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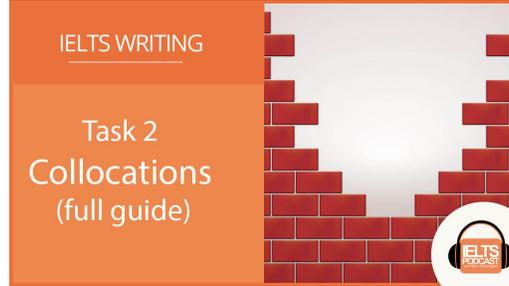
Task 2
Collocations
(full guide)

Ben: Hello there, IELTS students. Welcome to IELTS podcast. You no longer have to worry, fret, or panic about IELTS because we are here to guide you through this test jungle. Enjoy these IELTS tutorials and if you need more help or want to access the famous online course, you can visit us at ieltspodcast.com.

INTRODUCTION

Ellen: Hi, everybody. This is Ellen and today I have a tutorial for you **dealing with writing particularly task 2 writing** once again. I want to talk about one of the four criteria, which is lexical resource. Within lexical resource, if you look at the band descriptors you can see that it has a number of different bullets that say what is expected at each band score.

Right now, for example, I'm looking at the band descriptors for band 8 and it says things like wide range of vocabulary, precise meanings, uncommon lexical items, and then it says something about collocations and it talks about spelling. So, you can see that a lot goes into your band score for lexical resource.

So, today what I want to do is talk about one of those areas specifically and the area that I'm going to talk about is **collocations**. I know that a lot of you really go to great lengths to improve your vocabulary and learn high-level words; really advanced vocabulary and you learn them and

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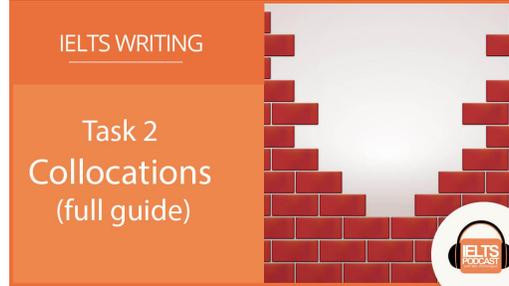
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**Task 2
Collocations
(full guide)**

you memorize them and you write them and that's great, but learning high-level less common words is only part of the puzzle. **There are more things that you have to do in order to do well in lexical resource, which is where collocations come in.**

WHAT IS COLLOCATION?

So first, we need to talk about what a collocation is. **Collocations are essentially combinations of words that don't go together because of some sort of specific grammar rule, but just through use over time words create a predictable connection.** So, we're just used to hearing certain words go together.

It's funny because when you hear a wrong collocation you know it right away, but again it's something that a lot of IELTS test takers don't really focus on i.e. word combinations, but it's really very important in order to do well. Like I said, **it's something that when it's wrong you'll notice it, when it's right you may not notice it or you may if it's something really uncommon or something that seems really more advanced, but it is really important when you're both speaking and, of course, when you're writing task 2.**
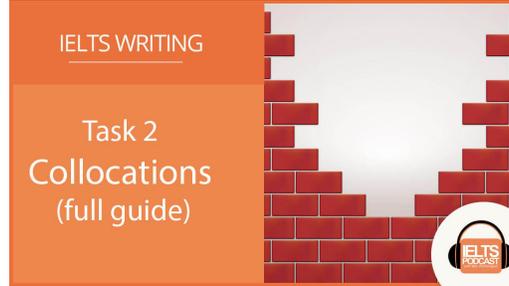
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Task 2
Collocations
(full guide)

TYPES AND EXAMPLES OF COLLOCATIONS

So, let's go into different collocations, for example. First of all, **we've got a couple of different types of collocation**s. So, there are **lexical collocations where i**t's combinations of words like **an adverb and an adjective, a**n **adjective and a noun**. You'll know all of these when you hear them. For example, let's think about the word combination very interesting. This is really very basic. We've all heard this before.

How often have you ever heard somebody say oh, that is **extremely interesting**? Not really. These don't really collocate together. So, they don't form a kind of predictable connection as we already said, but **very interesting** just kind of rolls of the tongue. When you hear it you know it sounds natural.
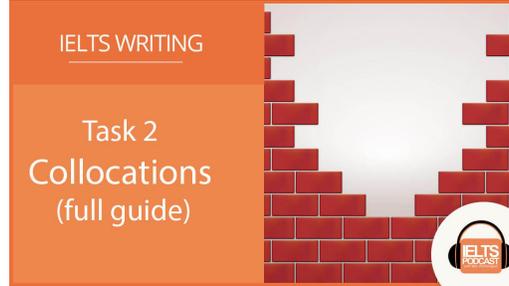
Another example is **strong traffic**. Have you ever heard anybody ever say that ever? Probably not because we don't call it strong traffic; instead we say **heavy traffic**. This is another example of a collocation. These are both pretty basic collocations, all right? I will call them probably lower-level collocations.

