



**Ken Lackman & Associates**  
Educational Consultants

# Teaching Collocations

Activities for Vocabulary Building



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*Methods and activities for more effective teaching with less preparation*

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# Introduction to Collocations

Select collocations from list below (answers on page 19)

	Coll?	Strength	Type	Notes
<b>1</b>				
set yourself a realistic objective				
catch up with the news				
revised edition				
widely available				
<b>2</b>				
learn a foreign language				
live dangerously				
speak through an interpreter				
pocket calculator				
I told her off				
<b>3</b>				
turn in				
aware of				
fire escape				
on the other hand				
hook, line and sinker				
to put it another way				
examine thoroughly				
the fog closed in				
<b>4</b>				
go home				
happy marriage				
make dinner				
go crazy				
very good				
torrential downpour				
refute a hypothesis				
surf the web				
profoundly disturbing				

## What is a Collocation?

According to the Oxford Dictionary, a collocation is “the habitual juxtaposition of a particular word with another word or words with a frequency greater than chance.” However, there are different ideas on the number and types of words that constitute a collocation. By some definitions, collocations can consist of more than two main words and, while functional words like prepositions are not considered primary components of these collocations, there are some definitions that actually include them. Part of the reason for this difference of opinion is that the study of lexical constructions in the language is not that old and ideas, terminology and definitions are still in the process of being formed.

One of the main reasons that the study of collocations is not that old is that it was the development of corpora that prompted investigation into the relationship between words. A corpus (plural: corpora) is a computer database of language that can be analyzed with a computer program to provide statistics and other information about how words are actually used.

Though there are different opinions on the nature of collocations, one thing that everybody agrees on is that, unlike grammatical constructions, there are no rules for the formation of collocations. What determines what words go together is usage over time. We don't know why people have, hold and throw parties rather than make them but what we do know is that it is that way because that's what people say.

As for the type of words that make up a collocation, there are those in the field who consider phrasal verbs to be collocations (take up) as well as verb and preposition combinations (walk in). Some consider semi-fixed expressions to be collocations. These are lexical (not grammatical) structures which can be used repeatedly by changing one word/part. For example, “It's a \_\_\_\_\_ day today.” Fixed expressions, such as idioms, which allow little or no variation are also considered by some to be collocations. However, what technically is a collocation is perhaps irrelevant as what is most important in a teaching context is a definition that will make teaching and learning easier. For this reason, it is suggested that phrasal verbs, prepositional phrases, semi-fixed and fixed expressions remain separate categories and collocations be restricted to (primarily) two-word combinations made up of the main parts of speech (nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs).

## Collocation Types

Taking for granted that we are going to consider collocations to be primarily two-word combinations made up of the main parts of speech, we can then classify them according to which parts of speech are in the collocation. Here are some common examples. Try categorizing group 4 on page 2.

Collocation	Type
sunny day	adjective + noun
learn a language	verb + noun
language school	noun + noun
a ship sinks	noun + verb
speak slowly	verb + adv.
quite common	adverb + adjective

## Split Collocations

Notice in the examples above that collocations can contain grammatical words like articles and prepositions. These words can be included in the construction but as collocations are about lexical words which go together, we focus mainly on the nouns, verbs, adjectives or adverbs and how they combine. Sometimes the two main words in a collocation may be separated by other words, both grammatical and lexical. For simplicity's sake, we can call these constructions split collocations. Consider how "learn a language" can become something like "learn a foreign language" or "learn one of the world's most frequently used languages". Sometimes these longer constructions will contain more than one collocation. For example, "learn a foreign language" contains both "learn a language" and "foreign language". Although technically "learn a foreign language" might be classified as a semi-fixed expression, we can, again for simplicity's sake, consider it more like two collocations together.

It is important that students, particularly those at higher levels, are aware of split collocations as that awareness will help them notice them and give them some ideas on how they can use those particular collocations. Something that is useful to do with students is to give them a text and ask them to look for split collocations, which is often quite challenging for them. Try it with the text used in *Verb + Noun Hunt*, page 10.

## Collocation Strength

Another way collocations are categorized is by strength. The strength of a collocation is not about how frequently the collocation is used but rather the strength is determined by how frequently the two principal words occur with other words. Strong collocations feature words that do not occur with many other words while weak collocations are made up of words which occur with many other words. A good way to think of it (and to explain it to students) is to compare it to relationships. People in strong relationships do not see other people, while people in weak relationships...well, you get the idea.

