

We Love IELTS

All you need for IELTS Success podcast

Series 2: Episode 4: How to learn collocations for IELTS

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00:00

LE: Hello there and welcome to the latest episode of our We Love IELTS podcast. As those who've listened to our previous episodes are aware, this podcast is for those taking the IELTS test. Every episode we're joined by experts from the world of IELTS to help you prepare for your test. We know preparing for IELTS can be challenging, which is why we're here to help.

00:30

My name is Liz and today I'm delighted to once again be joined by IELTS teachers, Emma Cosgrave and Liz Marqueiro. In this episode, they're discussing collocations, which I know is a popular topic with IELTS test takers. So I look forward to hearing more over to you.

00:45

Liz: Okay, hi, it's Liz and Emma here again. And yes, as mentioned before, we're going to be talking about collocations. What are these things? Well, I'll explain in a minute.

00:57

My students are always telling me, Liz, I really need to learn more vocabulary. My vocabulary is not good enough, I need to learn more words. And I always try and convince my students that it's not a long list of words that you need to learn. Basically, a word, vocabulary does not exist on its own. Vocabulary is always connected to other words in a sentence. So, for example, I'm interested in collocations, the word interested does not live on its own. It's connected really closely to in, I'm interested in. Those two words always appear together in this context, always. This is called a strong collocation. So basically, collocations are any nouns, verbs prepositions that go with that piece of vocabulary that you're looking at. Is that clear Emma?

01:55

Emma: Yes, I think so. So basically, whenever you're learning a new word, it's no good to just learn a word in isolation. You have to learn the language that goes around that word. Because you can make some terrible mistakes, if you get the wrong words around it.



02:14

Liz: Yeah, exactly. Like for example, if I tell you that today it's raining really heavily or there's heavy rain here today. The heavy rain is a really strong collocation. You couldn't possibly say that it's strong rain, or big rain. That doesn't work. It's heavy rain. This is called a strong collocation because you can't really use any other words there together at all.

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So we've got strong collocations and then you've got very weak collocations. And weak collocations aren't really that important, because those are the ones that you come across mostly from day to day.

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But when learning vocabulary, I cannot stress how important it is to not learn just one word. Look at the sentence and see what word comes after it. What words come before it? Do they go together? And if so, learn those words as a chunk, not as one word.

03:11

Emma: When you're looking at words in a dictionary, if you use a learner's dictionary, it can be helpful content. There are plenty like the Cambridge English dictionary online available for everyone to use. And in the dictionary you should be able to see what words collocate together. When you read the example sentences, that's a really good place to look for collocations.

03:35

Liz: Absolutely, and all dictionaries will give you collocations. They don't just give you that one word. So for example, if you're looking up the word agree, you will see the word collocates or goes with 'with' so you agree with someone always, strong collocation. You agree with someone and you agree on something. So those words are collocations and the dictionary will always give you that information. You're right.

04:02

Emma: This is an argument for using an English to English dictionary, rather than a bilingual dictionary, which may just give you a translation, but none of the extra information. So if you're if you are aiming to score a high, get a high band score, so a six a 6.5, or seven those kinds of IELTS band scores, then you need to be using a monolingual dictionary, you need to be thinking about this kind of collocations, how to use words in context.

04:33

Liz: Yes.

04:33

Emma: And these are things that will help you to get that higher band score.

04:38



Liz: Absolutely, you should not, if you're aiming to get a band six and above, you should not be using a bilingual dictionary, it will not help you at all. You need to be using an English dictionary which will show you these collocations.

05:02

Liz: We're kind of talking about collocations like this, but should we give some examples do you think Emma?

05:07

Emma: Yeah, okay, so let's, we're going to take some examples from the IELTS Common Mistakes, band 6.0 to 7.0. So these are high level mistakes. But these are also mistakes that Liz and I have heard throughout our time teaching, examining. So they're real mistakes. So we're looking at verb collocations. So I'm going to give you a sentence Liz and then could you please correct my language?

05:37

Liz: Okay, can I just make it clear? So I'm listening out for verbs plus nouns. So the verbs and nouns that go together, is that correct?

05:47

Emma: Correct. And I'm going to give you an example that is a common mistake, made by IELTS test takers. And if you could correct it, that would be great. Thank you.

05:58

Liz: Okay. All right, let's, let's start, shall we?

06:01

Emma: Okay, so I think the team have done progress this season.

06:06

Liz: Okay, this is a very common mistake. So you said done progress. So the verb that collocates that goes with progress is not do, but make. So the team has made or the team have made progress.

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Emma: Okay. And my next sentence, it is important to do a good first impression.

06:32

Liz: Okay, so you don't do an impression, you make an impression. So it's important to make a good first impression.

06:43

Emma: We believe we can do a difference to children's lives.



06:48

Liz: I'm sure you do believe that, but you don't do a difference, you make a difference.

06:54

Emma: And the system can be improved to have it more effective.

07:00

Liz: Okay, so you make something more effective, not do.

07:06

Emma: Okay, let me think of another one. So this incident will make a negative effect on tourism.

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Liz: Okay, so now you've used make with effect, and we don't make an effect, you have an effect on something. So this incident will have a negative effect on tourism.