IELTS WRITING

Task 2
Collocations
(full guide)

Let's think about another collocation which is a little more advanced and this might be really useful to you in your IELTS essays. For example, we have **confront issues**. That's a higher-level collocation because confront goes with issues. You would never hear or read somebody write the government has to confront troubles because confront and troubles just don't collocate whereas confront issues they do collocate.

Now, another type of collocation that we have is with **grammatical words**. So, for example, you could have verbs with prepositions or adjectives with prepositions. For example, we would often hear contribute to, okay? For example, let's see. **Fossil fuel** emissions contribute to air pollution, but you would never say that fossil fuel emissions contribute on air pollution because these two words collocate; contribute to.

Another one is with an **adjective and a preposition** like with the word **worried**. So, **you would say people worry about the future of our planet. They would never say people are worried of the future**, all right? These are also examples of collocations. You probably think they fall under grammar, but not really so much. This is really more of a lexical issue. So, your ability to use these kinds of things really would fall under lexical resource and affect your vocabulary score.
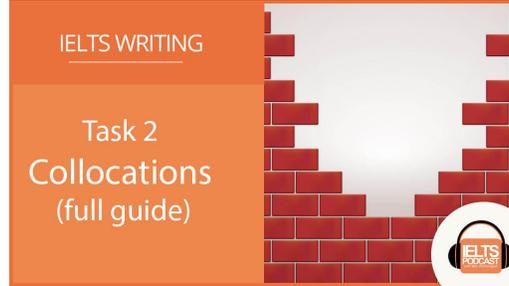
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Task 2
Collocations
(full guide)

HOW DO YOU LEARN THESE COLLOCATIONS?

So, we've talked about some different types of collocations. Now, the question is well, how do you learn these and what kind of things should you learn for writing? The first thing I'm going to address is the kind of things you should learn.

I have found lots of IELTS students really stress out about vocabulary and they say oh, you know I need to improve my vocabulary and how can I improve my vocabulary? What kind of resources should I learn? The lists of words are so endless. Yes, that's true, but you don't really need to swallow the dictionary in order to do well for IELTS.

What you need to do is study smarter, not harder. What do I mean? I mean there are tons of resources out there to equip you with the vocabulary you need to do well in IELTS and this is not just about collocations. This is about lexical resource in general.

For example, there are academic word lists available all over the internet and these are not topic-specific. So, regardless of the type of essay you get or the essay question, a lot of the words that you will find in these academic lists are very, very, very useful.
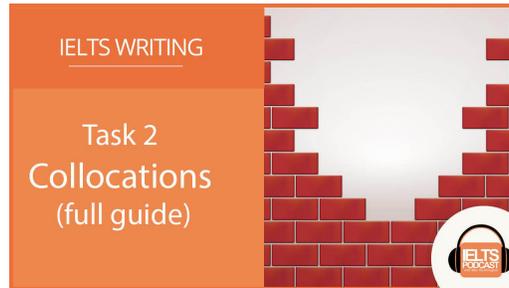

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Now, in addition to the academic word lists, there are also **academic collocation lists** and what a great resource this is because you get a lot of the same words, but then you see what they collocate with and we're going to talk about some of those in just a minute.

The other thing that you need to do, of course, which you probably have already done is really **familiarize yourself with topic vocabulary**. We all know what some of the main topics that come up over and over in IELTS are. **We've got things like the environment, society, crime, education, children, family, just to name a few.**

So, if you can find good resources on those and believe me they are out there; there're books, there're resources on the internet. There are tons of things you can find to help you with this. That's a good starting point, but after you get the topic vocabulary, you need to also work on, as I said, the academic vocabulary which you can find in places like the academic word list and also academic collocations. So, that's what I want to spend a few minutes talking about now.

As I said, they are on the internet, so you can look them up and you can see what sorts of things you think are useful for you to learn. They are divided in a couple of different ways. One really useful way I have found them is just **alphabetically**, okay?

For example, we have words like **acceptable**. What word collocates with acceptable? There are a handful. We say, for example, that something is socially acceptable or we say that an idea is
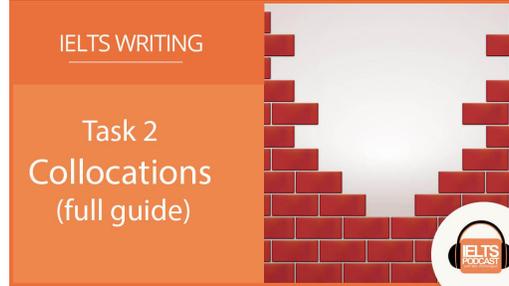
generally accepted. This collocates. You would never say that something is completely accepted. It just sounds unnatural.

