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Introduction

Welcome to *Keeping a Vocabulary Notebook*, the first in our new series: **Atlas Essentials: Essential Study Guides for Successful Language Learning**, from Atlas Language School in Dublin. These FREE downloadable study guides, will help you to make the most of the time you spend learning English. Our aim is to help you to help yourself, to take control of your studies, to use your time inside and outside class, to develop your skills and, ultimately to become the English speaker that you want to be.

These practical guides, written by experienced language teachers, are full of techniques and tips for how to improve your language learning.

In *Keeping a Vocabulary Notebook*, we discuss some reasons why vocabulary notebooks are necessary, how to notice and record vocabulary, how to organize your notebooks, and finally, how best to use them for revision – how to remember and reuse the vocabulary you learn.

So, why not get going on section one? We’re sure you’ll find it helpful.
Section 1: Vocabulary notebooks – Part 1

Many of you find English vocabulary difficult. To be honest, so do many teachers! There are SO many words and expressions in English. Sometimes it is difficult to know WHAT to record or even HOW to record them.

To make matters worse, English vocabulary doesn’t have simple rules like so many grammar items you learn in class.

English has thousands of words and word combinations, such as collocations, idioms and expressions. You can say a little with grammar, but you can say a lot more with words!

In this booklet we’re going to look at Vocabulary Notebooks. You will learn how to record words in your notebook and we will also show you ways to use excellent free online Dictionaries!
Rule No 1: Words, like people, need company
You must not see words as individuals. You must pay attention to combinations of words, i.e., collocations. There are several types of collocation:

a) **Verb + noun**: e.g. make a noise, have a party, take a tablet
b) **Adjective + noun**: e.g., strong accent, bright colour, heavy rain
c) **Verb + adverb** e.g. work hard, smiled softly
d) **Verb + preposition** (including *phrasal verbs*) e.g. talk about, burst into tears, filled with horror
e) **Fixed or semi-fixed expression** e.g. It seems to me that, It’s worth seeing/going to, sick and tired.

WHY are collocations so important? HOW will they improve my English?

1) Well, firstly, your speaking will improve e.g.

“I forgot my passport and *lost* the plane” *(miss the plane)*

**missed ✓**

“I’m sorry I’m late teacher. I hope I didn’t *lose* anything” *(miss class)*

**miss ✓**

(You can *lose* your pen or book but we say *miss* a class/lesson/lecture.)
2) Secondly, learning collocations will also improve your writing e.g.

“Many people **make** crimes every day. We need to **conclude** our crime problem soon”

We should say: **commit** crimes/ **solve** our crime problem.

Learning collocations will really help you to improve. Try it!

**HOW should I record and learn words?**

Most importantly, **NEVER** record a single word (e.g. “rest”). Write the other words that go with that word, i.e., its collocations: **take a rest**. Remember, words keep company. Is that Ok? Good!

**Some ideas for recording and using vocabulary:**

Here are a couple of sample vocabulary notebooks.

### Make/have: Verb-noun collocations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Make</th>
<th>have</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a mistake</td>
<td>a good time/fun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>money</td>
<td>lunch/a meal/breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a phone call</td>
<td>a cold/a broken leg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a decision</td>
<td>a party</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

e.g.: Anyone can **make** a mistake. My aim in life is to **make** money. I need to **make** a quick phone call. I can’t **make** a decision just yet. e.g.: we **had** a great time in Howth. I usually **have** breakfast at about 7am. Sarah’s got a **cold**/broken leg. We’re **having** a party on Saturday.
What’s next?
Now, it’s up to you. Look out for different types of collocation and record them in your notebook using some of the ideas above. You can find collocations anywhere – in class, in the street, at work, in a TV series, at the supermarket, so keep your eyes open!
In the last section we discussed some ways of recording collocations in your vocabulary notebook and asked you to give them a go. We made the point that words like the company of other words; that words like to hang out together. We looked at how words combine. In this section we’ll be focusing on patterns.
Rule No 2: Words follow patterns
As we have seen, collocation refers to the way words combine (heavy traffic, miss a plane, take a rest). However, we also need to pay attention to the grammatical patterns of words.

For example, verbs of perception, such as hear, notice, and see often have the pattern:

“to hear/notice/see somebody (sby) doing something (sth)”

e.g. I heard my neighbour making dinner last night.

When you look up the word “hear” in a good online Dictionary, such as Longman Dictionaries Online http://www.ldoceonline.com/, you will often see examples of HOW that word is used:

- Jenny could hear them arguing last night.
- Did you notice him leaving the Party last night?
- I heard someone screaming outside.
Using an Online Dictionary to find patterns

To make the most of a dictionary, there are two basic things you should do when you look up a word:

1. Write down the basic **pattern** the word takes, e.g. for “hear: to hear sby doing sth”.
2. Then you need to write **FULL examples** in your vocabulary notebook. It’s best to write a **personal** example as well, so you can **remember** it better, e.g. “I heard Miguel laughing at The Simpsons on TV.”

