly the kind of information that you need to have about collocations. It does this both through the examples provided for each word entry and through special collocations boxes or mini-panels. Your teacher, however, may also be able to recommend other dictionaries that you will find useful.

Good modern learners' dictionaries include example sentences which make a point of illustrating each word's most frequent collocations. Enormous databases of language, known as corpora, are used to analyse speech and text to identify which words collocate most frequently. Look up the word *abject* in the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* and you will find the entry below. Notice how frequent collocations are used in the example sentences.

abject /'æb.dʒekt/ **adjective** FORMAL EXTREME 1 **abject misery/poverty/terror, etc.** when someone is extremely unhappy, poor, frightened, etc: *They live in abject poverty.* ○ *This policy has turned out to be an abject failure.*
NOT PROUD 2 showing no PRIDE or respect for yourself: *an abject apology* ○ *He is almost abject in his respect for his boss.* ● **abjectly** /'æb.dʒekt.li/ **adverb**

For more information about Cambridge dictionaries and to do online searches you could go to: <http://dictionary.cambridge.org>

So, a study of collocation is **highly recommended** (Unit 7) if you want to impress people with your natural and accurate use of language and to **gain more marks** (Unit 1) in English exams. Above all, we hope both that this book gives you a **thirst for knowledge** (Unit 17) about English collocations and also that you will **thoroughly enjoy** (Unit 7) working through the units in *English Collocations in Use Advanced*.

1

What is a collocation?

A

What are collocations?

A collocation is a combination of two or more words which frequently occur together. If someone says, 'She's got *yellow hair*', they would probably be understood, but it is not what would ordinarily be said in English. We'd say, 'She's got **blond hair**'. In other words, *yellow* doesn't collocate with *hair* in everyday English. *Yellow* collocates with, say, *flowers* or *paint*.

Collocations are not just a matter of how adjectives combine with nouns. They can refer to any kind of typical word combination, for example verb + noun (e.g. **arouse someone's interest**, **lead a seminar**), adverb + adjective (e.g. **fundamentally different**), adverb + verb (e.g. **flatly contradict**), noun + noun (e.g. **a lick of paint**, **a team of experts**, **words of wisdom**). There is much more about different grammatical types of collocation in Unit 3.

Phrasal verbs (e.g. *come up with*, *run up*, *adhere to*) and compound nouns (e.g. *economy drive*, *stock market*) are sometimes described as types of collocations. In this book we consider them as individual lexical items and so usually include them here only in combination with something else, e.g. **come up with a suggestion**, **run up a bill**, **adhere to your principles**, **go on an economy drive**, **play the stock market**. However, it is not always easy to separate collocations and compounds and, where they are useful for learners as an important part of the vocabulary of a topic, we include some compounds in this book too.

It can be difficult for learners of English to know which words collocate, as natural collocations are not always logical or guessable. There is, for example, no obvious reason why we say **making friends** rather than *getting* friends or **heavy rain**, not *strong* rain.

Learners also need to know when specific collocations are appropriate. This is usually referred to by linguists as knowing which register to use. **Alight from a bus** is a formal collocation used in notices and other official contexts. In everyday situations we would, of course, always talk about **getting off a bus**. There is more about register and collocation in Unit 6.

B

Why is it important to learn collocations?

An appreciation of collocation will help you to:

- use the words you know more accurately
In other words, you'll **make** (NOT *do*) fewer **mistakes**.
- sound more natural when you speak and write
By saying, for example, **of great importance**, rather than *of big or high importance*, you won't just be understood, you will – quite rightly – sound like a fluent user of English.
- vary your speech and, probably more importantly, your writing
Instead of repeating everyday words like *very*, *good* or *nice*, you will be able to exploit a wider range of language. You would gain more marks in an exam, for instance, for writing *We had a blissfully happy holiday in a picturesque little village surrounded by spectacular mountains* than for *We had a very happy holiday in a nice little village surrounded by beautiful mountains*, even though both sentences are perfectly correct.
- understand when a skilful writer departs from normal patterns of collocation
A journalist, poet, advertiser or other inventive user of language often creates an effect by not choosing the expected collocation. For example, a travel article about the Italian capital might be entitled *No place like Rome*, a reference to the popular expression **There's no place like home**.

Exercises

1.1 Match the two parts of these collocations.

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| 1 adhere to | rain |
| 2 arouse | different |
| 3 blond | of wisdom |
| 4 come up with | your principles |
| 5 flatly | an economy drive |
| 6 fundamentally | a seminar |
| 7 go on | someone's interest |
| 8 heavy | contradict |
| 9 lead | hair |
| 10 a lick | the stock market |
| 11 play | of paint |
| 12 words | a suggestion |

1.2 Correct the underlined collocation errors with words from the advice in B. Be careful, you might find the words in the text, as well as in the examples.

- 1 Exam candidates often make faults in their use of verbs like *do*, *make*, *go* and *get*.
- 2 Try to use a longer range of language when you write.
- 3 Exam candidates who use collocations well gather better marks.
- 4 You have to know what normal collocation patterns are before you can lose them.
- 5 The writer used colloquial language to form an effect.

1.3 Look at these sentences from a hotel brochure. Improve the style by replacing the words in italics with the word in brackets that forms the best collocation. (Use each word only once.)

