

Deep Dive 2: Intermediate English Collocations

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You know that feeling, right? You're speaking English, maybe your grammar is perfect, you've got a decent vocabulary, but something just feels a little well off. Your sentence feels a bit clunky, maybe, or it doesn't quite hit the way you want it to. Yeah, like you're missing something. Exactly. Like playing the right notes, but in the wrong rhythm or something.

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You're hunting for that perfect word combination like, is it make a decision or do a decision? And it just trips you up. Right. Feels like there's some kind of hidden ingredient, does it? To sounding really natural. Well, guess what? You found that secret ingredient today. Welcome to the Deep Dive. This is where we take all those sources you've gathered, articles, notes, research, and we really dig in to pull out the crucial insights. We give you that shortcut to being genuinely well-informed. And today, we are unlocking that missing piece.

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The fascinating world of collocations. Now, simply put, collocations are just words that, really like hanging out together. They naturally occur side by side. Linguistic best friends, you could say. You know, like sharp pain or make a mistake. It's not just about grammar being correct. It's about what sounds right, what sounds expected to a native speaker. Exactly. And here's a little aha moment for you right from the start.

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Did you know, apparently, mastering just the top 2,000 collocations can get you almost 80% of the way to native level fluency in everyday English? It's A staggering statistic, isn't it? But it really highlights their importance. It's a game changer. So our mission

today, using all the great material you've provided, is to really unpack the power of these collocations.

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not just what they are, but how you can actually find them, record them effectively, and weave them into your own speech so smoothly that you start expressing yourself with, well, a whole new level of confidence and precision. And what's truly fascinating here, I think, is how fundamental they are. Collocations are really the bedrock of natural-sounding language. Without a good handle on them, even sentences that are grammatically flawless can sound, well, stiff.

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or just unnatural. A bit robotic, maybe. Yeah, kind of. Collocations add that richness, that precision, that nuance that honestly single words just can't capture on their own. And that statistic you mentioned, it really underlines how learning these specific pairings can seriously boost your fluency. It helps you dodge common errors and just makes your English sound way more authentic, much quicker. So it's not enough just to know individual words. It's about knowing

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their social circles, who they like to be seen with. That's a great way to put it. Yeah. It's about getting that gut feeling for what sounds right. Native speakers have it implicitly, but the good news is it absolutely can be learned systematically. Exactly. It's like moving beyond just translating word for word in your head and starting to grasp these sort of conventional, almost habitual pairings. That's where the language really comes alive, I think. And it's what separates, you know, a good speaker from a really great

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natural sounding one. Okay, so how do we actually start finding these pairings? Because they can feel a bit hidden sometimes. Your notes layout two really practical, powerful methods.

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It sounds almost like detective work, which I kind of like. So the first method is all about training your senses, your ear, and your eye. It's active observation. Right, not just passively consuming. Exactly. It means you're consciously spotting these collocations when you read or listen, not just letting the words wash over you. Let me grab a fantastic example from one of the texts you shared. Just listen to how these word pairs fit so naturally.

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After giving Mark a lift to the airport, Julie made her way home. What an exciting life he led. At times, Julie 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. Julie had promised to give her sister a call as soon as she got home, but she decided to run herself a bath first.

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She had a sharp pain in her side and hoped that a hot bath might ease the pain. See, what you've just read there is practically woven together with collocations. It really is, isn't it? Yeah. Giving a lift, made her way, exciting life, desperately jealous, taking care, making demands, give a call, run a bath, sharp pain, ease the pain. These aren't just random words stuck together. They're natural, expected combinations.

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And connecting this to the bigger picture, the real insight is to make this a habit. Right. Actively jotting them down or even just mentally flagging them whenever you come across them in any English you encounter. So like building a mental library. Precisely.

That conscious awareness, that's the crucial first step to really internalizing them. I really like that idea, making it a habit. It turns something passive, like reading an article or listening to something, into an active learning moment. It's like suddenly you have x-ray vision for

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the invisible glue holding sentences together. That's a perfect analogy. And the second really powerful method for digging up collocations is using good learner's dictionaries. These are more than just places to find definitions. They're specifically designed to show you the common word markers, the collocations for any given word. So let's take the word sharp, for instance, from your materials.

