

THE ROLE OF USING COLLOCATIONS IN IMPROVING ENGLISH FLUENCY

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Annotation

This article provides information about English collocations, types, grammatical categories, examples and distinctions between strong, weak and fixed collocations. Furthermore, benefits of using collocations in different contexts to be more fluent speaker is explicitly clarified.

Keywords: collocation, fixed collocation, fluency, context, association, native speaker.

What is a collocation? 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 native speaker would say. Native English speaker would say, 'She's got blond hair'. In other words, yellow does not 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).

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, they can be considered as individual lexical items and so usually included 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. However, it is not always easy to separate collocations and compounds and, where they are useful for learners as an important part of the vocabulary of a topic, we include some compounds too.

Why is it important to learn collocations? What are the benefits one can get by using them?

An appreciation of collocation will help to:

- use the words you know more accurately. In other words, you will make fewer mistakes.
- learning words in chunks will help you remember them easily and you will have ready-made word banks.



- using collocations while speaking and writing sounds more natural. By saying, for example, of great importance, rather than of big or high importance, you will not 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. Collocations make it easier to avoid overused or ambiguous words like “very”, “nice”, or “beautiful”, by using a pair of words that fits the context better and has a more precise meaning.
- 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 skillful 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”.

Collocations might be strong, fixed and weak collocations according association of words.

Strong collocations. A strong collocation is one in which the words are very closely associated with each other. For example, the adjective mitigating almost always collocates with circumstances or factors; it rarely collocates with any other word. Although she was found guilty, the jury felt there were mitigating circumstances (factors or circumstances that lessen the blame). Here are some other examples of strong collocations:

Inclement weather was expected. (formal) = unpleasant weather. Inclement collocates almost exclusively with weather.

She has auburn hair. Auburn collocates only with words connected with hair (e.g. curls, tresses, locks).

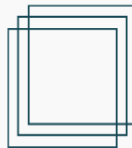
I felt deliriously happy = extremely happy. Strongly associated with happy; not used with glad, content, sad, etc.

The chairperson adjourned the meeting = have a pause or rest during a meeting/trial. Adjourn is very strongly associated with meeting and trial.

Fixed collocations. Fixed collocations are collocations so strong that they cannot be changed in any way. For example, you can say I was walking to and fro (meaning I was walking in one direction and then in the opposite direction, several times). No other words can replace to and fro in this collocation. It is completely fixed. The meaning of some fixed collocations cannot be guessed from the individual words. These collocations are called idioms.

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Weak collocations. Weak collocations are made up of words that collocate with a wide range of other words. For example, you can say you are in broad agreement with someone (generally in agreement with them). However, broad can also be used with a number of other words – a broad avenue, a broad smile, broad shoulders, a broad accent (a strong accent), a broad hint (a strong hint) and so on. These are weak collocations, in the sense that broad collocates with a broad range of different nouns. Strong collocations and weak collocations form a continuum, with stronger ones at one end and weaker ones at the other. Most collocations lie somewhere between the two. For example, the (formal) adjective picturesque collocates with village, location and town, and so appears near the middle of the continuum.

Stronger weaker inclement weather, picturesque village, broad hint, picturesque location, broad accent, broad smile.

Grammatical categories of collocations

Verb + noun: **draw up a list, a contract**- Our lawyer drew up a contract for us to sign (prepare something, usually official, in writing); **pass up a chance, an opportunity**- I didn't want to pass up the chance of seeing Hong Kong, so I agreed to go on the trip (fail to take advantage of).

Noun + verb: **opportunity arise** - An opportunity arose for me to work in China, so I went and spent a year there; **standards slip**- People feel educational standards slipped when the government cut finances.

