



Collocations

Overview

Collocation is a way in which some words are often used together, and sound natural together. This also refers to restrictions on how words may be used together, such as which verbs and nouns can be used together, and which prepositions and verbs can be used together.

For Example: We often say **heavy rain**, or **light rain**, instead of strong rain or mild rain, **heavy** goes well with **rain**, whereas strong does not. This sort of language behaviour is called **collocation**. There are many cases in English when it is difficult to know which words go well with the word you want to use, because there are no clear rules. Some words just sound right together, while others do not.

Verbs that Collocate with Nouns

When you use a noun in a sentence, you need to know which verbs go well with it. Learners often make mistakes with these verbs. For example:

- Instead of saying **do a bath**; you say **take a bath**
- Instead of **do an effort**; you say **make an effort**
- Instead of **do a crime**; you say **commit a crime**
- Instead of **say a joke**, you say **tell a joke, make a joke, or crack a joke**

Adverbs that Collocate with Adjectives

For example, there are a number of intensifying adverbs that can be used instead of **very** or **extremely** with adjectives, such as:

- **highly** controversial (= very controversial)
 - highly = adverb & controversial = adjective
- **deeply** offended (= very offended)
- **bitterly** disappointed (= very disappointment)

Often it is difficult to predict which adverb will be used with a particular adjective. Some adverbs occur quite often before some adjectives, e.g. **perfectly normal** (same as very normal) and **grossly misleading** (same as very...).

- **bitterly** ashamed / disappointed / cold **NOT** *bitterly* successful

- **highly** successful / accomplished **NOT** *highly* divided / grateful
- **deeply** divided / grateful / unpopular **NOT** *deeply* developed

Adjectives that Collocate with Nouns

When you want to describe a noun, there is often a range of adjectives you can use, e.g. you can say a strong, real, or distinct possibility when something is very possible, or a remote or faint possibility if something is not very likely.

Practice Exercises

Exercise 1

Choose which one of the following verbs (**Miss, Get, Do and Make**) goes well with the expressions below:

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| a) _____ a goal | j) _____ progress |
| b) _____ peace | k) _____ someone's help |
| c) _____ lost | l) _____ nothing |
| d) _____ a home | m) _____ an effort |
| e) _____ an appointment | n) _____ one's best |
| f) _____ a lesson | o) _____ furniture |
| g) _____ homework | p) _____ the shopping |
| h) _____ the cooking | q) _____ trouble |
| i) _____ ready | r) _____ someone a favour |

Exercise 2

Decide which word or phrase completes the sentence.

- He didn't know anything about business, so starting his own business was _____.
 a) a leap into the cloud
 b) a leap in the dark
 c) a leap into the whole
- I hate the way he criticizes everybody. It really rattles _____.
 a) my back
 b) my bones
 c) my cage
- When her business crashed, she had to pick up _____ and start again.
 a) the fragments
 b) the pieces
 c) the stones

She felt sad when she realized that she had lost her watch. It wasn't expensive but it had sentimental _____.

- d) expense
 - e) price
 - f) value
4. I used to go to church under false _____. I never wanted to go but my mother made me.
- a) agreements
 - b) feelings
 - c) pretences
5. One minute they were just talking and then all hell broke _____ and everybody started screaming and shouting.
- a) free
 - b) loose
 - c) over
6. He never cheats or tricks anybody when he plays. He always goes by the _____.
- a) book
 - b) instructions
 - c) principles
7. Don't tell Mary your plans or she'll tell everybody. She is always _____ her mouth off.
- a) shooting
 - b) speaking
 - c) talking
8. Tom might be able to help with your problem. He has friends in high _____ who might be able to change the decision.
- a) jobs
 - b) places
 - c) spots

Answers

Exercise 1

- | | | | | | |
|---------|---------|--------|---------|---------|---------|
| a) make | d) get | g) do | j) make | m) make | p) do |
| b) make | e) make | h) do | k) get | n) do | q) make |
| c) get | f) get | i) get | l) do | o) get | r) do |

Exercise 2

- | | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|------|
| 1. b | 3. b | 5. c | 7. a | 9. b |
| 2. b | 4. c | 6. b | 8. a | |