- 1 Our new family hotel is set in a *nice* location and all the rooms have *nice* furnishings and *nice* views over the surrounding countryside. (stylish / secluded / breathtaking)
- 2 Visitors will enjoy the *good* atmosphere in either of our *good* dining rooms, both serving *good* food to both residents and non-residents. (delicious / relaxing / spacious)
- 3 We organise tours to *beautiful* surrounding villages where you'll have the opportunity to take some *beautiful* photographs and sample the *beautiful* local cuisine. (mouth-watering / picturesque / stunning)

1.4 Write F (formal), I (informal) or N (neutral) in the brackets at the end of each sentence. In each pair of sentences, there is one neutral sentence and one formal or informal sentence. Underline the collocations that are noticeably formal or informal.

- 1 a Passengers must not alight from the bus while it is in motion. ()
b Passengers must not get off the bus while it is moving. ()
- 2 a Let's grab a bite before we get down to work. ()
b Let's have something to eat before we start work. ()
- 3 a SFTS has the right to bring the agreement to an end with three months' notice. ()
b SFTS reserves the right to terminate the agreement with three months' notice. ()
- 4 a She thinks her boyfriend is planning to pop the question tonight. ()
b She thinks her boyfriend is planning to ask her to marry him tonight. ()

1.5 Correct the four collocation errors in this paragraph.

The yellow-haired boy said he had joined the English class to get some new friends. He also said that he wanted to learn about collocations because it would be of big importance in helping him to do fewer mistakes when writing in English.

2

Strong, fixed and weak collocations

A

Strong collocations

A strong collocation is one in which the words are very closely associated with each other. For example, the adjective **mitigating** almost always collocates with **circumstances** or **factors**; it rarely collocates with any other word. *Although she was found guilty, the jury felt there were **mitigating circumstances**.* [factors or circumstances that lessen the blame]

Here are some other examples of strong collocations.

collocation	comment
Inclement weather was expected.	(very formal) = unpleasant weather <i>Inclement</i> collocates almost exclusively with <i>weather</i> .
She has auburn hair .	<i>Auburn</i> collocates only with words connected with hair (e.g. <i>curls</i> , <i>tresses</i> , <i>locks</i>).
I felt deliriously happy .	= extremely happy Strongly associated with <i>happy</i> . Not used with <i>glad</i> , <i>content</i> , <i>sad</i> , etc.
The chairperson adjourned the meeting .	= have a pause or rest during a meeting/trial <i>Adjourn</i> is very strongly associated with <i>meeting</i> and <i>trial</i> .

B

Fixed collocations

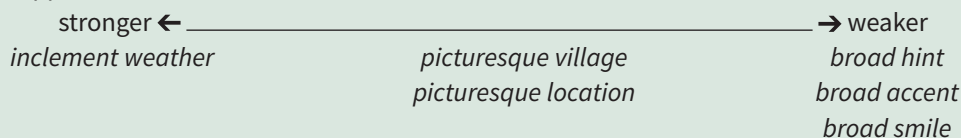
Fixed collocations are collocations so strong that they cannot be changed in any way. For example, you can say *I was walking **to and fro*** (meaning I was walking in one direction and then in the opposite direction, a repeated number of times). No other words can replace *to* or *fro* or *and* in this collocation. It is completely fixed. The meaning of some fixed collocations cannot be guessed from the individual words. These collocations are called idioms and are focused on in the book *English Idioms in Use*.

C

Weak collocations

Weak collocations are made up of words that collocate with a wide range of other words. For example, you can say you are **in broad agreement** with someone [generally in agreement with them]. However, *broad* can also be used with a number of other words – **a broad avenue**, **a broad smile**, **broad shoulders**, **a broad accent** [a strong accent], **a broad hint** [a strong hint] and so on. These are weak collocations, in the sense that *broad* collocates with **a broad range** of different nouns.

Strong collocations and weak collocations form a continuum, with stronger ones at one end and weaker ones at the other. Most collocations lie somewhere between the two. For example, the (formal) adjective *picturesque* collocates with *village*, *location* and *town*, and so appears near the middle of the continuum.



D

Types of collocations in this book

The collocations in this book are all frequently used in modern English. We used a corpus (a database of language) to check this. We have also selected the collocations which will be useful to you as an advanced learner. We pay most attention to those that are not predictable. *A broad avenue*, for example, would be predicted by any student who knows *broad* and *avenue*. However, the use of *broad* to mean *strong* as in **a broad accent** is more difficult to predict.

Exercises

2.1 Complete the collocations using the words in the box. You will need to use some words more than once.

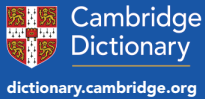
adjourn auburn broad deliriously inclement mitigating picturesque

- 1 a accent
- 2 in agreement
- 3 circumstances
- 4 factors
- 5 hair
- 6 happy
- 7 a smile
- 8 a location
- 9 a meeting
- 10 a town
- 11 a trial
- 12 weather

2.2 Rewrite each sentence using a collocation from 2.1.

- 1 Melissa has quite a strong Scottish accent.
- 2 Bad weather led to the cancellation of the President's garden party.
- 3 We were all very happy when we heard we'd won the award.
- 4 Their new home was in a very pretty location.
- 5 Because there were circumstances that made the theft less serious, the judge let him off with a warning.
- 6 I think we should stop the meeting now and continue it tomorrow.
- 7 She had a big smile on her face when she arrived.
- 8 She has lovely reddish-brown hair.
- 9 I think we're generally in agreement as to what should be done.