Consider the collocation mentioned on the first page, "torrential downpour". This is quite strong as "torrential" goes with very few other words (e.g., rain) as does downpour (e.g., heavy). This is a very strong collocation. Meanwhile, something like "buy a book" is very weak as there are hundreds of words that can go with "buy" and many that can go with "book". Strong collocations can often be guessed by native speakers when given one word of the pair, for example, "torrential \_\_\_\_\_", or "Merry \_\_\_\_\_".

Most of the time when we are analyzing collocations, we are looking at other words that go with a certain word, for example, adjectives that go with the word "day". The main word is known as the keyword (e.g., day) and the words that go with it are called collocates (e.g., beautiful, sunny, rainy, etc.). This is useful when establishing strength. For example, if our keyword was "card", we can think of many words that could go with it (white, red, yellow, green, business, playing, greeting, birthday, etc.). Thus, if card was our keyword we wouldn't see any of the aforementioned collocates as forming strong collocations. But if our keyword was "credit", then we would immediately think of "card" following it, suggesting that it is a strong collocation. A quick corpora search substantiates that as "card" is by far the most frequent collocate of "credit".

1	CARD	5139
2	CARDS	3371
3	UNION	403
4	RATING	332
5	REPORT	328
6	CRUNCH	288
7	UNIONS	267
8	BUREAUS	229
9	MARKETS	219
10	HOURS	203

The collocations that are usually the most significant for students are those that are medium strength, that is they are neither strong nor weak. It should be pointed out here that this is not an exact science and collocations do not fall nicely into predetermined categories like strong, weak and medium strength. Rather the three labels are merely means of referring to the relative uniqueness of a particular word combination and it's perfectly acceptable to say, for example, that a particular collocation is somewhere between strong and medium strength. Try categorizing group 4 on page 2.

## Why Teach Collocations?

If one were to look at the most frequently used words in the English language, particularly in spoken language, you would find that most of our active language is made up of relatively few words. For example, 90% of native speaker speech is made up of just 2000 words. Two thousand words is the lexicon of a student at intermediate level. Yet, it is not that native speakers are using the vocabulary of intermediate students as a close examination of a typical transcript of native speaker speech would be full of collocations formed mostly from those 2000 most frequent words. Thus what differentiates the intermediate learner from the native speaker is not knowledge of those 2000 words but the knowledge of how to combine them. The main way to bring learners up to native speaker level should not be by teaching them more words but by teaching them to combine words they probably already know.

Another main benefit to teaching collocations is that the way a word collocates can clarify the meaning of that word. Take, for example, the word "catch". Students will have no problem with the most literal meaning in the collocation "catch a ball" but collocations like "catch a bus", "catch a cold" and "catch your name" reveal the true diversity of the meaning of the verb. Words that have developed this kind of "diversified" meaning through collocation are known as "delexicalized" words, in other words, they have lost their unique meaning because of variations in usage. The words which have become most delexicalized are verbs, verbs such as get, take, go, etc., which, in certain collocations, bear little semantic resemblance to the "original" dictionary meaning. However, words of other parts of speech have also become delexicalized and a typical example is the noun "way" which ranges in meaning in collocations like "lose your way", "way to go", "a long way", "way off", etc. It's useful for students to be aware of delexicalized words as it is those words which form the most collocations. For that reason, these words show up on lists of the most frequently used words in the language.

However, it's not just delexicalized words whose meaning can be clarified by collocation. Consider, for example, the verb "commit". Note how the collocates *troops*, *resources*, *people*, *time* and *forces* illustrate another meaning besides the one associated with crimes and other regrettable acts.

1	SUICIDE	1920
2	CRIME	1539
3	CRIMES	1245
4	MURDER	631
5	ACTS	434
6	ACT	352
7	TROOPS	207
8	PERJURY	206
9	MURDERS	190
10	ADULTERY	183
11	SIN	169
12	FRAUD	155
13	ATROCITIES	150
14	RESOURCES	124
15	OFFENSES	122
16	OFFENSE	115
17	WAR	109
18	PEOPLE	106
19	MEMORY	101
20	VIOLENCE	101
21	ERRORS	97
22	FORCES	92
23	TIME	84
24	ERROR	83
25	FELONY	82

