

4 Collocations

In this unit you will:

- see how different classes of words combine in English
- learn some useful collocations

Introduction

Part of using a word properly is knowing what other words you can use it with. **Collocations** are the way that words combine in a language to produce natural-sounding speech and writing. For example, in English you say *tall person* but *high mountain*. It would not be normal to say *high person* or *tall mountain*.

Tall person is an example of an adjective + noun combination, but there are many other possible word combinations which we call collocations.

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| ■ <i>gain experience</i> | verb + noun |
| ■ <i>unemployment goes up</i> | noun + verb |
| ■ <i>interest rate</i> | noun + noun |
| ■ <i>rise sharply</i> | verb + adverb |
| ■ <i>choose between (two things)</i> | verb + preposition |
| ■ <i>safe from (danger)</i> | adjective + preposition |
| ■ <i>in advance</i> | preposition + noun |

Here are some examples in a text.

Today most psychologists agree not only that both nature and nurture play important roles but that they interact continuously to guide development. For example, we shall see in Chapter 12 that the development of many personality traits, such as sociability and emotional stability, appear to be influenced about equally by heredity and environment; similarly, we shall see in Chapter 15 that psychiatric illnesses can have both genetic and environmental determinants.

Source: Atkinson, R. L., Atkinson, R. C., Smith, E. E., Bem, D. J., & Nolen-Hoeksema, S. (1999). *Hilgard's Introduction to Psychology*. California, CA: Wadsworth Pub Co.

In this text, you can see that the word *role* is used with the verb *play* and the adjective *important*. Knowing the words that collocate with *role* allows you to produce phrases like *play an important role*.

The other examples of collocations highlighted in the text above are:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------|
| ■ <i>guide development</i> | verb + noun |
| ■ <i>personality traits</i> | noun + noun |
| ■ <i>psychiatric illnesses</i> | adjective + noun |

Note: For more on noun + noun combinations see Unit 5. Some noun + and + noun combinations have a fixed order. For example, you cannot write *nurture and nature*, or *figures and facts*; these should be written *nature and nurture* and *facts and figures*.

How do I learn collocations?

You already know many collocations without realizing it. For example, you will have learnt some of the following phrases in your earliest English lessons:

■ <i>turn on the light</i>	verb + noun
■ <i>have breakfast</i>	verb + noun
■ <i>a beautiful day</i>	adjective + noun
■ <i>ask a question</i>	verb + noun
■ <i>Happy Birthday</i>	adjective + noun

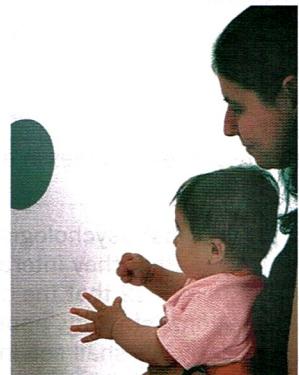
In other words, you will learn many collocations without consciously studying them. However, you can *consciously* learn more collocations by looking carefully at texts or by using a dictionary.

Task 1 Learning from texts

1.1 Read the text and answer the questions that follow.

Note: The **stress** on the verb *present* used in the text below falls on the second **syllable**, unlike the noun *present*, where the stress is on the first syllable.

Because babies cannot explain what they are doing or tell us what they are thinking, developmental psychologists have had to design some very ingenious procedures to study the capacities of young infants. The basic method is to introduce some change in the baby's environment and observe his or her responses. For example, an investigator might present a tone or a flashing light and then see if there is a change in heart rate or if the baby turns its head or sucks more vigorously on a nipple. In some instances, the researcher will present two stimuli at the same time to determine if infants look longer at one than the other. If they do, it indicates that they can tell the stimuli apart and may indicate that they prefer one to the other.



Source: Atkinson, R. L., Atkinson, R. C., Smith, E. E., Bem, D. J., Nolen-Hoeksema, S. (1999). *Hilgard's Introduction to Psychology*. California, CA: Wadsworth Pub Co.

1. What verbs are used before the following nouns?

- a. design _____ procedures c. _____ responses
b. _____ change d. _____ stimuli

2. What adjectives are used with these nouns?

- a. _____ psychologists c. _____ infants
b. _____ procedures d. _____ method

Task 2

Using a dictionary to learn collocations

By studying the text in Ex 1.1, you can be fairly confident that the following phrases are good collocations.

- *design ingenious procedures*
- *observe someone's responses*
- *introduce a change*
- *young infants*

However, you may not know what other words you could use with the nouns above. For example, what other verbs could you use with *procedures*? One way of finding out is by using your monolingual dictionary. Some dictionaries give you specific information about collocations.

Word	Adjectives used with the word	Verbs used with the word
problem (noun)	fundamental, major, real, serious, etc.	face, solve, create, pose, etc.

With this information, you can be fairly confident that the following phrases would be correct.

- *pose a serious problem*
- *face a major problem*

In other cases, the information may not be given explicitly in your dictionary, but by looking at the example sentences in the dictionary you can identify collocations.

2.1 Read sentences 1–9 and answer the questions below.

1. Tom's family are putting *pressure* on him to accept the job offer.
2. There is great *pressure* on the UN to take action.
3. The government is coming under *pressure* to hold a public enquiry into the alleged corruption of some ministers.
4. I have no *doubts* at all about the new PA's ability to do the job.
5. Some people have expressed serious *doubts* over the government's economic policy.
6. There are still some *doubts* about the applicant's suitability for a senior position.
7. I am delighted to have the *opportunity* to present my ideas to such a distinguished audience.
8. There are now more *opportunities* for Eastern Europeans to find work in Western Europe.
9. I'd like to take this *opportunity* to thank you for your help in this matter.