Another example that we can refer to is something like **adversely affect**. This is a great collocation to use for your essays. That something adversely affects the environment, for example, or something adversely affects our city centers and the quality of life there. Now, those-- that's a lovely collocation, but you would never say, for example, that something negatively affects. It just doesn't sound right.

On the other hand, you could say that something has a **negative effect** or you could say that something has an **adverse effect**. These are collocations and these are examples of the kinds of things you want to be using in your writing in order to improve your lexical resource score.

Another really useful collocation for IELTS writing is with the word **awareness**. For example, we can say that going back to this pollution example that I just used, you could say that the government must **increase awareness**. You would never say that the government must lift awareness because it's just not a collocation. So, you could say that the government must **increase awareness** or you could say the government must **raise awareness**. These are some examples of collocations with the word awareness.

Now, if you've ever heard any of my essay corrections or if you've ever heard some of my other podcasts that I have done for ieltspodcast.com you know already that there are some words I
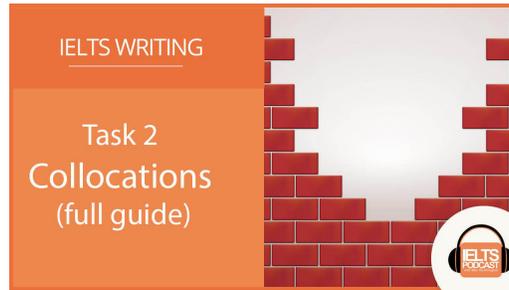
IELTS WRITING

Task 2
Collocations
(full guide)

never want to see in IELTS essays. So, a couple of those words are big and small. They really have no place in an IELTS essay as far as I'm concerned if you are aiming to get anything over a 6.

So, let's say you wanted to use the word change in your essay. You definitely don't want to use something like this would bring about a big change in our city centers, okay? You don't want to say that. What a basic, basic word. Instead what you could say is that something would bring about a fundamental change to our urban centers or you could say that this measure would bring about a major change to our urban centers and it sounds so much more sophisticated, such a higher-level of language when you use expressions like this.

So, another thing that I want to point out is how **just a couple of basic collocations can really completely change the level of a sentence and really impress an examiner.** Let's pretend that we've got this essay which is talking about the problems and solutions of pollution in our cities, which is a pretty common topic.

It's possible that in your essay you might write something like governments must make a plan to fix pollution. Okay. No problems. It's clear. It gives suggestion that governments have to have some sort of a plan and they have to solve the problem of pollution. No problems, right? Perfect. Well, it's fine.

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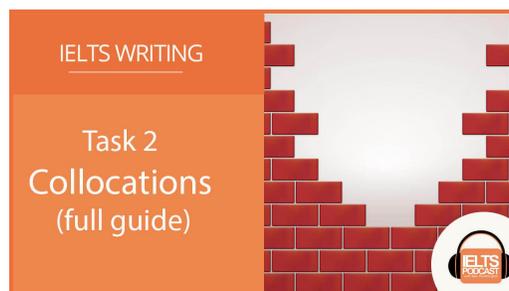
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Task 2
Collocations
(full guide)

It's not perfect, but it does the job. It gets the message across, but look what you could do with that. Instead of make a plan, you could say that governments need to develop a strategy. Then instead of saying to fix pollution or to solve pollution, look what else you could say. You could say combat the issue of pollution.

So, instead of having a sentence like governments must make a plan to solve pollution, you could say governments need to develop a strategy to combat the issue of pollution and it just takes the sentence so many levels higher.

I want to give you another example of how collocations can improve your writing using the word develop again. Let's say in this essay about **pollution** you have a sentence like governments need to improve public transport in order to reduce pollution. Fine. No problem. Great, right?

Well, it's good, but look what you could do instead. You could say further development is needed to improve public transport and what you've done here is you've used this nice collocation further development and then you've also used passive voice. So, it's showing that you can both use higher-level vocabulary and more advanced grammatical structures. So, you're really killing two birds with one stone here.

Now again, you realize that we're not reinventing the wheel. We're just taking a couple of things, both grammatically and lexically, to really improve the level of your writing. Now, one

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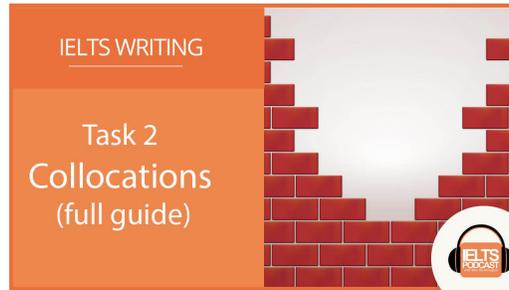Click here for IELTS Materials (free)

word that I see really frequently with IELTS students it seems to be one of the most beloved words I would have to say for IELTS test takers is the word impact.

