

I

Introducing collocations

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. However, in this book we consider them as individual lexical items and so 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*.

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 B. Be careful, you will find the words in the *text*, not 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.