## **Teaching Collocations**

There are literally hundreds of thousands of collocations in the English language. It's impossible to teach them all and, if one accepts that nowhere near all can be taught, it would be at least extremely difficult to determine which ones to select to teach. So, the aim of teaching collocations is not to teach specific collocations but about the nature of collocations in general. The reason for this is that those students who approach native speaker level will acquire the bulk of their collocational knowledge through exposure to spoken and written language outside the classroom. In order to help them learn as much as possible during that exposure, we need to first teach students about collocations and then we need to teach them to notice them when they deal with language that contains them. Since a lexical item encountered is more likely to be acquired with more cognitive processing, explanation of the types of collocations will have several benefits. Firstly, awareness of different types of collocation will encourage students to notice them. For example, the knowledge that adjectives are often preceded by adverbs may lead students to notice the kind of word that follows a particular adverb. Secondly, collocational awareness should lead students to analyze a collocation when they encounter it and that cognitive process should aid acquisition. Finally, understanding the nature of a collocation may lead a student to think about how they are going to use that productively. The activities which follow here were created with these principles in mind.

Most of the activities in this collection are primarily receptive, for the reasons mentioned above. Some activities do have some suggestions for productive tasks. There is no reason why students shouldn't use collocations in productive tasks as learners do need to do productive tasks and why not use collocations that they've learned in doing them? However, teachers should always keep in mind that the way that students are going to learn collocations is by using strategies learned in class with extensive exposure.

## Activities

	<i>Speaking</i>	<i>Listening</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Writing</i>
	<i>Vocabulary</i>	<i>Grammar</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>	<i>Warmer/Icebreaker</i>

### Collocations Scavenger Hunt

Texts of different genres will have different distributions of collocations. This activity not only raises learners' awareness of types of collocations in general but it also informs them about types of collocations that can be expected to occur in texts of certain genres.

To prepare for this activity, make a chart listing the common types of collocations and allow for multiple examples of each one, e.g., three N + N collocations, five V + N, etc. (see partial sample below). You can also include a column on the chart for point values of each collocation. You may want to keep it simple and just award one point for each collocation found or you could establish a point value based on how frequently the collocation appears. For example, in many genres of writing, Adj + N collocations are very frequent, so you could award just one point for each one found. On the other hand, Adv + Adj collocations usually appear less frequently so you could award two, three, four, etc. points for each of those. For higher levels, you may choose to go one step further and award extra points for medium-strength and strong collocations, say double points for medium and triple for strong. If you go this route, be prepared for lots of discussion afterwards about the relative strength of particular collocations.

Once you have the chart completed, give a copy to each pair or group students. Make sure they understand how the scoring works, then give them a copy of the text. The search through the text and when they find a collocation of a particular type they write it in the appropriate space. Stop the activity whenever you want and get the students to change papers and they check and score their classmates work. You only need to be involved if there is some confusion or debate about a particular collocation. After the papers have been checked and scored, elicit the scores to find out who won. Then ask them about the collocations distribution for the text, i.e., which were most/least prominent.

Have each group discuss which of the collocations that they feel they should remember because they seem most useful. Get some feedback

Type	Collocation	Value	Points
Adj + N		1	
Adj + N		1	
Adj + N		1	
Adv. + Adj.		5	
Adv. + Adj.		5	
V + N		2	
V + N		2	

**Creating Collocations Using a Thesaurus**

	<i>Speaking</i>	<i>Listening</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Writing</i>
	<i>Vocabulary</i>	<i>Grammar</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>	<i>Warmer/Icebreaker</i>

This activity is useful because it is an easily implemented productive activity and these type of activities are not that common for collocations. Most activities with collocations tend to be receptive, where students look at a text and find and categorize certain types of collocation. In this activity, students look at the nature of a collocation and try to guess which similar words could be substituted using a thesaurus, thus producing more collocations.

To begin the activity either supply the students with a list of collocations, or, better still, have them collect them from a text. Try to get them to focus on the collocations most likely to produce more variations. Students work in pairs or small groups with the list of collocations and they try to select one that would produce the most variations. Each pair/group should choose a different collocation. If you want, list them on the board and have each group cross off the one they have chosen. This activity works best if you have significantly more collocations than groups of students. When each group has chosen, give them a thesaurus. They look up synonyms of one (or both) of the two words and guess which words from the thesaurus could be used as an alternative. For example, if the students were working with “send a message”, the Thesaurus entry for “message” would produce memo, letter, note, etc., which could all be used instead of message. When each group has finished listing the alternatives, get some feedback to check their answers and award them a point for each correct one. Other groups can write them down as they are read out.

