

Collocations in English

Collocations are groups of words that are usually found together in pairs or in small phrases. Every verb is attached to a noun in some way, every noun to an adjective, every adverb to a verb.

These combinations just sound "right" to native English speakers, who use them all the time. On the other hand, other combinations may be unnatural and just sound "wrong". Look at these examples:

Natural English...	Unnatural English...
the fast train fast food	the quick train quick food
a quick shower a quick meal	a fast shower a fast meal

Why learn collocations?

- Your language will be more natural and more easily understood.
- You will have alternative and richer ways of expressing yourself.
- It is easier for our brains to remember and use language in chunks or blocks rather than as single words.

How to learn collocations

- Be aware of collocations, and try to recognize them when you see or hear them.
- Treat collocations as single blocks of language. Like, learn strongly support, not strongly + support.
- When you learn a new word, write down other words that collocate with it (remember rightly, remember distinctly, remember vaguely, remember vividly).
- Read as much as possible. Reading is an excellent way to learn vocabulary and collocations in context and naturally.
- Revise what you learn regularly. Practice using new collocations in context as soon as possible after learning them.
- Learn collocations in groups that work for you. You could learn them by topic (time, number, weather, money, family) or by a particular word (take action, take a chance, take an exam).

Types of collocation

There are several different types of collocation made from combinations of verb, noun, adjective etc. Some of the most common types are:

- adverb + adjective: completely satisfied (NOT ~~downright~~ satisfied)
- adjective + noun: excruciating pain (NOT ~~excruciating~~ joy)
- noun + noun: a surge of anger (NOT a ~~rush~~ of anger)

- noun + verb: lions roar (NOT lions ~~shout~~)
- verb + noun: commit suicide (NOT ~~undertake~~ suicide)
- verb + expression with preposition: burst into tears (NOT ~~blow up in~~ tears)
- verb + adverb: wave frantically (NOT wave ~~feverishly~~)

1. adverb + adjective

- Invading that country was an **utterly stupid** thing to do.
- We entered a **richly decorated** room.

2. adjective + noun

- The Titanic sank on its **maiden voyage**.
- He was writhing on the ground in **excruciating pain**.

3. noun + noun

- Let's give Mr. Jones a **round of applause**.
- The **ceasefire agreement** came into effect at 11am.

4. noun + verb

- The **lion** started **to roar** when it heard the **dog barking**.
- The **bomb** **went off** when he started the car engine.

5. verb + noun

- The prisoner was hanged for **committing murder**.
- I always try to **do my homework** in the morning, after **making my bed**.

6. verb + expression with preposition

- At first her eyes **filled with horror**, and then she **burst into tears**.
- Their behavior was enough to **drive anybody to crime**.

7. verb + adverb

- Mary **whispered softly** in John's ear.
- I **vaguely remember** that it was growing dark when we left.

Some examples:

cautiously optimistic, conventional wisdom, exercise caution, gainfully employed, tangible results, vaguely familiar, menial job, file for bankruptcy, irreparable damage

1. Gilbert is cautiously optimistic that the acquisition will be earnings positive sooner rather than later.
2. The goal of the campaign is to raise awareness of pollution and overfishing in the area.
3. Moisture in the atmosphere contributes to irreparable damage caused by mold growth.
4. These vines seem vaguely familiar from florist's shops, though here they grow on a giant scale.