

Collocations in English – Video

In this lesson, you can learn about collocations in English. But, what are collocations?

Collocation means that some words fit together, and other words don't.

In this class, you'll learn about common collocations in English, how to learn and remember collocations, and why you should focus on collocations

(<https://www.thoughtco.com/collocation-examples-1210325>) as part of your English study.

Daniel: Why can't you say, There was hard traffic on the way to the centre?

Kasia: Because of collocation.

D: Can you say totally exhausted?

K: Yes, you can,

D: What about totally freezing?

K: No, you can't.

D: Why not?

K: Collocation!

D: Why do you apply for a job, but you apply to a company?

K: Can you guess?

D: Er...

Of course, the answer is 'collocation.' But what does this mean?

Look at a sentence you heard before:

There was hard traffic on the way to the centre.

Is this correct or not?

It's not correct. If you said this, everybody would understand what you meant, but native English speakers (<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/understand-native-speakers>) would never use the words *hard traffic* together. Do you know the correct way to say it?

You could say *heavy traffic*, *bad traffic*, *terrible traffic*, and there are other possibilities.

What's the point here? The point is that some words fit together, and some words don't.

There isn't any logic to it. This makes collocations in English difficult. If you don't know that *heavy traffic* is the correct collocation, it's hard to guess. You either know it, or you don't.

1. The Most Common Collocations in English

You almost certainly know many collocations in English already.

The most common collocations in English are with everyday verbs like *do*, *make*, *get*, *give*, *have*, and so on.

Each of these verbs has tens of possible collocations.

Here's a challenge for you. You're going to hear a dialogue. In the dialogue, there are ten collocations with these five verbs. Listen and write down the ten collocations.

K: Can you do me a favour?

D: I've just got in! Can't I have a break for five minutes?

K: But I have a big problem! Amanda's arriving in fifteen minutes, and my car won't start. Can you give me a lift to the station?

D: Okay, fine. Give me a minute to get ready.

[...]

D: So, where's Amanda? Shouldn't she be here already?

K: I think I made a mistake...

D: Oh?

K: I got confused and mixed up the dates. She's coming tomorrow.

D: Well, at least you already made the beds.

K: Can you give me a lift tomorrow? Please?

D: Work is busy tomorrow, but I'll do my best.

How was that? Could you write down the ten collocations? If you want, you can go back and listen to the dialogue a second time.

Here are the ten collocations you heard:

do someone a favour

do (your) best

make a mistake

make the beds

get in

get confused

give someone a lift

give (me) a minute

have a break

have a (big) problem

You can see how common collocations are. They're everywhere in spoken English!

All the collocations you saw are based on verbs. However, collocations can be based on any part of speech.

For example, there are adjective-noun collocations, like *a great achievement* or *a long journey*.

There are adverb-adjective collocations, like *terribly hot* or *extremely significant*.

There are noun-noun collocations, like *a slice of cake* or *a pile of laundry*.

There are more. The point is that collocations are everywhere. To speak English naturally and fluently, you need to pay attention to them.

So, what should you do?

2. How to Find and Learn Collocations

The best way to find and learn collocations is to do regular reading and listening practice in English.

As you read or listen, pay attention to collocations. If you're reading something, you can try to underline the collocations you find.

Remember that just because you know the words, it doesn't mean you know the collocation! For example, you might see collocations like:

He went bald when he was in his twenties.

It's a big decision, but we have to do something.

It was a little expensive, but still good value.

You might think, "I know the words, so there's nothing to learn here," but this could be a mistake.

Think about the collocation *big decision*. If you don't know the collocation, you might say something else, like *large decision* or *heavy decision*. However, these don't work. You need to know the collocation: *big decision*.

The collocation is almost like a separate word that you need to learn and remember.

Let's practice! Look at a short text. There are ten collocations in the text. The collocations are of different types. Can you find the ten collocations? Pause the video, read the text, and try to find them. Start again when you're ready.

I met Paul ten years ago. We became friends almost immediately, because we had so much in common. He has a very outgoing personality and he's very patient; I've never seen him lose his temper. We don't keep in touch so regularly these days, because he has a very demanding job, and my young children keep me busy, too. Even so, we try to have a chat when we can so that we can catch up. I would say he's one of my closest friends, even though I don't see him often.

Ready? Let's look.

*I met Paul ten years ago. We **became friends** almost immediately, because we **had so much in common**. He has a very **outgoing personality** and he's very patient; I've never seen him **lose his temper**. We don't **keep in touch** so regularly these days, because he has a very **demanding job**, and my young children **keep me busy**, too. Even so, we try to **have a chat** when we can so that we can **catch up**. I would say he's **one of my closest friends**, even though I don't see him often.*

One quick point: maybe some of you have different answers. Maybe some of you think there are more than ten collocations in the text.