Main Entry:           **message**  
 Part of Speech:       *noun*  
 Definition:           communication, often written  
 Synonyms:           bulletin, cannonball, communiqué, directive, dispatch, dope, earful, epistle, information, intelligence, intimation, letter, memo, memorandum, missive, news, note, notice, paper, report, tidings, wire, word

Entry for *message* from <http://thesaurus.com/>

**Verb + Noun  
Hunt**

	Speaking	Listening	Reading	Writing
	Vocabulary	Grammar	Pronunciation	Warmer/Icebreaker

While adjective/noun collocations are usually the most common, verb/noun are probably the most useful for students to learn. However, unlike adjective/noun collocations they are usually more difficult to pick out. The reason for this is that they are often split, with the noun coming well after the verb it collocates with. Before beginning the activity detailed below, it's a good idea to provide your students with a good example of this. If you look at the previous sentence you can see that the verb/noun collocation "provide an example" has been split, which would make it more difficult for students to notice. Even students at the highest level find this challenging, provided that the text is at the appropriate level for them.

The activity is basically a competition to locate the most verb/noun collocations. Put the students in pairs (a group of three will also work) and give them a copy of a text. Explain that they are to look for verb/noun collocations and make them aware of how they can be split. You may be able to use an example in the actual text. Then the students work together and search through the text underlining every verb/noun collocation that they've found. When you stop the activity, ask each pair how many they found and elicit the list in order from the group that had the most. While they are reading it, ask others to listen for any that they missed. Write them on the board and afterwards make any corrections, i.e., eliminate ones that are not actually verb/noun collocations.

If you would like to follow this activity with a productive one, ask students to read the text over for comprehension and then tell them to put the texts away. Then have them work, either individually or in pairs, to paraphrase the text in writing or in speaking by incorporating just the collocations from the board.

**Sample text from CAE Gold Plus**

*After filling in the verbs, find their noun collocates.*

My advice to potential ad writers is this: (1) \_\_\_\_\_ the following approach that I have always found very effective. Memorable ads always begin with good opening lines that involve the reader immediately. They (2) \_\_\_\_\_ a powerful initial mental image, and don't leave readers in any doubt about what they are reading. OK, these ads are not great literature, because their purpose is to (3) \_\_\_\_\_ the reader's attention immediately. I use verbs, because they (4) \_\_\_\_\_ vivid and vibrant images to mind, but I avoid adjectives, as these remind people of poetry. An effective ad makes a full circle, and (5) \_\_\_\_\_ with a mental image that is just as effective as the first, and so (6) \_\_\_\_\_ the advertising message drops deep into people's memory which makes it an effective selling tool.

Decide which verb from below best fits each gap. There are two verbs you will not need to use, and you may need to change the form of the verb to fit each gap.

run adopt grab create drive finish cause bring

*Adapted from CAE Gold Plus, Pearson Education 2008*

## Collocate Search

	<i>Speaking</i>	<i>Listening</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Writing</i>
	<i>Vocabulary</i>	<i>Grammar</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>	<i>Warmer/Icebreaker</i>

This is a really simple activity which helps students notice collocations in a text. Although it can be used at all levels, it's particularly useful for lower levels because of its simplicity and adaptable difficulty level. Simply give the students a list of keywords found in the text and ask them to find the words that go with them. For example, with this paragraph, you might choose, "activity", "useful", "levels", etc. Either hand students the list of keywords or have them write them down from the board or dictation and they work individually or in pairs and when they find a collocate, they write it next to the keyword. If you want to make it competitive, tell them it's a race to see who can find them all first.

Once all the collocations have been found, you could ask the students to classify them according to type (e.g., Verb + Noun, Adj. + Noun, etc.). For higher levels, you can purposely give them keywords whose collocates are not directly adjacent to them or you could also give them synonyms of the keywords. For example, instead of giving them "activities", "useful" and "level", you would give them "exercises", "helpful" and "rank". Then you could discuss whether both synonyms collocate with the words found in the text, which they do for the three examples here (simple exercises, particularly helpful, lower rank).

Another variation on this activity is to have two different texts and have pairs/groups prepare lists of keywords for other pairs/groups. They then exchange texts and list of keywords. However, before you attempt this with students, they should be already fairly familiar with collocations in general.