2.3 Think of as many collocations as you can for each word. Then look in a dictionary such as the Cambridge Online Dictionary for other suitable words. Write W (weak) or S (strong) next to each group depending on how many words you found.



- 1 extremely
- 2 an effort
- 3 cancel
- 4 deliver
- 5 a living
- 6 a meeting
- 7 feature
- 8 engage
- 9 bright

2.4 How useful do you think the collocations you have worked on in 2.2 and 2.3 are for you personally? Choose which collocations are most important to you and make sentences with them.

Over to you

Choose an English-language text that you have worked on recently. Underline five collocations in it. Are these collocations weak, strong or fixed?

3

Grammatical categories of collocation

A

Verb + noun

verb	noun	example	meaning of verb
draw up	a list a contract	Our lawyer drew up a contract for us to sign.	prepare something, usually official, in writing
pass up	a chance an opportunity	I didn't want to pass up the chance of seeing Hong Kong, so I agreed to go on the trip.	fail to take advantage of
withstand	pressure the impact	The police officer's vest can withstand the impact of a bullet.	bear

B

Noun + verb

noun	verb	example
opportunity	arise	An opportunity arose for me to work in China, so I went and spent a year there.
standards	slip	People feel educational standards slipped when the government cut finances.

C

Noun + noun

- Noun + noun collocations used to describe groups or sets:
There's been **a spate of attacks/thefts** in our area recently. [unusually large number happening in close succession]
The minister had to put up with **a barrage of questions/insults** from the angry audience. [unusually large number, happening at the same time]
- Noun + noun collocations used with uncountable nouns:
By **a stroke of luck** I found my keys in the rubbish bin! [sudden, unexpected piece of luck]
She gave me **a snippet of information** which is top secret. [small piece of information]

D

Adjective + noun

This is not an **idle threat**; I will call the police if this happens again! [simply a threat]
He waited in the **vain hope** that the minister would meet him. [unlikely to be fulfilled hope]
There is **mounting concern/criticism/fury** over the decision. [growing concern, etc.]
The **simple/plain truth** is that no one was aware of the problem.

E

Adverb + adjective

The article provides an **intensely personal** account of the writer's relationship with his sons.
Joe's sister was a **stunningly attractive** woman.

F

Verb + adverb or prepositional phrase

The teenager tried to persuade his mother that he was innocent but he **failed miserably**.
I don't like to travel with my brother because he **drives recklessly**. [wildly, without care]
As soon as the singer came on stage she **burst into song**.
If your dog starts to **foam at the mouth**, you should take it to the vet immediately.

G

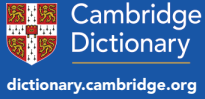
More complex collocations

Mary was looking forward to retiring and **taking it easy for a while**.
It's time you **put the past behind you** and started focusing on the future.

Exercises

3.1

Match a word from each box to form collocations. Not all the collocations appear on the opposite page, so use a dictionary such as the Cambridge Online Dictionary to help you if necessary.



disease evidence opportunity smoke
standards teeth wind withstand

arises chatter howls pressure
rises slip spreads suggests

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8

3.2

Complete each sentence using a collocation from 3.1 in the appropriate form.

- 1 The scientific human beings first emerged in Africa.
- 2 The was all night and it was raining, so I couldn't sleep.
- 3 The machine has to be made of materials that can a lot of
- 4 Oh, no! There's a fire. Look at the from those buildings.
- 5 It was so cold I couldn't stop my from
- 6 Our survey shows that parents believe have at the school.
- 7 You must accompany Mason on one of his business trips to Asia, if the ever
- 8 An alarming new is among cattle in the south of the country.

3.3

Rewrite the underlined part of each sentence using a collocation from the opposite page.

- 1 I don't want to say no to the chance of meeting such a famous person.
- 2 We'll have to write a contract before you start work, as it's a new position.
- 3 You're working too hard. You should try to relax for a short period of time.
- 4 This new bullet-proof car can take the impact of a rocket-propelled grenade.
- 5 Do you have any interesting little bits of information about our new boss to tell us?
- 6 The minister faced a large number of questions from reporters.
- 7 I had some luck last week. The police found my stolen wallet and nothing was missing.
- 8 There's been a number of violent attacks in the area recently.
- 9 After her divorce Mandy was determined to forget the past and build a new life.

3.4

Answer these questions.

- 1 Who do you think is the most stunningly attractive person you have ever seen?
- 2 What should you do if you are in a car with someone who is driving recklessly?
- 3 Do you prefer walking in the country if there is a gentle breeze or a strong wind?
- 4 Would you write your most intensely personal thoughts and feelings in your diary?

3.5

Choose the correct collocation.