Questions:

- a. What verbs are used with the nouns *pressure*, *doubts* and *opportunities*?

- b. When *pressure*, *doubts* and *opportunities* are followed by a preposition and noun, what are the prepositions?

- c. When *pressure* and *opportunities* are followed by a verb phrase, what form does the verb take – ‘to + infinitive’ or ‘verb + ~ing’?
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2.2

You can use your answers to the different questions in Ex 2.1 to build phrases. Write out other phrases you can make by combining your answers.

1. doubt

have no doubts about

2. pressure

put pressure on (someone to do something)

3. opportunity

there is an opportunity for (someone to do something)

2.3

Complete these sentences. All the words you need are in your answers to Ex 2.1.

- All the new supervisor needs is an opportunity to show his ability.
- Career opportunities for young people have improved in the last 20 years.
- There are several opportunities for experienced programmers and software designers.
- Sales managers always put pressure on their teams to achieve their targets.

5. The pressure _____ professionals in many walks of life is increasing day by day.
6. There _____ no doubt that sensible investment produces a good return.
7. I _____ doubts about the benefits of investing in gold in the present economic situation.

Task 3 Verb + noun combinations

3.1 Use your dictionary to check which verbs are often used before these nouns.

1. make, have, cause trouble
2. _____ (a) business
3. _____ an effort
4. _____ an impact
5. _____ a connection
6. _____ an effect
7. _____ proof
8. _____ a gap
9. _____ standards
10. _____ concern

Task 4 Verb + noun + preposition combinations

4.1 The verb + noun combinations from Ex 3.1 would also need a preposition if they were followed by a noun phrase. What prepositions would you need after the nouns in these sentences?

1. The team are having a lot of trouble with the new software.
2. There is a widening gap between rich and poor countries.
3. Tariffs on agricultural products have a major impact on farmers in the developing world.

Study tip

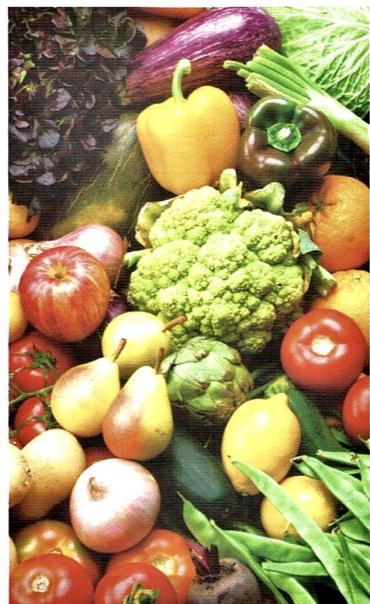
When you see a word you have been studying in an academic text or newspaper, think about the words it is used with. By taking an interest in words and how they are used, you will make rapid progress in vocabulary development.

4. There is a great deal of concern _____ the continuing drought in parts of Africa.
5. Another dry winter could have a serious effect _____ this year's harvest.
6. Some people fail to see a connection _____ subsidies to farmers in the West and poverty in the developing world.
7. Doing business directly _____ the people producing the goods is more cost-effective.

Task 5 Adjective + noun combinations

5.1 Look at these sentences and circle the adjectives that are used with the underlined nouns.

1. The main purpose of the end of the month meeting is to set sales targets for the following month.
2. The sole purpose of the survey is to gather information to improve the quality of service provided.
3. Every single person on the project has been chosen for a particular purpose.
4. There is a growing demand for organic food.
5. In the past five years, there has been a huge demand for exotic fruit in the UK.
6. Recent studies show that the costs of importing food over long distances far outweigh the benefits.
7. Owing to the practical nature of the course, the number of participants will be limited to a maximum of 20.
8. It is human nature to want to be successful.
9. There is growing public concern about the high cost of public transport.
10. This issue will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.



5.2 Use your dictionary to check which adjectives are often used before these nouns.

1. slight, dramatic, significant _____ increase
2. _____ problem
3. _____ supply
4. _____ standards

Task 6

Adverb + verb, adverb + adjective combinations

6.1 Underline the adverbs in these sentences and then answer the questions that follow.

1. If natural resources were managed more effectively, the quality of human life could be improved.
2. Regular exercise can significantly reduce your risk of suffering a heart attack.
3. A balanced diet is especially important.
4. The maximum permitted daily dose is clearly stated on the label.
5. Some patients experience a recurrence of the symptoms as the effectiveness of the drug gradually decreases.
6. A knowledge of one or more foreign languages is particularly useful for market research positions.
7. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find people with adequate linguistic skills.
8. Online shopping is a relatively recent phenomenon.
9. The problem was probably caused by a computer virus.
10. Trojan viruses can spread rapidly and affect millions of computers in minutes.
11. The general manager strongly disagrees with the decision to replace all the hardware.
12. Using the new system is comparatively easy, and the basics can be learnt in just a few hours.

Questions:

- a. Which adverbs are used with verbs and what verbs are they used with?

effectively – manage(d) effectively _____

- b. Which adverbs are used with adjectives and which adjectives are they used with?

especially – especially important _____

Task 7

Review

7.1 Complete these exercises using collocations from this unit.

1. Verb + Noun

_____ trouble

_____ an effect

_____ resources

_____ a connection

2. Verb + Noun + Preposition

have trouble _____

have an impact _____

do business _____

3. Adjective + Noun

widening _____

sole _____

growing _____

4. Verb + Adverb

_____ significantly

_____ rapidly

_____ clearly

5. Adverb + Adjective

_____ difficult

_____ important

_____ useful