

I What is a collocation?

A A collocation is a pair or group of words that are often used together. These combinations sound natural to native speakers, but students of English have to make a special effort to learn them because they are often difficult to guess. Some combinations just sound 'wrong' to native speakers of English. For example, the adjective *fast* collocates with *cars*, but not with *a glance*.

We say ...	We don't say ...
fast cars fast food	quick cars quick food
a quick glance a quick meal	a fast glance a fast meal

Learning collocations is an important part of learning the vocabulary of a language. Some collocations are fixed, or very strong, for example **take a photo**, where no word other than *take* collocates with *photo* to give the same meaning. Some collocations are more open, where several different words may be used to give a similar meaning, for example **keep to / stick to the rules**. Here are some more examples of collocations.

You must **make an effort** and study for your exams (NOT ~~do~~ an effort)

Did you **watch TV** last night? (NOT ~~look at~~ TV)

This car has a very **powerful engine**. It can do 200 km an hour. (NOT ~~strong~~ engine)

There are some **ancient monuments** nearby. (NOT ~~antique~~ monuments)

Sometimes, a pair of words may not be absolutely wrong, and people will understand what is meant, but it may not be the natural, normal collocation. If someone says *I did a few mistakes* they will be understood, but a fluent speaker of English would probably say **I made a few mistakes**.

B Compounds and idioms

Compounds are units of meaning formed with two or more words. Sometimes the words are written separately, sometimes they have a hyphen and sometimes they are written as one word. Usually the meaning of the compound can be guessed by knowing the meaning of the individual words. Some examples of compounds are **car park, post office, narrow-minded, shoelaces, teapot**.

It is not always easy to separate collocations and compounds and, where they are useful for learners or an important part of the vocabulary of a topic, we include some compounds in this book too.

Idioms are groups of words in a fixed order that have a meaning that cannot be guessed by knowing the meaning of the individual words. For example, **pass the buck** is an idiom meaning 'to pass responsibility for a problem to another person to avoid dealing with it oneself'. We deal with idioms in detail in the book *English Idioms in Use* in this series.

C Why learn collocations?

Learning collocations is a good idea because they can:

- give you the most natural way to say something: *smoking is **strictly forbidden*** is more natural than *smoking is ~~strongly~~ forbidden*.
- give you alternative ways of saying something, which may be more colourful/expressive or more precise: instead of repeating *It was **very cold and very dark***, we can say *It was **bitterly cold and pitch dark***.
- improve your style in writing: instead of saying *poverty **causes crime***, you can say *poverty **breeds crime***; instead of saying *a **big meal*** you can say *a **substantial meal***. You may not need or want to use these in informal conversations, but in writing they can give your text more variety and make it read better: this book includes notes about formality wherever the collocations are especially formal or informal.

2

Finding, recording and learning collocations

A Finding collocations

There are two main ways in which you can find collocations.

- You can train yourself to notice them whenever you read or listen to anything in English. Look at the collocations that are worth learning from this short text in English.

After **giving** Mark **a lift** to the airport, Cathy **made her way** home. What an exciting **life** he **led**! At times Cathy felt **desperately jealous** of him. She **spent her time** doing little more than **taking care of** him and the children. Now her sister was **getting divorced** and would doubtless be **making demands on** her too. Cathy had promised to **give** her sister **a call** as soon as she got home but she decided to **run** herself **a bath** first. She had a **sharp pain** in her side and hoped that a hot bath might **ease the pain**.

TIP

Get into the habit of making a note of any good collocations you come across in any English text you read.

- You can find them in any good learner's dictionary. For example, if you look up the word *sharp* you will find some of these collocations:

a sharp pain
a sharp bend/turn
a sharp contrast/difference/distinction
a sharp rise/increase/drop

TIP

When you look up a new word make a point of noting it down in several different collocations.

B Recording collocations

The best way to record a collocation is in a phrase or a sentence showing how it is used. Highlight the collocation by underlining it or by using a highlighting pen.

For example: I don't have access to that kind of secret information.
Or: Jim gave me a very useful piece of advice.