So try not to just copy the examples from the dictionary. Follow the pattern carefully, but make your **own** sentences, about **your** life, **your** thoughts and **your** feelings.
Remember: **examples are as important as definitions.** When you write a **FULL** sentence, you learn and practise using the prepositions and objects that are used with the words. For example: *He was laughing at the Simpsons on TV.*

Here’s a sample page from a student’s vocabulary notebook:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>hear sby doing sth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>e.g. Jenny could hear them arguing last night.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I heard someone screaming outside.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>notice sby doing sth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>e.g. I noticed Raul leaving the Party last night.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>notice to watch sby doing sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>see</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As we can see above:
- the meaning or use of a word (e.g. hear) can often determine the pattern it will follow:
  “**hear** sby **doing** sth”
- other verbs with similar or related meanings and uses often follow the same pattern:
  “**notice/hear/watch/see** sby **doing** sth”
In conclusion, learning a word means you should learn the **pattern** it takes. Then, you should learn **how to use** that pattern. This will really improve your written and spoken English, and it will help you with reading and listening, too. You’ll be paying attention to patterns (and, of course, collocations), rather than lonely little words that can’t do much on their own.

I know this sounds crazy, but words have grammar!

So get going and let’s hope you see or hear somebody doing something interesting very soon!
Section 2: How to Organize your Notebook

In the notebooks we use in class, we often write new words in alphabetical order, sometimes with a translation of that word into our first language, or maybe with an explanation in English. However, your Vocabulary Notebook should be organized more effectively. One way of doing this is by recording vocabulary – collocations and patterns etc. – by TOPIC. You can have separate sections for topics such as ‘Food’, ‘Work’, ‘Health’, ‘Money’, ‘Films’ and ‘Appearance’. This means that words and phrases that are used together in real life are kept together in the notebook.

What Topics might the following photographs be filed under?

Image taken by @thornburyscott, from ELTpics collection and shared under a Creative Commons 3.0 licence
For example, in the Films section, an Intermediate student wrote the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Film-related</th>
<th>Talking about films</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>shoot</td>
<td>The Beach was filmed on location in...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>edit</td>
<td>it is set in Thailand/the 1980s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>play a film</td>
<td>Michael Keaton was nominated for best Actor in Birdman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>star in review</td>
<td>I'll never forget the scene where Bruce Willis...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>review</td>
<td>The special effects in the Matrix were amazing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Describing a film**

- It's a gripping thriller. It really moved me.
- It's a hilarious romantic comedy. I couldn't stop laughing.
- The plot was a bit confusing. I couldn't follow it.
- I heard it's a fantastic film. The critics gave it rave reviews.
- It's an action-packed war film. Tom Hanks plays the lead character/role.

Language taken from *English Vocabulary Organiser: Film and cinema* pp 94-95
As you might have noticed, there are no strict rules about how you should record vocabulary. You have to find the way, or ways, that work for you. However, one important rule is NEVER write single words. Also, write complete and personalized examples – write examples that relate to you and your life, your thoughts, your memories etc.

Apart from topics, you can also organize pages according to:

a) SITUATIONS (in a hotel, in a restaurant)

---

**In a Restaurant**

---

**Customer requests**

- Could you tell me...
  - what this means? Light
  - if you have any/some...? substantial meal
  - I’ll have the....for starters and the... slap-up
  - for the main course, please gourmet
  - Can I have my steak...
  - rare/medium/well done
  - The fish was delicious, thank you

**Eating and drinking**

- have a quick snack.
- I could really do with a refreshing drink.
- I’m dying of hunger!
- I have a healthy appetite,
- I had a hearty breakfast only three hours ago!
- Crisps will only spoil your appetite.
- The set menu is reasonably priced. Let’s go in.
- I love home-cooked food,
- international food/cuisine,
- I had a Chinese/Mexican/French meal in a restaurant
- I love Chinese/Mexican/French food/cooking/
b) **KEYWORDS** (Expressions with *like*, *time*, *make*)

**GET MONEY**
The plan could cost you more than you make. They made a profit of £140 million.
His one aim in life was to make money, make a living from writing children's books.
He's made a fortune

**CAUSE**
its beautiful beaches make this a highly popular.
It was this movie which made him a star.
His attitude made him very unpopular with colleagues.
The photo makes her look much older than she really is

**EXPRESSIONS WITH MAKE**

- **make it through**
couldn't have made it through those times without the support of my boyfriend.

**DO**
Anyone can make a mistake.
[I can't make a decision just yet.
I need to make a quick phone call.
You could have made more effort to talk to him.
He made no attempt to apologize.

**FORCE**
make somebody do something
My parents always make me do my homework before I go out.

- **make it**
to succeed in getting somewhere in time for when difficult
If we run, we should make it.