## My Favourite Collocations

	<i>Speaking</i>	<i>Listening</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Writing</i>
	<i>Vocabulary</i>	<i>Grammar</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>	<i>Warmer/Icebreaker</i>

This is a great activity for getting students to notice collocations and think about how useful they could be for their communication. Before doing this activity, explain to students that they will improve their proficiency with collocations by following these three steps.

1. **Noticing:** Whenever they read they should keep an eye out for collocations as they occur.
2. **Selecting:** When they come across a collocation, they should think about whether it would be useful to remember.
3. **Recording:** They should write down the collocations that they deem to be useful.

Then give each student a text and give them a number of collocations that you want them to select and record, say 10. Students then go through the text and select the 10 (or so) collocations they deem to be most useful.

There are a few ways that you could take up their answers without spending a lot of time eliciting each student's list.

1. Ask students to work in pairs or small groups. They look at their lists

and choose collocations that they think everyone else will have. Then ask each group in turn for a collocation that they think would be popular. When they say it, students in other groups raise their hands if they also chose it. You can award a point to the group for each hand that went up. Write the collocation on the board, and continue in the same way with other groups.

2. Do the same as above except ask pairs/groups to select a collocation that they think nobody else would have and award a point for each hand that doesn't go up.
3. Combine the two above methods and let the students choose either a collocation that they think everyone would have or one that nobody will have. They must state which one they are going for before they read it out. Then you can award points accordingly.
4. Students mingle and find someone who they have the most collocations in common with, based on the how similar other student's lists are to theirs. Then elicit what collocations were the most common and write them on the board.
5. Students play "Find Someone Who..." by finding other students who choose the same collocation for each one on their list, but they try to find a different person for each one. Obviously, they can't ask someone in their own group. Elicit some of the collocations that were repeated on different lists and write them on the board.

Try giving your students a writing task based on the text and then they can choose the 10 collocations they feel that they could use for the task. Then have them mingle and find another student whose list is most similar to their list. Then when everyone has found someone, use those pairings to have them do the writing task together.

## Collocations on a Topic

	<i>Speaking</i>	<i>Listening</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Writing</i>
	<i>Vocabulary</i>	<i>Grammar</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>	<i>Warmer/Icebreaker</i>

This is a great activity to do before students write on a particular topic. However, it can also be used to precede a speaking activity, or it can be used on its own without a productive task following it. It does require a resource such as a collocations dictionary as the students will be trying to find collocations on a particular topic.

Once you have chosen a topic, put students in groups and get them to brainstorm nouns associated with that topic. For example, if the topic was movies, students would brainstorm words such as:

**actor**  
**director**  
**film**  
**script**  
**comedy**

After a few minutes, stop the brainstorm and find out which group got the most nouns. Elicit their list and write it on the board, making corrections where necessary. Then augment it with any nouns that other groups had which were not on their list. Put students in pairs (or groups of three) and give each pair a collocations dictionary (note that some students may have them on their electronic dictionaries). Put a stack of little pieces of paper on

your desk large enough to write a word on. Tell students to take one piece of paper from your desk and to look up one of the nouns from the list in the collocations dictionary. When they find a collocation with it that has to do with the topic (e.g., film), they write it on the paper and return it to the desk. Depending on the level of the students you may want to restrict the collocations to just adjectives. They then take another paper and use it to write another collocation for one of the other nouns. Every time a student comes up to take a paper, they should look at the collocations that have already been written so that they don't repeat any of them. Keep an eye on the papers as they come in and throw away any repeats. If you want to make this stage of the activity competitive, you could use different coloured papers for each group so that you can keep track of who provides the most collocations. Stop this activity at any point when you determine you have enough collocations.

The next phase of this activity requires that a student from each pair comes to the front and takes one of the collocate papers. They show it to their partner and they write the collocate next to the noun they think it goes with. They return it and they take another one. You can make this competitive to see which pair collocates them all first.

Once all or most students have matched the words, elicit the collocations and write the collocates on the board next to the nouns. For example, for the film nouns mentioned before it might look something like this:

**actor** wonderful, supporting, veteran, comic, leading, famous, talented  
**director** first-time, legendary, veteran, famous, talented  
**film** independent, animated, short, foreign, upcoming  
**script** original, wonderful, funny, well-written  
**comedy** romantic, musical, black, dark, hilarious

You may need to make corrections when you elicit the collocations as some that the students form will not actually be collocations. Note that some collocates may go with more than one noun, e.g., wonderful, famous, talented, veteran, etc. You may also have some nouns without collocates. When all the collocations are up on the board, you can give the students a writing or speaking topic that would encourage them to use some of the collocations.