First of all, I see a lot of people use it in the plural although this seems a little strange. We're really used to seeing it most often as a singular, but I want to talk about some of the words that collocate really nicely with impact because I know you're all going to use it anyway. At least let's try and use some higher-level collocations to make it really stand out and give it more well, impact.

So, you could say that something has an enormous impact or something has made a significant impact. Something has had profound impact or perhaps let's go back to this idea of pollution and things that governments should do. You could say that I believe such a measure would have little impact on pollution levels in our city. There are lots of different words that collocate with impact and they collocate pretty strongly. You're used to seeing them together and they feel like they flow really naturally.

ACADEMIC WRITING FOR TASK 2

All right. So, we talked about some collocations. I gave you some suggestions on what kinds of collocations would really fit into academic writing for task 2 really nicely. Now, I say academic
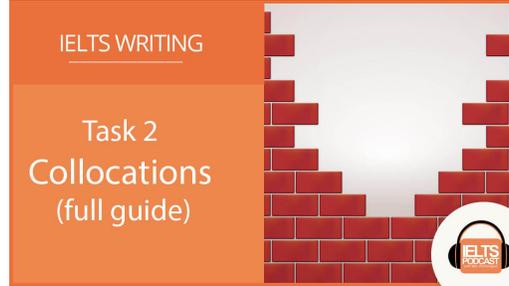
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Task 2
Collocations
(full guide)

writing because task 2 is somewhat academic. Whether it's general or academic IELTS it doesn't matter. The style of writing is fairly academic, but what I want to talk about now is where you can locate these resources and what kinds of resources you can use in order to improve your database of collocations.

First of all, there are some books out there that are wonderful, that not only teach collocations they also give you **exercises to use them and to practice them**. These are a great resource if you're interested in self-study. So definitely, I recommend that.

Another thing I really recommend is **looking at collocations online**. Like I said, they are available. There is something called the academic collocations list. It's great. It's not the only list out there though. All you need to do is type into your search engine advanced collocations and you'll find tons of resources on where you can learn different collocations.

Another great resource for you to improve your collocations is a **good dictionary**. When you look up a word, it's not enough to only learn the meaning of the word. What's also really important is to see the words that are used around that word.

So, sometimes those are collocations, sometimes it's just context or grammar and so forth, but this is really important and like I said before, you don't really know a word unless you know the other words that go with it and how it is used. So, referring to a dictionary you'll see that there

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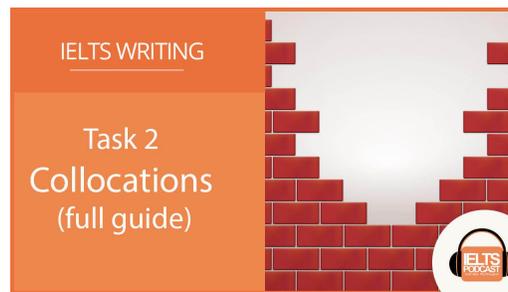Click here for IELTS Materials (free)

are example sentences and a lot of times those example sentences will show you some collocations.

Another thing that I often recommend to students is **literally typing into their search engine the word they are interested and writing in a sentence**. So say, for example, you're trying to learn how to use the word impact. Just type into your search engine impact in a sentence and you will be amazed at the resources that are out there for you to learn how impact has been used in sentences by other writers.

Now, assuming that the people using these are either native speakers or people who use English to an advanced level, you can pretty much be sure that you are getting some good resources. Like I said, there are some websites out there that focus just on this; how words are used in a sentence.

Another great resource for you to learn some more collocations is, of course, **podcasts**. So, when you listen to speakers, not only myself but other speakers on any topic really that interests you at all, you can **learn tons of collocations from the things that they say that come out naturally**. Also, **TEDx talks** are fantastic for this as well. Lots of collocations and of course, **newspapers are a wonderful resource**. There are a number of, obviously, physical newspapers, but also online versions where you can gain really, really wonderful insight and information and see how these words are actually used together, not just seeing them kind of in a theoretical

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sort of way, but actually in practice; how advanced users of English who basically use English for their job, how they're expressing these ideas and how they use collocations to do that.

Okay, so in this podcast we talked a lot about collocations. We talked about the different types of collocations, things that make collocations and things that definitely don't make collocations and how you can use collocations in your writing. Also, what sorts of resources you can use in order to improve your mental database of collocations.

I hope you found all this information useful. Of course, if you sign up to the online course you'll get information like this and much, much, much more, so I definitely recommend checking that out. See if the course is something you can sign up for. We would love to have you on it. So, till the next time, good luck with your IELTS preparation.

Female Voice: Thanks for listening to ieltspodcast.com

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