- 1 He said he would throw us out, but it was just a(n) *vain / idle / lazy* threat.
- 2 They rushed the victim to hospital, in the *idle / simple / vain* hope of saving her life.
- 3 The government is encountering *mounting / climbing / rising* criticism of its policies.
- 4 There is *raising / mounting / vain* concern across the world about climate change.
- 5 The horse was *fuming / foaming / fainting* at the mouth, so we called the vet.
- 6 Suddenly, without warning, Marta *busted / bustled / burst* into song.
- 7 The *right / straight / plain* truth is that I hate my job.
- 8 I tried to persuade her but I'm afraid I failed *desperately / miserably / wholeheartedly*.

A

Finding collocations

You can expand your collocation vocabulary by training yourself to notice collocations whenever you read. Note the collocations in these three examples of texts from different sources – a newspaper feature, a film review and a website for London tourists.

LOCAL SPOTLIGHT

As a **newly qualified** teacher at a comprehensive school in Wiltshire, every day Joe **faces the challenge** of **gaining the respect** of a class of 15-year-olds. Joe, 26, admits it is a **tough challenge** but thinks he is **winning the battle**. Joe, who teaches English and media studies, and coaches a school football team, will **qualify fully** in July, **pending the results**¹ of his lesson assessments. With this **milestone passed**², and the increased financial stability it will bring, Joe will **turn his thoughts to** buying his first home.

¹ (formal) as long as he achieves successful results ² major life event behind him

The Interpreter

STARRING
Nicole Kidman
Sean Penn

She has a **gift for languages**, which brings her to the UN. She wants to **make a difference**. She is idealistic in that single-minded, dedicated manner associated with freedom fighters. Silvia (Nicole Kidman) remains an enigma. When Tobin Keller (Sean Penn) begins to investigate her, he is faced with a blank sheet. She is beautiful, blonde, lissom and lithe. She lives alone, has no lover, rides a Vespa throughout New York and works all day, **providing simultaneous translation** for delegates. She has an odd accent, which, like everything else about her, is **difficult to pin down**³.

³ hard to fix or place

**Entertaining children in London**

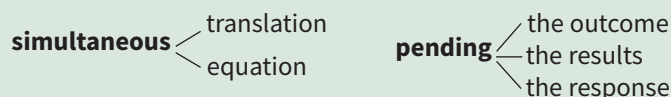
Covent Garden's buskers and jugglers **provide** no-cost **entertainment** in a car-free setting, and you've always **got the chance** of being plucked from the crowd to help out with a trick. Don't **underestimate the value of** London's public transport as a **source of fun**, either. The #11 double-decker from Victoria, for instance, will trundle you past the Houses of Parliament, Trafalgar Square and the Strand on its way to St Paul's Cathedral for a modest sum. The driverless Docklands Light Railway is another guaranteed **source of amusement** – **grab a seat** at the front of the train and pretend to be the driver, then **take a boat** back to the centre of town from Greenwich.

Remember you will also hear collocations in conversations, lectures, songs and films. Try to get into the habit of recording any interesting collocations that you notice.

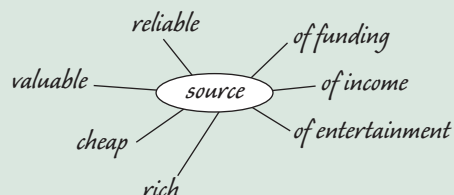
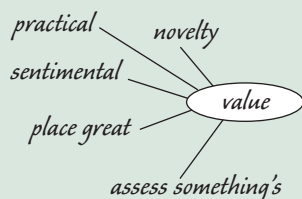
B

Recording collocations

When working on collocations in a text, use your dictionary to find more relating to one or both parts of the original collocation. You can record strong collocations in collocation forks:



and weak ones in collocation bubbles (because there are so many more of them):

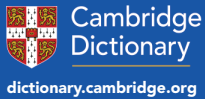


Exercises

4.1 Complete each sentence using a collocation from A.

- 1 Tania has always had a so I'm not surprised she wants to study Chinese at university.
- 2 At high tide the sea covers the causeway and the only way to get to the island is to
- 3 It's very crowded in this café. You and I'll get our drinks.
- 4 Once my exams are over I'll planning a holiday.
- 5 Far more people these days manage to against cancer.
- 6 Most politicians say they enter politics because they want to
- 7 Try not to having good friends. Ultimately, friendship is far more important than work.
- 8 He's got the job – a successful in his driving test tomorrow.
- 9 Although they lack experience, doctors are often very enthusiastic and passionate about their work.

4.2 Complete the collocations. The first letters are given to help you. Use a dictionary such as the Cambridge Online Dictionary if necessary.



to j _ _ _ a _ t _ _
 to p _ _ _ u _ t _ _
 to g _ _ t _ _
 to s _ _ _ _ a
 to b _ i _ w _ _ _ a

chance

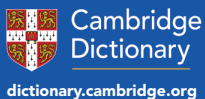
to f _ _ _ a
 to p _ _ _ a
 a d _ _ _ _
 to r _ _ _ t _ t _ _
 a s _ _ _ _ _

challenge

4.3 Check these expressions (a) in a good dictionary and (b) using a search engine. Which two are collocations and which two are not?