## Reconstructing a Text

	<i>Speaking</i>	<i>Listening</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Writing</i>
	<i>Vocabulary</i>	<i>Grammar</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>	<i>Warmer/Icebreaker</i>

This is a great activity to get students to notice collocations and to select those which are most important semantically within a context. And while they are making decisions about what collocations are the most important, they will, of course, be noticing other collocations also. All you need are one or two relatively short texts.

If you are using one text, give the students the text and have them read it. Then have them work individually to select the ten most important collocations in the text, relative to the content (you can raise or lower that number depending on the length of the text and the level of your students). Remind them that they will have to reconstruct the text using only those

collocations, so they should choose them carefully. When students have finished, have them compare lists of collocations with a partner and if there are differences, they should discuss whose collocations are the most important and why. Finally, have students put the texts away and have them practice explaining to their partner what the text was about while incorporating the collocations or ask them to reconstruct the text in writing with their partner. Once they have done that, you can get them to check back with the original text to see how well they did it.

If you use two texts, you'll divide the class in two and each half will work with a different text. The procedure above would be the same but in the end, each student would find a partner from the other half of the class and they would explain the text to them using just the collocations.

## Gapped Text

	Speaking	Listening	Reading	Writing
	Vocabulary	Grammar	Pronunciation	Warmer/Icebreaker

This is a good activity to get students to notice those words which form collocations and to think about what kind of words would collocate with them. All you need is a text which has been gapped in advance or you can use two texts and have students gap them.

If you use one text, take out collocates of keywords in the text – whiteout will be fine. Then make enough photocopies of it for the class and distribute them. Students work in pairs and try to determine what words go in the gaps by considering the word(s) next to the gap and thinking about what collocations could be formed. When students have done this, elicit answers for each gap from them and write all possible collocations on the board as you may get others that work besides the original one. Finally, point out from each group of collocates which one was the original, or get students to guess which one it was. If they did not guess the original word for any of the gaps try eliciting the original word from them by giving them clues.

You can make this activity completely student-centred by splitting the class in two and giving each half a different text. They would gap their text for the students in the other half. Have each half agree on the same collocations to gap and check with them to make sure they are indeed collocations. Then you can have each half gap one text and you would photocopy enough copies of it to give to the other half. If you won't have access to a photocopier during class, you can photocopy them after class and do the activity in the next class. Otherwise, the students are going to need lots of whiteout as they prepare texts in class for the other half.

### *Gapped second paragraph from this text*

If you use one text, take out collocates of keywords in the text – whiteout will be fine. Then make enough photocopies of it for the class. Students work in \_\_\_\_\_ and try to determine what words \_\_\_\_\_ in the gaps by considering the word(s) next to the gap and thinking about what collocations could be \_\_\_\_\_. When students have done this, elicit \_\_\_\_\_ for each gap from them and write all possible collocations on the board as you may get others that work besides the original one. Finally, point out from each group of collocates which one was the original, or get students to guess which \_\_\_\_\_ it was. If they did not guess the original word for any of the gaps try eliciting the original \_\_\_\_\_ from them by giving them clues.

## Finding Collocations in Dictionaries

	Speaking		Listening		Reading		Writing
	Vocabulary		Grammar		Pronunciation		Warmer/Icebreaker

This is a good activity for getting students to notice collocations in very short segments of authentic text, which can be advantageous since most of the time they are required to search for them in relatively long passages. This activity uses standard L1 dictionaries as a resource. Often the sample sentences illustrating the usage of a particular word in a dictionary will contain common collocations. Consider the following sentence which came from the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* in the definition of the word "search".

