

## **Lesson Plan: Collocations & fixed expressions to sound more natural**

**Level:** Advanced (C1–C2)

**Time:** 60–90 minutes

**Lexical Focus:** Collocations, fixed and semi-fixed expressions

**Skills:** Vocabulary accuracy, speaking, editing, noticing patterns

### **Objectives**

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Define collocations and fixed expressions.
2. Distinguish between **free combinations, collocations, and fixed expressions.**
3. Recognize why some word combinations sound “wrong” despite being grammatically correct.
4. Produce natural-sounding English using appropriate collocations for different registers.

### **Materials**

- Board / slides
- Handout with examples
- Short authentic text (news article, opinion piece, academic excerpt)
- Optional: collocation dictionaries or corpus screenshots

## 1. Warm-Up (10 minutes): What Sounds Wrong?

Write on the board:

A) **Make** a decision  
B) **Do** a decision

A) **Strong** coffee  
B) **Powerful** coffee

Ask students:

- Which sound natural?
- Why can't we explain it with grammar rules?

Students discuss in pairs, then share.

### Teacher note:

Elicit the idea that English prefers **habitual word partnerships**, not logical ones.

## 2. Clarifying the concepts (10 minutes)

Introduce the **collocation spectrum**:

### 1. Free combinations

Meaning is literal; many options possible.

buy a book / buy a car / buy time

### 2. Collocations

Words that commonly appear together.

make a mistake  
heavy rain  
deeply concerned

### 3. Fixed / Semi-fixed expressions

Little or no variation allowed.

by and large  
at the end of the day  
the sooner, the better

Highlight:

- Fixed expressions behave like **single lexical units**.
- Changing one word often breaks naturalness.

### 3. Core focus: Types of collocations (20 minutes)

#### A. Verb–noun collocations

*make progress*  
*reach a conclusion*  
*pose a threat*

Contrast with incorrect or awkward versions.

#### B. Adjective–noun collocations

*strong argument*  
*heated debate*  
*growing concern*

Explain how meaning shifts subtly:

- *strong rain* 
- *heavy rain* 

#### C. Adverb–adjective collocations (advanced)

*highly unlikely*  
*deeply offensive*  
*painfully obvious*

Point out that *very* is often replaced in advanced English.

#### D. Fixed & semi-fixed expressions

Examples:

- **Fixed:** *by and large, once and for all*

- **Semi-fixed:** *It's not so much X as Y*

Discuss:

- Which words can change and which cannot?

## 4. Controlled practice (15 minutes)

### Task 1: Choose the natural option

1. commit / do / make a crime
2. absolutely / very / strongly exhausted
3. serious / heavy / big mistake
4. raise / increase / grow awareness

Students justify their choices.

### Task 2: Error correction

Correct the collocation errors:

*The company did a serious effort to solve the problem.*

(Expected: *made a serious effort*)

## 5. Advanced practice: meaning & register (15 minutes)

Give pairs two options:

- A) a **big** problem
- B) a **major** problem

Students discuss:

- Which is more formal?
- Which would you use in:
  - An academic essay?
  - A conversation?

- A news report?

Repeat with:

- *totally wrong* vs. *fundamentally flawed*
- *very important* vs. *of vital importance*

## 6. Production task (15 minutes)

### Option A: Collocation upgrade

Give students a basic paragraph and ask them to improve it.

Original:

The situation is very bad and makes many problems.

Improved:

The situation is **extremely serious** and **poses numerous challenges**.

### Option B: Speaking

Students describe:

- A current issue
- A past experience
- A debate topic

Rule:

- Use at least **5 strong collocations or fixed expressions**

Peers listen and note good usage.

## 7. Wrap-Up & Reflection (5 minutes)

Discuss:

- Why native-like English relies more on vocabulary partnerships than grammar

- Why collocation errors are more noticeable than tense errors at advanced levels

### **Key takeaway for students:**

**Fluency is not about knowing more words — it's about knowing which words belong together.**

### **Optional homework**

- Keep a **collocation notebook** organized by key words.
- Extract collocations from a news article and classify them.
- Rewrite an old essay focusing only on collocation improvement.