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If you look that up in a decent learner's dictionary, you won't just get not blunt. Right, you'll get more contact. Exactly, you'll likely find.

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find examples like a sharp pain, we just heard that one, a sharp bend or a sharp turn in the road, a sharp contrast or difference or distinction, and maybe a sharp rise, increase, or drop in something like sales figures. Wow, okay, that's actually a really powerful takeaway. Because it means you're not just learning one word in isolation. You're immediately building a whole network of how that word actually works in real sentences. You got it. It completely changes how you might approach learning new vocabulary, doesn't it? So the tip

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is, when you look up a new word, don't just stop at the definition. Actively look for and note down its common partners. Absolutely, see who its friends are. It's like getting invited to the whole party, not just meeting one person. Okay, so...

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We know how to find these natural pairings now. We can spot them in the wild or look them up, but finding them is, well, only half the battle, right? How do we make sure they actually stick? How do we make them part of our active vocabulary? Right. This is where effective recording and crucially consistent practice come in. So the best way to record a collocation isn't just writing down the two words, like access information. It's much better to record it within a meaningful phrase or even a full sentence that shows how it's used. So for instance, you might

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Write down, I don't have access to that kind of secret information, so you see it in action, exactly, or another example from the sources: Jim gave me a very useful piece of advice that context makes it much easier to remember and use correctly later, and there's a simple, but I thought brilliant tip in your notes.

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physically highlight the collocation within that phrase or sentence. Yes. Underline it, use a highlighter, whatever works, so it just visually pops out when you're reviewing your notes. It's simple, but it really works, like putting a spotlight on it, as I said. It draws your eye right to the key pairing.

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when it comes to actually learning these for the long haul, the strategies are quite similar to learning any vocabulary, but with that specific focus on the pair. Okay. So first, you've got to regularly revise. Consistency is absolutely key. Little and often is much better than cramming once in a blue moon. Makes sense. Second, you need to practice using them.

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And crucially, use them in context that mean something to you. Personalization? Yes, connect them to your own life, your job, your hobbies. That relevance really helps cement them in your memory.

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And 3rd, and this is where it gets quite interesting and effective, learn collocations in groups. In groups. Okay, that sounds intriguing. How does that work? Like what kind of groups? Well, there are a couple of ways. You could group them by a shared topic. For example, you might collect collocations related to business, like set up a business, make a profit, negotiate a deal, that kind of thing. Or maybe health ease the pain, catch a cold, prescribe medicine. Right, thematic grouping? Exactly. But perhaps an even more powerful way, often, is to group collocations based

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On the same core word, this really shows you the versatility of that word. Let's use the word way again from the examples. Instead of just learning way, you group together phrases like, I must find a way to help him, or, Can you find your way back to my house?

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Then there's the idiom, I learned the hard way that Jack can't be trusted. And also, please tell me if I'm getting in your way. Or, you must give way to traffic from the left. And maybe I've tried every possible way to get him to change his mind. See how grouping them like that really highlights the different shades of meaning and the different grammatical patterns for just that one word, way. Absolutely. That's brilliant. It shows how one little word can branch out into so many natural expressions, each slightly different. It's not just memorizing lists. It's understanding the system.

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The flexibility of the language. Okay, let's shift gears slightly and dive into some of those common tricky spots. The aha moments that your forces point out where people often

get tangled up. First, just to really hammer home how common these things are, let's look at spotting them in just a normal bit of text. There was an exercise about a woman named Abigail. Listen again to how these pairs just naturally appear. My friend Abigail is desperately worried about her son. He wants to enroll on a course.

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can't make a decision. I gave Abigail a ring and we had a long chat. He'd like to study for a degree but is afraid he won't meet the requirements for university entry. Abigail thinks he should do a course in management because he'd like to set up his own business. I agree that would be a wise choice.