*The detectives searched the house from top to bottom, but they found no sign of the stolen goods.*

There are three collocations here with *search*:

1. detectives *searched* (N + V)
2. *searched* the house (V + N)
3. *search* from top to bottom (V + N+N)

A good way to implement this feature of dictionaries into your lessons is to provide students with a list of words to find collocations for and then have them create gap fills. Put students into pairs and write the list of words on the board. There should be one word for every pair in the class plus at least one extra. Students come up and choose a word from the board by crossing it off or putting a check mark beside it. Then they should look the word up in the dictionary and find a sample sentence containing a collocation with the word. Then they should take a strip of paper from your desk and write a gapped sentence containing the collocate but not the keyword (i.e., "search"). Students will tend to replicate the sentence from the dictionary so try limiting the number of words they can use from the sample sentence. For example, tell them they can only use five (or some other number) words from the sample. Then they could write something like this:

A policeman \_\_\_\_\_ the house completely but he didn't find anything.

Only three words are the same as the dictionary sample, not counting the missing word.

When students have finished writing their gapped sentence, they write their names next to it and show it to you and you can check it for errors. Correct anything that needs to be corrected and then number the strip. Depending on the number of words you have relative to the number of students, you may ask the first pair(s) to finish to choose another word and write another gapped sentence.

When you have enough strips of paper, tell students how many there are in total and have them write those numbers (e.g., 1 – 10) in their notebooks. Then have a member of each pair come up and take a strip of paper with a gapped sentence on it. If they think they know the missing word, they check

with the group that wrote it and if they are correct, they write the collocation in their notebooks beside the number for that strip. They return the strip and take another. It is a race to see who can complete all the collocations first.

## Collocations on Walls

	<i>Speaking</i>		<i>Listening</i>		<i>Reading</i>		<i>Writing</i>
	<i>Vocabulary</i>		<i>Grammar</i>		<i>Pronunciation</i>		<i>Warmer/Icebreaker</i>

This is a fun text-based activity which gets students out of their seats and raises awareness of lexical structures. You will need to decide on at least three categories of lexical structures you want your students to find in a text. For example, you could have them find different types of collocations (e.g., Noun + Noun, Adjective + Noun, Adverb + Verb, Verb + Noun, etc.). Each category is written on the top of a sheet of paper and the papers are posted around the classroom. Students work in teams, usually of two or three, and compete against other teams in an attempt to add the most items to the sheets. Each team is given a different coloured marker and told that they cannot add two items in a row. This keeps them moving around the class. Since the teams are each given just one marker, the members of a team will have to work together to help the person with the marker add to the sheets. Clever teams will split up so that the other members are not with the writer at a particular sheet, but waiting at other sheets with ideas. You can let students in on that strategy so that they don't end up bunched up around the writer at one sheet. Alternatively, before starting the activity, you could give the teams a couple of minutes to discuss strategy.

## Top Five

	<i>Speaking</i>		<i>Listening</i>		<i>Reading</i>		<i>Writing</i>
	<i>Vocabulary</i>		<i>Grammar</i>		<i>Pronunciation</i>		<i>Warmer/Icebreaker</i>

This is a great activity to raise students awareness of some of the most common collocates of a certain keyword and also some that they might be unfamiliar with.

To do this activity students will need to have access to collocations dictionaries. Put students in pairs or groups of three so that there are an even number of pairs/groups. Give each group one or more level-appropriate keywords which have a number of collocates. Or you can have a list of keywords on your desk and have each group come up and check off each one that they choose. Each group looks their word up in the collocations dictionary and chooses five collocates which they think are common. Then they arrange them in order starting with the one that is easiest to guess. Note that for lower levels you can specify that the students choose only those collocates whose meaning they are familiar with. Thus, the collocates for the word "book" might be:

1. comic
2. publish
3. read
4. write
5. holy

If you want, you could limit the collocations to one type, e.g., adj. + noun, which might be easier for lower levels, or you could allow students to choose different types.

When all students have prepared their list(s), they get together with another pair/team and one team gives the number 5 clue (e.g., holy). If the other team guesses the keyword correctly, they get 5 points. If they don't guess, they are given the second clue (e.g., write) and they guess again. This time, they can only get 4 points, and so on. You can make it easier for students by telling them that they should let the guessing team know the part of speech of the keywords. As the guessing team is given the collocates, they should write them down in their notebooks. When one team has finished giving clues, the other goes and if they wrote more than one list, they continue until all collocations have been guessed and written down. Then teams switch so they are playing against new teams.

At the end of the activity, ask students for their total scores to see who won. If you want them to do a productive activity with the collocations, get them to write a short paragraph containing a set of five collocations. For example:

I wanted to write a book and my friend suggested that I write a comic book. People like to read these kinds of books so I thought it was a good idea. I hoped to find someone to publish the book and that it would be as popular as the holy book.