- 1 learn by head 2 learn by heart 3 lose a chance 4 miss a chance

4.4 Answer these questions.



- 1 Name three milestones in your life that you have already passed.
- 2 Are you already fully qualified? If so, as what? If not, when will you be?
- 3 What are some typical sources of income?
- 4 What is the toughest challenge you have ever faced?
- 5 What qualities would be needed by someone providing simultaneous translation?
- 6 What are some examples of things that have sentimental value for you?

4.5 Here is one student's plan for work on collocations. Complete the gaps, using a dictionary if necessary. Then tick the ideas you can use yourself.



- (1) an effort to notice collocations in any English text I read.
- (2) hold of a good dictionary to check other collocations for words that I want to learn.
- Write down at least three collocations for each new word I want to (3) to memory.
- Look back over old homework to see where I have (4) mistakes with collocations and (5) my best to (6) those mistakes in future.
- (7) a point of using good collocations when I have to write or speak in English.
- Read and listen to as much English as (8) because that will expose me to natural collocations.
- Every week revise the collocations I have (9) a note of in my vocabulary file.

A

What is register?

Our use of language changes according to the situation that we are in. If your close friend hosts a party, you could say, 'Thanks for the party. It was a blast.' (very informal) However, if your boss was the host, you would probably say, 'Thanks for the party. I really enjoyed it.' (neutral) In this example, *neutral* and *very informal* are both examples of register.

The register of most language is neutral (it can be used in any situation). However, register can also be formal, informal, characteristic of a certain professional field (e.g. legal, journalistic or media) or specific to official notices and forms.

Our choice of register depends on **what** we are talking about (business, the news, the neighbours), **who** we are talking to (friends, strangers, figures of authority) and **how** we are talking to them (in a letter, in an email, in public, in private). Study the table below and notice how different words and phrases are used to describe the same situation.

example	register	comment
The police are investigating / looking into the arms deal.	neutral	Either version would not seem out of place in any spoken or written contexts.
The cops are trying to dig out info about the arms deal.	informal	Phrasal verbs are often an informal alternative – although some are neutral.
The police are conducting an investigation into the arms deal.	formal	Longer words of Latin or Greek origin often indicate more formal language.
Police to probe arms deal	neutral, journalistic	<i>Probe</i> is typical of newspaper headline style.
The arms deal may be subject to police investigation .	formal, legal and official	<i>Subject to investigation</i> is typical of a bureaucratic or legal style.

Be careful not to think of formal language as written and informal language as spoken. There is a lot of overlap. For example, markedly formal language is most typical of official or academic writing and official legal or bureaucratic speech. Informal language is typical of conversation, personal letters and emails, messages on social media and some journalism.

B

Formal versus neutral collocations

formal (from official documents)	neutral (spoken)
Students must submit their assignments by 1 May.	'You have to hand in your assignments by 1 May.'
Students may request an extension after consulting their tutor .	'You can ask for an extension after you've talked to / had a word with your tutor .'

C

Informal versus neutral collocations

That film was **totally awesome!** (mainly used by teenagers, predominantly US) [neutral equivalent: absolutely amazing/fantastic]

That party was well good! (*Well* used to mean 'very'/'really', mainly by younger UK speakers.)

I **haven't a clue / the foggiest idea** what you mean. [neutral equivalent: I have no idea]

We can **grab a snack** before the meeting if you're hungry. [neutral equivalent: have a snack]

Tip

Make a note in your notebook if a collocation is very formal or informal in register.

Exercises

5.1 Write F (formal), I (informal) or N (neutral) in the brackets at the end of each sentence. Underline the collocations which indicate the register. Then rewrite the formal and informal sentences to make them neutral.

Example: Do not alight from the bus until it stops. (F) *Do not get off the bus until it stops.*

- 1 I feel dead tired all the time. ()
- 2 We were all bored stupid by the poetry reading. ()
- 3 Currency exchange offices are located in the arrivals lounge. ()
- 4 She conducted a study of single-parent family units. ()
- 5 She did her degree in London and found work there in 2015. ()
- 6 I just got the latest software so my computer is bang up to date. ()
- 7 Affix a passport-size photograph to the application form. ()
- 8 Jake asked his tutor for an extension to complete his dissertation. ()

5.2 Match the beginning of each sentence with its ending. Then label each sentence with the appropriate register from the list below. Underline the collocations which indicate the register.

Registers: informal conversation (IC) journalism/news (J) entertainment (E)
technical (T) legal (L) notices (N)

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 This is breaking | a ring after dinner. |
| 2 These are the songs that are climbing | according to model and road conditions. |
| 3 There are tons of good reasons | blockbuster from Star Studios. |
| 4 Visitors must keep to the designated | news here on Global TV Extra. |
| 5 In any such case, customers shall forfeit | electronic circuit. |
| 6 Fuel consumption may vary | of the fitness machines to 20 minutes. |
| 7 I'll give you | to win support for the plan. |
| 8 The minister will tour Asia in a bid | the charts this week. |
| 9 Joss Engold stars in the latest | for not studying law. |
| 10 A microchip is a miniaturised | testify for a second time. |
| 11 Please restrict your use | areas at all times. |
| 12 A witness may be asked to | the right to compensation. |

5.3 Complete this conversation between a doctor and a patient, using the verbs in the box in the appropriate form. The language is quite informal, without technical medical terms.

come clear do feel get run take write

Doctor: What can I (1) for you, Mr Wilson?