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It's seamless, isn't it? Completely. From desperately worried right through to wise choice, these aren't just individual words strung together. They function as a unit, a natural pairing that conveys a specific idea. Yeah. And simply noticing those consistently makes your understanding so much richer, and eventually it helps your own speech sound just as effortless. And you mentioned earlier, sometimes it's those really common simple verbs that cause the most headaches, like do, make, have, take,

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give. Your sources had some classic mix-ups here. yes, the Famous Five. They trip up so many learners. And it raises that key question, why do we use one and not the other? Often there's a subtle logic, but sometimes it's just convention. Right. Knowing the correct collocation is vital. So for example, someone might incorrectly say having her duty. The natural correct phrase is doing her duty. Okay, so do for duty. Generally, often connects with tasks, jobs, general activities. Similarly, you wouldn't usually

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usually say taking a lecture, a professor or speaker gives a lecture. Right, the students take notes, maybe. Exactly.

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Exactly.

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And you definitely take an exam.

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You don't make an exam.

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But you do make progress, not do progress.

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Why make there?

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Because make often implies creating something, producing a result, achieving something.

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Progress is something you produce or achieve.

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Got it.

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Although giving a party is already correct, give often relates to offering or providing something.

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Okay, so while some are just convention, there often is a sort of underlying logic or meaning pattern.

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Those little distinctions make such a difference.

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difference, don't they?

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really do.

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And this becomes even clearer when we look at actually correcting some typical errors.

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Yeah, the sources had that example text about someone's day gardening, shopping, a meal.

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And some phrases just sounded a bit clunky.

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Like it mentioned, made some work in the garden and spent a rest.

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How should those sound?

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Right, classic examples.

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Instead of made some work, the natural collocation is did some work, again, do for general activities.

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You don't spend a rest, you had a rest.

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Had a rest, right.

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You generally do some shopping, not have some shopping.

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If you're putting in extra effort for something special, you make a special effort, not do one.

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Make, again, like creating something.

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Exactly.

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If you quickly look at a book, you had a look, not gave a look.

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And finally, you want to make a good impression, not do one.

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Make fits that idea of creating an impact or effect.

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Wow.

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These might seem small, but mastering these distinctions is really fundamental to sounding fluent.

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Those are incredibly common points of confusion.

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And seeing the corrections side by side really

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clarifies the patterns, practice on those specific pairs feels essential.

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It really is like learning the secret handshake of natural English.

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And that brings us right back to the power of the dictionary dick dive we talked about.

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Remember the verb lead.

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A good learner's dictionary won't just tell you it means to guide.

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It'll show you collocations like lead the expedition, lead the discussion, lead the inquiry.

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Each uses lead naturally, but in a distinct context.

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And it doesn't stop there.

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It might also show you more informal, idiomatic uses like

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The phrase leads someone by the nose.

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It means to completely control someone, make them do exactly what you want.

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You'd probably never guess that just from the basic definition of lead.

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No way.

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That absolutely drives home the point, doesn't it?

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Looking up one word shouldn't just be about the definition.

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It's a chance to scoop up a whole family of related natural phrases.

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You're not just getting one coin, you're finding the whole treasure chest.

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You expand your usable natural vocabulary so much faster.

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Okay, so let's wrap up this deep dive.

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The power of collocations.

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It's pretty undeniable, isn't it?

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They really are a key, maybe the key, to sounding natural, precise, fluent in English.

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Absolutely.

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And we've looked at some simple but really effective ways to master them.

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First, just actively noticing them everywhere, reading, listening.

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Then, using those learner's dictionaries as fantastic discovery tools.

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And finally, strategically recording them in context, in full phrases, and locking them in through regular review, meaningful practice, and that clever grouping technique.

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If you start applying these methods,

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You really can boost your language skills and your confidence quite significantly.

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You'll find yourself shifting from translating word by word to actually thinking and speaking in more natural, flowing English phrases.

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It genuinely feels like a shortcut to sounding more authentic.

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So here's something to think about as you go about your day.

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How many phrases that you use all the time are actually perfect collocations?

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And maybe what new collocations could you find for words we mentioned, like desperately or pain or wise or run, just by applying these strategies.

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Start actively looking for them in your own reading, your own conversations.

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You'll be amazed what you find.

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I think so too.

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You'll be surprised how many there are and how quickly your ear starts tuning into them.

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Thank you so much for joining us for this deep dive into the world of collocations.

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Until next time, keep exploring, keep noticing, and let those words really connect.