## Missing Verbs

	<i>Speaking</i>	<i>Listening</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Writing</i>
	<i>Vocabulary</i>	<i>Grammar</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>	<i>Warmer/Icebreaker</i>

This is an activity which can be used at any level and it reinforces the importance of verb + noun collocations as well as the concept that collocations can include other words not belonging to the four main parts of speech. It presents students with three noun collocates of a certain verb and they try to guess what verb it is.

You can prepare this quiz for students or better still, have students prepare it for each other. Give each student a verb to find collocations for. They look up their verb in a collocations dictionary and find three useful/common collocations. Then they write the three collocations on a piece of paper and insert a blank instead of their verb. For example:

_____	a bus
_____	a shower
_____	a short break

When all students have finished, get them to mingle and guess each other's collocations. You can collect their papers after class and type them all up to hand to them the next day for their own reference or as a test.

This activity was adapted from an activity in *Teaching Collocation* Michael Lewis, Ed.,

## Listening for Collocations

	<i>Speaking</i>		<i>Listening</i>		<i>Reading</i>		<i>Writing</i>
	<i>Vocabulary</i>		<i>Grammar</i>		<i>Pronunciation</i>		<i>Warmer/Icebreaker</i>

This activity is good to use with students because it's gets them to listen for collocations rather than read for them. You can point out to students that they should notice collocations in speech as well as writing. Another benefit to this activity is that it is completely student-centred as it is the students who are targeting the collocations that they think are useful. This selection process will encourage acquisition as well as emphasize the need to learn language for productive use by receptive exposure.

Take any recording that you have a tapescript for. Coursebooks are good sources for these. Divide the tapescript up so that you will have a piece of the tapescript for each group in the class. Groups can be any size but the length of your tapescript will be the deciding factor which determines how many segments you can split it up into. Make a photocopy of the tapescript and cut it up and give each group one section. They look it over and underline a certain number of collocations that they think are useful. You can determine the number that you want them to find, usually 3 to 5. Check with each group to make sure the collocations they are choosing are indeed collocations and also useful. Then give each group a marker and a large sheet of paper, e.g., a sheet of flipchart paper. They write form and meaning clues for their collocations and list them in order that they appear in the tapescript. For example, if the collocation was "take the subway", the form and meaning clue might be:

V + N: use an underground train

You may need to help them with this. When all groups are finished, collect their sheets and post them on the wall in the same order as the tapescript.

If you haven't done so already, play the recording for comprehension. Then tell the students that they will be listening to the first part and they are to listen for the collocations on the first sheet. When they hear them, they are to write them down. Play the recording and stop at the end of the first segment. Elicit ideas for the collocations from the class and get the group who wrote the clues to verify if they are correct. Then continue in the same way with the rest of the recording.

## Recommended Books

**Teaching Collocation** Michael Lewis, Editor Thomson Heinle

**Vocabulary Matrix** Michael McCarthy, Anne O'Keefe, Steve Walsh Heinle  
Cengage Learning

**Oxford Collocations Dictionary** OUP

### Answers to page 2

	Coll?	Strength	Type		Coll?	Strength	Type
<b>1. Morgan Lewis, Teaching Collocation</b>				on the other hand	x		
set yourself a realistic objective	x			hook, line and sinker	x		
catch up with the news	x			to put it another way	x		
revised edition	x			examine thoroughly	x		
widely available	x			the fog closed in	x		
<b>2. Jimmie Hill, Teaching Collocation</b>				<b>4. McCarthy, O'Keefe &amp; Walsh, Vocabulary Matrix</b>			
learn a foreign language	x			go home	x	W	V + Adv
live dangerously	x			happy marriage	x	M	Adj + N
speak through an interpreter	x			make dinner	x	W	V + N
pocket calculator	x			go crazy	x	M	V + Adj
I told her off	x			very good	x	W	Adv+Adj
<b>3. Michael Lewis, Teaching Collocation</b>				torrential downpour	x	S	Adj + N
turn in	x			refute a hypothesis	x	S	V + N
aware of	x			surf the web	x	S	V + N
fire escape	x			profoundly disturbing	x	S	Adv+Adj

Note that the lists of collocations are taken from writers of the two books listed above, pointing out differences in interpretation of the nature of collocations. For simplicity's sake, the interpretation used by McCarthy et al is the one used in this document.