Collocation: which words go together

VOCABULARY PRACTICE
UPPER-INTERMEDIATE | B2

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 Match each precise term with its definition.

1 collocation ____	**a** the tendency of certain words to occur together more often than chance would predict
2 collocate ____	**b** a word that habitually co-occurs with another specific word
3 fixed expression ____	**c** a phrase whose wording is fixed and cannot be freely varied
4 lexical chunk ____	**d** a multi-word unit stored and retrieved as a single item rather than built word by word
5 semantic prosody ____	**e** the tendency of a word to occur with words carrying a particular positive or negative association
6 delexicalised verb ____	**f** a common verb, such as make, do, take, whose meaning largely comes from the noun it combines with
7 restricted collocation ____	**g** a collocation with a limited number of acceptable word partners
8 open collocation ____	**h** a collocation where many different word combinations are equally natural
9 collocational range ____	**i** the number and variety of words that a given word can naturally combine with
10 idiomaticity ____	**j** the quality of sounding natural and native-like through appropriate word combination

2 Choose the word with the most suitable connotation.

1 For words occurring together more than chance predicts: collocation / a random pairing.

2 For a phrase with fixed, unchangeable wording: fixed expression / freely variable phrase.

3 For a multi-word unit stored as a single item: lexical chunk / a word built letter by letter.

4 For a word's tendency to occur with positive or negative words: semantic prosody / neutral meaning.

5 For a common verb whose meaning comes mostly from its noun: delexicalised verb / a content-rich verb.

6 For a collocation with very limited partners: restricted collocation / an open collocation.

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7 For a collocation where many combinations are natural: open collocation / a fixed idiom.

8 For sounding natural and native-like: idiomaticity / stilted, unnatural phrasing.

3 Complete the collocation-studies terms with one word.

1 a _____ dictionary (= lists common word partnerships)

2 _____ prosody (= tendency to occur with positive/negative words)

3 a _____ verb (= like make, do, take)

4 a fixed _____ (= unchangeable phrase)

5 a lexical _____ (= a multi-word stored unit)

6 collocational _____ (= range of acceptable partners)

7 a restricted _____ (= limited word partners)

8 natural _____ (= sounding native-like)

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4 Complete the case notes with words and phrases from the box.

collocate | collocation | collocational range | delexicalised verb | fixed expression | idiomaticity | lexical chunk | open collocation | restricted collocation | semantic prosody

Case A: Corpus linguists studying 1 _____ identify which words habitually 2 _____ with a given headword far more often than chance would predict.
Case B: The verb 'make' functions largely as a 3 _____, deriving most of its specific meaning from the noun that follows.
Case C: Some phrases show a genuinely 4 _____, since only a handful of words can grammatically or naturally complete them, unlike an 5 _____ where many nouns pair naturally.
Case D: 'By and large' functions as a 6 _____, a phrase learned and used as a single 7 _____ rather than assembled word by word.
Case E: Researchers noted that 'commit' displays negative 8 _____, typically co-occurring with words denoting crime or wrongdoing.
Case F: A word's 9 _____ can be surprisingly narrow, limiting which partners sound natural, and mastering these patterns strongly affects a learner's overall 10 _____.

5 Read the text and answer the questions briefly.

Semantic prosody and hidden meaning

Corpus linguists studying large collections of authentic language have identified semantic prosody, the tendency of certain words to habitually co-occur with words carrying a particular evaluative association, positive or negative, even when the word itself appears superficially neutral. The verb 'cause', for instance, overwhelmingly collocates with negative outcomes such as damage, problems or delay, rarely appearing with positive nouns despite no obvious semantic restriction preventing 'cause happiness' or similar combinations. This subtle patterning often escapes conscious awareness among native speakers, yet learners who violate these unwritten conventions, producing grammatically correct but pragmatically odd combinations, can sound distinctly non-native even while making no identifiable grammatical error.

1 What have corpus linguists identified through studying large collections of authentic language? ___
2 What is semantic prosody? _____
3 Give the example used to illustrate this in the text. _____
4 What prevents 'cause happiness' from being commonly used, according to the text? _____
5 Why does this subtle patterning often escape conscious awareness among native speakers? _____

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6 What can happen to learners who violate these unwritten conventions? _____

6 **Rewrite each sentence using the word in capitals. Do not change the meaning.**

1 The word habitually paired with negative outcomes. SEMANTIC PROSODY _____

2 The verb's meaning came mostly from the noun that followed it. DELEXICALISED VERB _____

3 The phrase could only combine naturally with a few words. RESTRICTED COLLOCATION _____

4 The multi-word phrase was learned and used as a single unit. LEXICAL CHUNK _____

OVER TO YOU

Write a 120-150 word account analysing how semantic prosody shapes natural word choice, distinguishing observation from linguistic theory.

[ ] Use at least twelve target expressions. [ ] Control connotation carefully. [ ] Avoid unsupported assumptions.

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ANSWER KEY

1 Precise terms

1 a 2 b 3 c 4 d 5 e 6 f 7 g 8 h 9 i 10 j

2 Connotation

1 collocation 2 fixed expression 3 lexical chunk 4 semantic prosody 5 delexicalised verb 6 restricted collocation 7 open collocation 8 idiomaticity

3 Collocations

1 collocation 2 semantic 3 delexicalised 4 expression 5 chunk 6 range 7 collocation 8 idiomaticity

4 Case notes

1 collocation 2 collocate 3 delexicalised verb 4 restricted collocation 5 open collocation
6 fixed expression 7 lexical chunk 8 semantic prosody 9 collocational range 10 idiomaticity

5 Reading - suggested answers

1 Semantic prosody.
2 The tendency of certain words to habitually co-occur with words carrying a particular evaluative association, even when the word itself appears neutral.
3 'Cause' overwhelmingly collocating with negative outcomes such as damage, problems or delay.
4 No obvious semantic restriction prevents it; it's purely conventional patterning.
5 Because native speakers absorb it unconsciously.
6 They can sound distinctly non-native even while making no identifiable grammatical error.

6 Rewriting - possible answers

1 The word showed semantic prosody. 2 The verb was delexicalised.
3 It was a restricted collocation. 4 It was a lexical chunk.

Over to you

Answers will vary. Check lexical precision, appropriate connotation and separation of fact from inference.