Patient: Well, Doctor, I've been (2) a temperature for the last couple of days and I've (3) out in a rash on my neck. Do you see? These red spots here.

Doctor: Hmm. Let's (4) a look.

Patient: It's very irritating and I have trouble (5) off to sleep at night. Then I (6) down all day and can't concentrate on my work.

Doctor: Right. I don't think it's anything serious. I'll (7) you out a prescription for some lotion which should help to (8) up the rash.

5.4 Look at how the doctor describes the case in his records using more technical language. Choose the correct word from the choices provided. Use a dictionary to help if necessary.

A patient (1) *presented* / *represented* this morning with an (2) *elevating* / *elevated* temperature. He was also (3) *exposing* / *exhibiting* a neck rash. He further (4) *complained* / *grumbled* of an (5) *inability* / *impossibility* to concentrate.

When we speak metaphorically, we use words in a non-literal sense. For example, when we say a writer **casts light on a situation**, we mean that the writer helps us understand it more clearly, in the same way that putting a light on in a dark room helps us see more clearly.

A

Metaphors based on the body

collocation	example	meaning
face (up to) the facts	You're never going to run in the Olympics. It's time you faced (up to) the facts .	accepted reality
shoulder the blame	Although others were also responsible for the problem, Alice decided to shoulder the blame .	take responsibility for something bad
foot the bill	Choose what you like from the menu – the company is footing the bill .	paying
head a team	Jo heads a team working on crime prevention.	leads a project group
keep someone on their toes	Having three sons under the age of five keeps Jana on her toes .	makes her stay active and concentrated
have an eye for	Gina has an eye for detail, so ask her to check the report.	is good at noticing
go hand in hand with	Unemployment goes hand in hand with social unrest.	happens at the same time or as a result of

B

Metaphors based on weight

Heavy can be used to mean serious or difficult, as in **heavy responsibility**. A **heavy burden** can be either something heavy to carry or a difficult responsibility to deal with, while a **heavy book** can be either one that weighs a lot or one with difficult content. A **weighty tome**, however, would only be used to mean a book with difficult content. Similarly in **weighty matters** or **weighty problems**, *weighty* means difficult and serious.



Light, the opposite of *heavy*, can also be used metaphorically to mean carefree or lacking in seriousness. So **light reading** is reading material that is not serious. If you do something with a **light heart**, you feel carefree and happy.

If someone has a **slim chance** of doing something, there is a chance, but it is small. **Fat chance** (very informal) means almost no chance.

C

Metaphors based on movement

James did a lot of partying in his final year and **ran into difficulties** with his course. His father was **hopping mad**¹ when he only just managed to get his degree. However, when he left university he **walked straight into a job**² in an excellent company. Some people **jumped to the conclusion** that this was because he'd started going out with the managing director's daughter. His mother worried that, if their relationship **hit the rocks**³, he would **run into trouble** at work too.



¹ (informal) extremely angry

² got a job very easily

³ ended (metaphor based on a boat being destroyed on rocks)

Exercises

6.1 Rewrite the underlined part of each sentence using a metaphor from A.

- 1 The presidential visit meant no one had time to relax.
- 2 Rosetta took full responsibility for the failure of the project.
- 3 I don't think Greg will ever win Rosie's heart; it's time he accepted that.
- 4 The company had done so well that year that it agreed to pay for a staff night out.
- 5 I'm glad I'm not in charge of this team.
- 6 Eva is very good at finding a bargain.

6.2 Answer these questions about the metaphors on the opposite page.

- 1 What usually goes hand in hand with inflation: an increase or a decrease in savings?
- 2 If a relationship hits the rocks, is it the end or the beginning of that relationship?
- 3 If you say that someone is hopping mad, do you mean that they are good at athletics or that they are very angry?
- 4 If you run into difficulties or trouble, does that mean that they happen quickly?
- 5 Would you be more likely to call a magazine article featuring gossip about celebrities light reading or a weighty tome?
- 6 If you talk about facing the facts, are the facts more likely to be pleasant or unpleasant?

6.3 Explain the difference in meaning between the sentences in each pair.

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1a Jess walked into a well-paid job in the City. | 1b Jess got a well-paid job in the City. |
| 2a Rafael is heading the project team. | 2b Rafael is backing the project team. |
| 3a Dad jumped to the wrong conclusion. | 3b Dad came to the wrong conclusion. |
| 4a Jan left the room with a light heart. | 4b Jan left the room with a heavy heart. |
| 5a Fat chance I've got of winning! | 5b I've got a slim chance of winning. |

6.4 Choose the correct collocation.

- 1 Kieran's constant whistling is *riding / getting / driving* me crazy.
- 2 Sylvia is a first-class designer as she has a good *eye / nose / hand* for detail.
- 3 You mustn't shoulder the heavy *weight / burden / task* of redecorating the house all by yourself.
- 4 There is just a *thin / slim / skinny* chance that Marek might pop in today.
- 5 The committee has some *fat / weighty / heavy* matters to discuss on today's agenda.
- 6 When the results came out, Marco was thrilled to see his name *footing / facing / heading* the list of successful candidates.