C Learning collocations

Learning collocations is not so different from learning any vocabulary item. The key things are to:

- regularly revise what you want to learn
- practise using what you want to learn in contexts that are meaningful for you personally
- learn collocations in groups to help you fix them in your memory. You might group together collocations relating to the same topic. Or you might group collocations based on the same word, for example:

I must **find a way** to help him.

Can you **find your way** back to my house?

I **learnt the hard way** that Jack can't be trusted.

Please tell me if I'm **getting in your way**.

You must **give way to** traffic from the left.

I've tried **every possible way** to get him to change his mind.

Collocation

A

Collocation is concerned with the way words occur together, often in unpredictable ways. It is a very good idea when learning new words to learn any typical collocations that go with them.

Adjective + noun collocations

Nouns often have typical adjectives which go with them. Here are some examples.

Compare **article** and **thing**:

We say	<i>but not usually ...</i>
the real thing	the genuine thing
the genuine article	the real article

Examples:

I don't like recorded music, I prefer the **real thing**. [i.e. real, live music]

These trainers are the **genuine article**. Those others are just cheap imported copies.

Other examples:

You can give a **broad summary** of something. (*Not: a wide summary*)

You can describe something in **great detail**. (*Not: in big detail*)

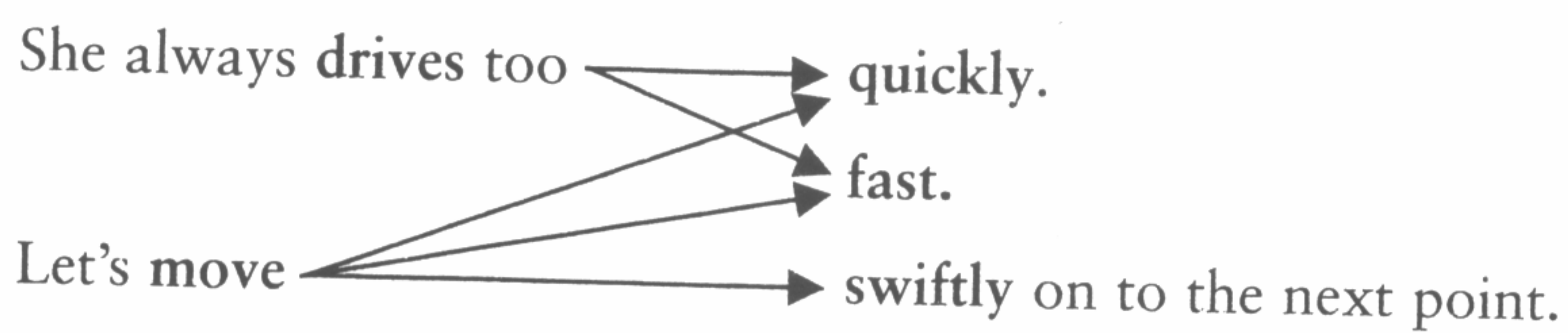
Some adjectives go with a restricted range of nouns.

For example: a **formidable task/opponent/amount/person**

B

Verb + adverb collocations

Often, verbs have typical adverbs that collocate with them. The lines in the chart show which collocations are normal:



Other examples:

It's something I feel **strongly** about. (*Not: I feel powerfully about*)

If I **remember rightly**, it happened at about six-thirty. (*Not: If I remember perfectly*)

C

Adverb + adjective collocations

It is useful to learn which adverbs most typically modify particular types of adjectives. For example, the adverb **utterly**, which means totally or completely, generally occurs before an adjective. The majority of these adjectives have a negative connotation. Typical examples are: **alien, appalling, blank, dismal, depressed, disgusting, distasteful, false, fatuous, impossible, lost, ludicrous, naïve, ridiculous**. Try to notice this kind of regularity when learning words.

D

Verb + object collocations

Verbs and their objects often form collocations.

You **raise your hand** to ask a question. (*Not: lift your hand*)

You can **raise a family**. (i.e. bring up children; *not: lift a family*)

You can **visit / go to / check out** a website on the Internet.