

Vocabulary Lesson Plan: Collocations

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Revised Collocation Activity “Word Partners” (with Scaffolding)

Lesson Overview

Target Skill:

Vocabulary — identifying and using common collocations

Class Level:

Intermediate

Time:

35–40 minutes

Activity Objectives

- Students will be able to identify common collocations in a written text
- Students will be able to match words with their most natural collocates
- Students will be able to use collocations correctly in their own sentences

Materials

- A short reading passage (newspaper article or short story) containing several target collocations
- Pre-made collocation word cards (one set per pair or group of students) printed and cut out before class
- Whiteboard and markers
- Timer (optional, for the competitive element)
- Collocation anchor chart displayed at the front of the room (see Scaffolding 1)
- Sentence frame handout for the production activity (see Scaffolding 4)

Scaffolding Overview

Four scaffolding strategies have been embedded into this lesson to support intermediate learners in accessing, processing, and producing collocations. Each scaffold is temporary and should be gradually reduced as students gain confidence.

Procedure

1. Warm Up (5 minutes)

Write two sentences on the board, one using a natural collocation (e.g., make a decision) and one using an unnatural combination (e.g., do a decision). Ask students which sounds more natural and why. Use this to introduce the concept of collocations.

Example:

Before the lesson begins, display a large anchor chart on the board titled 'Collocations = Words That Go Together.' Include 3–4 clear examples with a simple formula: [Verb + Noun], [Adjective + Noun]. For instance: make + a decision, heavy + rain, fast + food. Leave the chart visible throughout the entire lesson so students can refer to it at any point.

Why this helps:

Intermediate learners often understand new concepts in the moment but forget as the lesson continues. With a permanent visual students can glance at the chart and remember the topic and stay on track. This is especially helpful during the reading and card game activities where students are actively processing new language.

2. Introduction (5 minutes)

Briefly explain that collocations are words that naturally and frequently appear together in English. Give a few examples, such as heavy rain, fast food, and making a mistake. Emphasize that collocations are not about grammar rules but about natural usage.

Example:

During the introduction, model your own thinking process aloud using one collocation as an example. Say something like: 'When I hear the word heavy, I ask myself what things can be heavy? Heavy rain sounds natural. Heavy water? That sounds strange. So, heavy rain goes together; they collocate.' Then invite students to try the same thinking with one more example before they attempt the reading activity independently.

Why this helps:

Think-alouds make the invisible visible. Intermediate students often know that a phrase sounds wrong but cannot explain why they lack the metacognitive language to evaluate collocations. By narrating your reasoning, you demonstrate the process of noticing and testing word combinations, not just the answer. This gives students a concrete mental strategy they can apply independently during the reading activity and the card game, building transferable skills rather than just pattern recognition.

3. Reading Activity (10 minutes)

Distribute the short reading passage. Ask students to read through it and underline any word combinations they think go together naturally. Go over their answers as a class and highlight the target collocations on the board.

Example:

Before students read independently, read the first paragraph aloud as a class and annotate one collocation together. Use a specific color or symbol (e.g., underlining verb+noun collocations in

blue and adjective+noun collocations in orange). Give students a key at the top of their handout: blue = verb + noun, orange = adjective + noun. Students then continue annotating the rest of the passage on their own using the same system.

Why this helps:

Open-ended tasks like 'underline words that go together' can be overwhelming for intermediate learners because the criteria are unclear. Color coding gives students a concrete sorting system that breaks the task into two manageable categories. It also directs their attention to the grammatical patterns underlying collocations, helping them notice that many collocations follow predictable structures. This reduces anxiety and increases confidence before the competitive card game that follows.

4. Card Matching Game (10 minutes)

Divide students into pairs or small groups and distribute one set of word cards to each group. The cards are shuffled and spread face down on the desk like a memory game. Students take turns flipping over two cards at a time, trying to find a natural collocation pair (e.g., heavy + rain, make + a decision). If the two cards form a correct collocation, the student keeps the pair and takes another turn. If they do not match, the cards are flipped back over, and it is the next student's turn. The student with the most matched pairs at the end wins.

For a faster-paced version, all cards can be placed face up, and teams race to match all the collocations correctly before the other team.

5. Production Activity (5–10 minutes)

Ask students to choose 3 collocations from the card matching game and write their own original sentences using each one. Ask a few students to share their sentences with the class and provide feedback.

Example:

Provide a printed or displayed handout with optional sentence frames for students to use during the production activity. For example: 'Every morning, I usually ____.' / 'Yesterday, my friend decided to ____.' / 'It is important to ____ because ____.' Students choose a frame that fits their collocation or write their own sentence if they feel confident enough to do so without support.

Why this helps:

The jump from recognizing collocations to producing them independently is a significant one for intermediate learners. Sentence frames lower the barrier by removing the burden of constructing a full sentence from scratch, allowing students to focus their cognitive energy on using the collocation correctly. Crucially, the frames are optional; stronger students are encouraged to write freely, making this a differentiated support rather than a limitation. This also makes the activity more inclusive, as students with lower confidence can participate meaningfully without being left behind.

6. Wrap Up (5 minutes)

Review the target collocations from the lesson. Ask students to recall one collocation they found easiest to remember and one they want to practice more. Record student responses on the board as a quick formative check.

Sample Reading Passage: A Busy Day

Sarah woke up early on Monday morning and decided to choose her future career. She paid attention to a job advertisement she had seen the week before and thought it sounded perfect. She took a break from her usual routine and sat down at the kitchen table with a strong cup of coffee to think it over. Outside, it had started to rain heavily, so she was glad she had decided to stay inside. She picked up her phone to advise her friend Emma, who was also looking for a new job. After their conversation, Sarah realized she needed to do her homework and research the company before applying. She spent the rest of the morning reading about the company and paid close attention to every detail. By lunchtime, she was feeling hungry, so she stopped at a fast-food restaurant near her house. On her way home, she realized she had missed an opportunity to pick up her dry cleaning, so she made a mental note to go back later. When she finally got home, she caught a cold from being out in the rain without her jacket. She made herself a hot cup of tea, took a break, and decided to finish her application the next morning, feeling refreshed and ready to go.

Sample Word Cards

Print and cut out one set per pair or group. For the memory game version, place face down. For the speed version, place face up.

Card A	Card B
heavy	rain
make	a decision
do	homework
fast	food
pay	attention
take	a break
strong	coffee
catch	a cold
miss	an opportunity
give	advice

I found these links helpful when making the lesson plan and understanding how to teach collocations.

<https://eflmagazine.com/how-to-teach-collocations-the-sure-fire-way/>

<https://www.englishclub.com/vocabulary/collocations.php>