6.5 Explain what the play on words is based on in each of these headlines.

1 **ATHLETE RUNS INTO TROUBLE**

4 **SHOEWORLD CO.
TO FOOT THE BILL**

2 **DIET PILLS HAVE FAT
CHANCE OF SUCCESS**

5 **NEW LAW MAKES RABBIT
OWNERS HOPPING MAD**

3 **NEW DIRECTOR KEEPS
ROYAL BALLET ON ITS TOES**

Tip

You may find it useful to draw little pictures in your vocabulary notebook – or imagine them in your mind – to help you remember some collocations.

7

Intensifying and softening adverbs

Adverbs are often used before adjectives and verbs either to strengthen their meaning (intensifying adverbs) or to weaken it (softening adverbs).

Her comments were **deeply offensive**. (intensifier – very/extremely)

Her comments were **slightly offensive**. (softener – a little bit)

A

Intensifying adverbs

Notice how intensifying adverbs are used to mean ‘extremely’ or ‘completely’ in the sentences below. The expressions marked with * are very informal.

Olivia really enjoys doing housework. You should see her flat – it’s always **spotlessly clean**.

It was **downright rude** of Antonio to tell Paula that she looked older than her own mother.

I hope he feels **thoroughly ashamed**.

It’s **blatantly obvious** that Olga is only interested in Richard because he’s so wealthy.

I wonder what she’ll do when she finds out he’s **wildly exaggerated** how rich he really is!

I don’t know what I was worrying about! The exam turned out to be **dead easy***!

This celebrity website is good fun but most of the information is **wildly inaccurate**.

B

Softening adverbs

Note the softening adverbs used in these sentences from newspapers.

The spokesperson said the new insurance scheme was only **slightly different** from the old one. [weak collocation; *slightly* can be used with a wide range of adjectives]

The chief executive said he was **mildly surprised** by the public interest in the firm’s plans. [*mildly* also collocates with *amusing/ed*, *irritating/ed*, *offensive*]

Alfredo Scaluzzi’s new film is **loosely based on** a nineteenth-century novel. [*loosely* also collocates with *centred*, *structured*, *related*, *connected*]

Ms Giroa said she regarded reports that she was about to seek a divorce as **faintly ridiculous**. [fairly formal; *faintly* also collocates with *amused*, *surprised*, *patronising*, *absurd*]

C

Alternatives to very

There are a variety of words that you can use as alternatives to *very* which collocate with most adjectives, for example: *really*, *extremely*, *terribly*, *incredibly* and *awfully*. Other adverbs collocate with certain adjectives and verbs but not with others.

alternatives to <i>very</i>	✓	NOT
highly	unlikely, educated, recommended	appreciate, influence, interesting
strongly	influence	appreciate
greatly	appreciate, influence	
utterly	absurd, ridiculous	sorry, busy, glad, lonely
completely/totally/entirely	different, dependent, separate	
thoroughly	enjoy	

Common mistakes

Absolutely collocates only with adjectives which have strong meanings, e.g. **absolutely** (NOT *very*) **delighted**, **very** (NOT *absolutely*) **happy**.

Exercises

7.1 Match a word from each box to form collocations.

blatantly downright spotlessly
thoroughly wildly

ashamed clean inaccurate
obvious rude

7.2 Complete each sentence using a collocation from 7.1.

- 1 I'm amazed you didn't realise she was lying! It was to me!
- 2 It was of him not to say hello to the secretary.
- 3 I've been hoovering and dusting all day, so now my flat is
- 4 Most of the facts were wrong in that news report. It was
- 5 You should be of yourself. Your behaviour was appalling!

7.3 Rewrite the underlined part of each sentence using a collocation from the opposite page.

- 1 The American writer Mark Twain is famous for commenting that reports of his death had been over-exaggerated.
- 2 This restaurant is recommended by many different people.
- 3 The exam was extremely easy; everyone got high marks. (make this informal)
- 4 The musical *West Side Story* is kind of based on the plot of Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet*. (make this less informal)
- 5 The idea of the boss singing *Happy Birthday* to me struck me as a little bit ridiculous.
- 6 The success of the Wimbledon tennis tournament is 100% dependent on the weather. (give two answers)
- 7 I really enjoyed the days I spent at your lovely house in the country.
- 8 I was just a little surprised by her decision to quit her job so soon.
- 9 I was really delighted when they told me I'd got the job.
- 10 The new model of this camera is a little bit different from the old one.

7.4 Add intensifying adverbs from the opposite page to these sentences to make the words in bold stronger.

- 1 I **appreciate** the fact that you have given me so much of your time.
- 2 Sometimes Tony says **ridiculous** things.
- 3 The crossword in today's newspaper is **difficult**. I can't even start it!
- 4 It's **sweet** of you to offer to help.
- 5 I found his remarks **offensive**; he should apologise.
- 6 She leads a **lonely** life in a tiny house on a remote island.
- 7 We should try to keep the two groups **separate** from each other.
- 8 She is an **educated** person.
- 9 I've been **busy** all week.
- 10 That meal was **expensive**! I'm not eating there again.

7.5 Are the following adverb collocations correct or not? If they are incorrect, correct them using collocations from C opposite.

- 1 I thoroughly enjoyed the film.
- 2 Your help would be strongly appreciated.
- 3 The song is highly influenced by Brazilian folk rhythms.
- 4 I find the situation utterly absurd.