You could be right. There isn't a clear line between what is a collocation and what isn't. For example, is *very patient* a collocation? You could say that it is, or that it isn't. It isn't clear.

Don't worry about this point. It doesn't make any difference to how you should study and use collocations.

So, now you've found ten collocations in your text.

You could find more collocations using a dictionary.

(<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/dictionary.webp>)

For example, there are two collocations in the text with the word *friend*: *become friends* and *one of my closest friends*.

Can you find two more? Use your favourite dictionary, preferably a monolingual dictionary. (<http://www.antimoon.com/how/dictionary.htm>) Look up the word friend, and write down two more collocations. Pause the video and do it now!

Ready? What did you get?

There are many, many possible answers, but maybe you wrote down something like:

make friends (with someone)

a good friend

(your) best friend

a true friend

Let's do one more. In the text, you saw the collocation *demanding job*. What else can be *demanding*? Pause the video, look up *demanding* in your dictionary, and write down two more possible collocations.

Ready? What did you get this time? Here are three suggestions:

a demanding person

a demanding period

a demanding situation

Again, there are other possibilities.

So, when you're reading or listening in English, try to notice the collocations you see or hear. You can then use your dictionary to look up related collocations.

However, you'll very quickly have a lot of collocations! How can you remember them all?

3. How to Remember and Use Collocations

(https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/thought-bubble-305053_1280.webp)

Learning and remembering collocations is the same as learning any other vocabulary. That means you should:

One: Learn vocabulary from real-life sources, for example from reading articles, listening to songs, or having conversations with your friends. Don't learn vocabulary by making big lists of words from the dictionary.

Two: learn and review vocabulary in full sentences. If you want to remember the collocation keep in touch with someone, don't just write down the phrase; write down a full sentence which is meaningful for you somewhere like a vocabulary notebook (<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/vocabulary-notebook>). For example: I use Whatsapp to keep in touch with my friends overseas.

Three: you need a system to review vocabulary regularly. The best way to do this is to use a flashcard app like Quizlet or Anki.

Finally, like any vocabulary, you need to use it, otherwise it won't stick in your head. How can you do that?

Here's one suggestion: when you learn collocations, put them in groups by topic. For example, collocations to describe a person, collocations to describe a city, collocations to talk about relationships, and so on.

When you have ten or more collocations in a group, write a short text, and try to use all of the collocations as you write.

For example, if you've found ten collocations to describe a city, you could write a short paragraph about your hometown using the collocations you've learned. It might look something like this:

Athens is a **sprawling city** with a **rich history**. The old centre is full of **steep, narrow streets** and **archaeological monuments**. It has a **lively atmosphere**, especially at night. You can get around by metro, which is useful because traffic jams are a **constant problem**. You can easily find **tasty local food** in the centre, although **touristy places** can be overpriced. There's very little **street crime**, so you don't have to worry about safety, although you should **look out for pickpockets** in the metro.

This can be challenging, but it's worth making the effort. By using the collocations you learn to write something which is true for you, you'll be able to remember them more easily.

Finally, let's see how collocations can be the key to increasing your English vocabulary.

4. How to Boost Your Vocabulary With Collocation Study

Often, students tell us things like:

I need more vocabulary to speak English. I can't find the right words when I'm speaking.

I need to learn more vocabulary for my IELTS exam.

I want to learn academic vocabulary to express my ideas clearly.

What if we told you that you could improve your vocabulary massively, without even learning any new words?

What? How can that be?

It's not about how many words you know; it's about how you use those words.

Remember earlier, you saw the collocation *big decision*?

Probably, all of you know the words *big* and *decision*, but we're guessing not all of you knew the collocation *big decision*.

Most of the collocations in this lesson are probably similar. The individual words might not be new, but the combination is.

You've seen around thirty to forty different collocations in this lesson. Actually, you've seen many more, but we've highlighted that many.

This is a tiny, tiny proportion of the collocations we could have shown you. Collocations are everywhere, and many of them use words you're already familiar with.

So here's our final piece of advice: spend more time learning collocations. Don't just learn single words; learn combinations and phrases with them. Learn collocations using the vocabulary you have.

Follow the steps in this lesson: find collocations by reading or listening, use good vocabulary learning practices, and use collocations by writing short texts on different topics.

This way, you can learn to use the vocabulary you already know to express a wider range of ideas. You'll be able to talk more fluently and naturally, and express yourself more clearly.

Here's a question for you: have you found any weird, funny, interesting or really illogical English collocations? Please share them in the YouTube comments!

Do you need more practice for an upcoming IELTS exam? Get useful tips in these Oxford Online English IELTS Preparation Lessons (<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/free-ielts-preparation-lessons>).