Noun + noun collocations used to describe groups or sets: There's been **a spate of attacks/thefts** in our area recently. (unusual large number happening in close succession). The minister had to put up with **a barrage of questions/insults** from the angry audience. (unusual large number, happening at the same time)

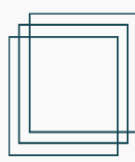
Noun + noun collocations used with uncountable nouns: By **a stroke of luck** I found my keys in the rubbish bin!(sudden, unexpected piece of luck); She gave me **a snippet of information** which is top secret. (small piece of information)

Adjective + noun: This is not **an idle threat**; I will call the police if this happens again! (simply a threat); He waited in the **vain hope** that the minister would meet him. (unlikely to be fulfilled hope)

Adverb + adjective: The article provides **an intensely personal** account of the writer's relationship with his sons. Joe's sister was a **stunningly attractive** woman.

Verb + adverb or prepositional phrase: The teenager tried to persuade his mother that he was innocent but he **failed miserably**; I don't like to travel with my brother because he **drives recklessly**. (wildly, careless).

Usage of collocations in different contexts.



She has a **gift for languages**, which brings her to the UN. She wants to **make a difference**. She is idealistic in that single-minded, dedicated manner associated with freedom fighters. Silvia remains an enigma. When Tobin Keller begins to investigate her, he is faced with a blank sheet. She is beautiful, blonde, lissom and lithe. She lives alone, has no lover, rides a Vespa throughout New York and works all day, **providing simultaneous translation** for delegates. She has an odd accent, which, like everything else about her, is difficult **to pin down** (hard to fix or place). “The Interpreter”.

Covent Garden’s buskers and jugglers **provide** no-cost **entertainment** in a car-free setting, and you’ve always **got the chance** of being plucked from the crowd to help out with a trick. Don’t **underestimate the value of** London’s public transport as a source of fun, either. The double-decker from Victoria, for instance, will trundle you past the Houses of Parliament, Trafalgar Square and the Strand on its way to St Paul’s Cathedral for a modest sum. The driverless Docklands Light Railway is another guaranteed **source of amusement** – **grab a seat** at the front of the train and pretend to be the driver, then **take a boat** back to the centre of town from Greenwich. “Entertaining the children in London”.

Examples of common collocations that natives use everyday:

10 collocations with keep: (keep - have or retain possession of something)

1. **Keep a secret**-retain the possession of secret

I do not know how I will keep it a secret

2. **Keep promise**- do as you have promised

You said you would arrive by Monday. I just hope you can keep your promise. We need you here.

3. **Keep something safe**- look after.

My mom pulled out my primary school uniform. She’d been keeping it safe all these years. I had no idea.

4. **Keep in mind**-remember something until you need it.

Thanks, I’ll keep it in mind

5. **Keep quiet**-remain in a certain condition or position.

Ben kept quiet while she had explained what had happened.

6. **Keep in touch**-keep the contact with someone.

Well, it was great bumping into you, let’s keep in touch!

7. **Keep up with**- not to fall behind

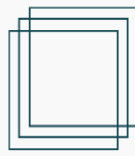
Come on! Keep up!

8. **Keep track of things**- stay informed, to know what’s happening.

I use google calendar to keep track of all my appointments and meetings.

9. **Keep tabs on -keep an eye on someone/something-** watch someone/something carefully, monitor

I try to keep tabs on my students in case they may escape from lessons.



10. Keep up to date- be informed up to date information, news
Some people read the news every morning to keep up to date with world affairs.
Some other examples of verb collocations:
do homework, do exercises, do a report
make a decision, make choice, make dinner
take a look, take a holiday, take a rest
go bald, go mad, go crazy, go bankrupt, go overseas
get started, get married, get drunk, get pregnant, get worried

Conclusion

Collocations are natural combination of words which refers to a close association of English words. Using appropriate collocations in speech and writing helps to be understood and become more fluent speaker. It motivates to produce spontaneous, natural speech. Learning collocations will also help to increase a range of English vocabulary. For example, it easier to avoid words like very or nice or beautiful or get by choosing a word that fits the context better and has a more precise meaning. This is particularly useful if you are taking a written exam in English and want to make a good impression on the examiners. In advanced level exams, marks are often specifically awarded for the appropriate handling of collocations

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