Tip

Look out for more collocations with these words as you listen and read, and record them in collocation bubbles indicating what they do and do not collocate with.

A

Common errors with *make*

The *Cambridge Learner Corpus* shows that some of the most frequent collocation errors made by candidates in advanced English exams relate to the use of *make*. Here are some typical errors and their corrections.

I would like to ~~do~~/give some suggestions – **make some suggestions**

I think that I could ~~have~~/give a contribution to the project – **make a contribution**

I expect you to give a formal apology – **make a formal apology**

There is still some way to go and lots of improvements to ~~do~~ – **improvements to make**

Thank you very much for ~~doing~~ these arrangements – **making these arrangements**

Sometimes candidates use *make* where another verb is required. For example:

We're going to ~~make a party~~ on Saturday – **have a party**

Lana ~~made some interesting~~ research into her family roots – **did ... research**

B

Other expressions with *make*

It's a good idea to **make a habit of** switching off the lights when you leave a room.

If you always say exactly what you think, you'll **make a lot of enemies**.

The team **made several attempts** to climb the mountain before they finally succeeded.

I hope that they'll **make a success of** their new restaurant business.

I have to go to a party for a colleague after work but I will try and **make an early escape**.

Our research team has **made** an important **discovery** about how whales communicate.

When doing your accounts, try to ensure you **make** all the **calculations** correctly.

If we move the sofa closer to the window, it'll **make room for** the piano.

I first **made his acquaintance** when he moved in next door. [formal: got to know him]

The house we looked at is just what we want and we've decided to **make an offer** on it.

As no one else has any ideas, I'd like to **make a proposal**. [make a formal suggestion]

We must **make a stand against** the casino they propose to build here. [protest about]

C

Other verbs that mean *make*

collocation	example	comment
create a good/bad impression	Wear your grey suit to the interview if you want to create a good impression .	slightly more formal than make an impression
create a (+ adj.) atmosphere	The lanterns in the garden create a romantic atmosphere .	more formal than make for a romantic atmosphere
stage a protest	The students staged a protest against rising tuition fees.	= make a formal protest
lodge a complaint	Several people have lodged a complaint about the receptionist's rudeness.	= make a formal complaint
rustle up a meal	It took Sam ten minutes to rustle up a meal .	(informal) = make a meal very quickly
run up curtains	This weekend I'm going to run up some curtains for my new room.	= make quickly using a sewing machine
turn a profit	This month our company should turn a profit for the first time.	slightly more informal than make a profit
coin a phrase	I wonder who coined the term 'blogging'.	= invent / make up a new phrase

Exercises

8.1 Are these sentences correct or incorrect? If they are incorrect, correct them.

- 1 Have you any suggestions to make about how to celebrate the school's anniversary?
- 2 We are planning to have a party next Saturday.
- 3 The company director gave a formal apology for his earlier comments.
- 4 The manager had to make a number of changes to office procedures in order to do all the improvements he had planned for the company.
- 5 My sister did all the arrangements for the party.

8.2 Complete each sentence using a word from the box.

acquaintance	attempt	calculations	discovery	enemies
habit	offer	room	stand	success

- 1 Try to make a of noticing good collocations in any text you read.
- 2 A railway official asked us to move our luggage to make for the boy's bike.
- 3 The new CEO has made a lot of by being so autocratic.
- 4 If Pauline makes a of this project, she'll probably get promoted.
- 5 The old gentleman said he was delighted to make my
- 6 Do you think you'll make an on the flat you viewed yesterday?
- 7 Every young scientist dreams of making a that will change the world.
- 8 Rachel made no to contact me when she was over here last year.
- 9 We tried to make a against the new housing development but to no avail: the contractors started work this morning.
- 10 The that you made contained a few inaccuracies.

8.3 Replace *make* in each sentence with an alternative word. Then say whether you have made the sentence more or less formal.

- 1 The Green Party plans to make a major protest against the government's new farming policy.
- 2 Tessa helped me to make some lovely cushion covers for my new flat.
- 3 I regret to inform you that several clients have made complaints about your conduct.
- 4 You won't make a good first impression if you arrive late for your interview.
- 5 It won't take me long to make a meal for the children.
- 6 Do you expect your business to make a profit this year?

8.4 Rewrite each sentence using the word in brackets.

- 1 At the meeting the chairman proposed something rather interesting. (PROPOSAL)
- 2 I hope we can leave soon as I'm terribly tired. (ESCAPE)
- 3 I'm reading a fascinating book about the invention of new words and phrases to express new social and technical needs. (COINED)
- 4 We changed the layout of the hall to make it more relaxed for the yoga class. (ATMOSPHERE)
- 5 I tried to phone the company several times at the weekend. (ATTEMPTS)
- 6 Kim contributed very positively to the discussion. (CONTRIBUTION)
- 7 The service was poor but I wouldn't go so far as to formally complain. (LODGE)
- 8 I first got talking to Roger on a train. (ACQUAINTANCE)

Over to you

Make a point of looking back through any pieces of your writing that a teacher has corrected. Have you ever **made any mistakes** involving collocations with *make*? If so, **make an effort** to use those expressions correctly in your next assignment.