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Emma: Okay, so that's quite confusing, because we just did an example that said the system can be improved to make it more effective.

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Liz: Yes.

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Emma: But we have a negative effect on something.

07:42

Liz: Yes.

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Emma: So it's easy to see how people get confused isn't it with this stuff?

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Liz: Absolutely. It really is. But my advice would be you have to learn them. You really just have to learn them.

08:00

Emma: There are no shortcuts.

08:01

Liz: No, sometimes you can you know that it just sounds wrong but you're not really sure why. But yes, it's really important that you learn these and they do get easier with time, the more you listen in English, and the more you read in English, the easier it gets to pick these out, I think. Have you got any more examples for me?

08:22

Emma: I do actually, yeah. So retired people take more time to spend on their hobbies.

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Liz: So they take more time? Does that mean they're slow?

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Emma: No.

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Liz: Okay. So do you mean that because they are retired and no longer working they have more time?

08:42

Emma: That's it, yes. They have more time to spend on their hobbies.

08:46

Liz: Okay, so the collocation there is have time to do something. Any others? Have you got one more?

08:53

Emma: Okay, tea is believed to give health benefits.

08:58

Liz: Right so it doesn't give health benefits, it has health benefits. So the collocation there is to have an advantage or have a benefit to you.

09:11

Emma: Okay, can I do another one?

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Liz: Yes, you can.

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Emma: Okay, so another example I've got here is he didn't do any explanation.

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Liz: Okay, so you don't do an explanation, you give an explanation. So he didn't give any explanation with the correct collocation there.

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Emma: So, my next one, make her a chance to explain first.

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Liz: Yeah, no you're not doing that you are giving her a chance to explain first, so you give someone a chance. That's the collocation.

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Emma: Okay, so I think this is my second to last one.

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Liz: Okay.

09:53

Emma: There are several problems we need to handle with.

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Liz: Okay, that's really interesting because handle, we use the verb handle sometimes when we're talking about situations and problems, but not in this context. So you deal with a problem or with a situation. So there are several problems we need to deal with.

10:18

Emma: Okay, so we could handle a problem without the with, couldn't we?

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Liz: Yeah

10:25

Emma: So we deal with a problem or we handle a problem

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Liz: Exactly. I could tell you, you handled that really well. Or you dealt with that really well.

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Emma: Okay. Okay. So my very last one, she proved that he didn't do the crime.

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Liz: Ah, this is a very common mistake. So you don't do a crime, you commit a crime. It's very strong collocation, commit a crime.

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Emma: Okay, so, these are all verb collocations that come up in high level IELTS work.



11:11

Liz: Yeah.

11:12

Emma: And we've talked about how to learn collocations and the importance of learning collocations. Is there anything, any other advice you would give the candidates, IELTS candidates?

11:24

Liz: Yeah, so what I always say is, there are two things you could do. As I've mentioned before, you need to listen to as much English as possible. So listen to the radio, listen, watch your favourite movie. Anything that you're interested in, listen to it in English. And as you're listening, give yourself a challenge. See if you can pick out two or three collocations. And maybe just write them down or you know, put them on your phone while you're watching your movie. Just go oh, those three words go together and make a note of it like that. And when you're reading, definitely have a highlighter. So just to highlight when you're reading a sentence, look at that one word, maybe it's a new piece of vocabulary that you've come across. But look at the sentence and see, does it link to another word? Does it go with another word? Check in your dictionary to see if it's a collocation or not. So reading and listening is a great way to improve your vocabulary and expand your vocabulary by using collocations.

12:28

Emma: Brilliant, and I would highly recommend the blog post by Liz on the We Love IELTS website. It's called 'How to improve your vocabulary using collocations'. And also the Vocabulary for IELTS Advanced book is a really good source of information.

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Liz: Yeah, they have lots of collocation tips in there.

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Emma: And of course, we took some of our examples today from the Common Mistakes in IELTS band six to seven book. So any of these resources will be really useful and to you in your journey preparing for IELTS.

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Liz: Absolutely. Well, I hope Emma I haven't bored you with my love of collocations.

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Emma: I think I love them as much as you do now Liz.

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Liz: Good, that's good. And we hope that the listeners also have enjoyed this and found it useful.

13:21

Emma: And we'll see you again soon, or we will speak to you again soon. Bye for now. Bye.



13:27

LE: Thank you. I'm really Liz. I'm sure the listeners found that really useful, I know that I did.

13:32

Don't forget you can find out more about other common mistakes made by test takers in the IELTS test in our previous episodes, available on all popular podcast channels.

13:41

And that's it for today. If you found the podcast useful, head over to our website, weloveielts.org. We'll include all the links from today's podcast in the show notes, including a link to our IELTS Common Mistakes book, and also Liz's blog post on collocations.

13:57

My thanks to Emma and Liz once again for all your help and advice. And thank you to you, the listener, for joining us today. If you've something that you'd like us to discuss in a future podcast, do get in touch on social, we'd love to hear your suggestions. You can find us on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Just search for We Love IELTS and that's it. Thank you very much. Bye bye.