---

c) **Differences between two CONFUSABLE WORDS:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>confusing words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advise</strong> is a verb, and <strong>advice</strong> is a noun:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- She <strong>gave</strong> me some good <strong>advice</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- She <strong>advised</strong> me to <strong>get some rest</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>earn/win</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>win</strong> a race/a game/an election etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who do you think will <strong>win</strong> the next election?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>win at</strong> sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I never <strong>win at</strong> cards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>win</strong> something for somebody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the man who helped <strong>win the Cup for</strong> Arsenal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Earn</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You don't <strong>earn</strong> much money being a nurse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He <strong>did all sorts of jobs to earn a living</strong>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
d) Common **Grammar** structures or patterns (for example, present perfect expressions)

**Present perfect expressions:**

*Have you ever been to the States?*
*Have you ever seen that film, *21 Grammes*?*
*Have you finished?*
*Have you had enough food?*
*Have you talked to him about it?*
*Where have you been?*
*What have you been doing?*
*How long have you been doing that?*
*How long have you been studying English?*
*How long have you been here?*
*I haven’t done it yet.*
*They haven’t decided yet.*
*I haven’t seen him recently.*
*We haven’t been out for ages.*
*He hasn’t finished yet.*
*She hasn’t ever done it before.*

(Thanks to Hugh Dellar & Andrew Walkley for these examples)
Whichever way you decide to organize your notebook the following layout might help to keep everything in order:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>My example</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>put up with sby/ssth</td>
<td>to accept someone or something</td>
<td>i had to put up with</td>
<td>Ho dovuto fare i conti con il cattivo comportamento di John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>unpleasant in a patient way</td>
<td>john’s bad behaviour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolerance of/towards sth/sby</td>
<td>allowing someone to do sth that you don’t like</td>
<td>We need to show greater tolerance of minorities</td>
<td>Dobbiamo mostrare maggiore tolleranza delle minoranze</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When you record vocabulary you should follow these guidelines:

- **Less is more**: It’s better to focus on fewer words but give full information about them, including collocations, grammatical patterns and possibly example sentences. There is no need to record every single new word.

- **Words need space**: Some space should be left after each entry so you can return to it and add other similar examples.

- Start a **new topic** on a **different** page: This way you can add new language to each section as you use your notebook. For example, if your current topic in class is Food and a piece of vocabulary related to Films is used, record that word in the Films section.

- Don’t forget to ask your teacher about the Topics she/he will be doing in class the following week.
Now, it’s up to you to try out some of these ideas, and perhaps some of your own too. And if you’re having any difficulties, feel free to ask for advice. Hopefully, we can help.

Leave a comment on the Atlas Blog and we’ll do our best to deal with any questions or suggestions you send our way.

http://www.atlaslanguageschool.com/Atlas-blog/
Section 3: How to Revise Vocabulary

In this section we will show you a few techniques to help you revise and remember the vocabulary in your notebooks.

Many students have problems trying to remember vocabulary. For example, you study something in class, or write a great expression in your notebook, and then, when you try to remember it, it’s gone! Irritating, isn’t it?

Below are two principles to remember when revising vocabulary:

1. Spacing:
   
   When you learn vocabulary, you should return to it after 2 days, then 5 days, then after 2 weeks, then 4 weeks etc. Keep coming back! Try to increase the interval between each revision. If you do this, it will help vocabulary go from your short-term memory to your long-term memory. Use your brain!

   Image by Bruce Blaus and shared under a Creative Commons 3.0 licence
2. Repetition:

Research says you need to meet expressions and collocations again and again before you they are remembered. So the more you meet a collocation or expression, the more you have to use it and the more it will become part of your language.

However, simply looking back at your vocabulary is not enough; you need to **DO SOMETHING** with your collocations, phrases, expressions etc. You need to **USE** them:

(New vocabulary lying on a table)

(A Student doing something with his new vocabulary!)
Every time you re-visit a page of your notebook, try **testing** yourself, or else you will simply forget all that stuff you took the time to record and organize and go back to. **USE IT OR LOSE IT!**

**Some ideas**

Here are some activities that should help you to remember vocabulary (and stop you forgetting it!).

1. **Personalization:**
   If you relate vocabulary to your own life, your experiences, plans, or desires, it will stay in your memory longer.

Sample notebook page:

```
Make/have: Verb-noun collocation

make
- a mistake
- money
- a phone call
- a decision
have
- a good time/fun
- lunch/a meal/breakfast
- a cold/a broken leg
- a party
```

**Personalized story by a student:**

```
My crazy night in Dublin

Last night I went to the pub and made a mistake. I bought two drinks. Then I made a quick decision. I ordered and drank them quickly. However, because I made no money, I was broke. I had to make a phone call to my amazing girlfriend Ciara. She had a party so I went to the party with Inho and Ahmed. We had fun and had a good time. We had a meal and had more drinks. But today I’m really sorry because I have a cold and have a broken leg. What a night.
```
This Time it’s Personal!

Now, it’s time for you to try personalization. Choose some new expressions that you’re added to your notebook this week and make up a little story with them, or just use them to write some sentences about your life – if possible the life you are experiencing in an English-speaking country.

2. Mental Associations:

The more associations you make, the easier it will be to remember expressions. For example, try to associate a collocation with a visual mental image (it could be a person, a film, a picture at home or a place you love).

---

**IN A RESTAURANT**

- Customer requests
  - Could you tell me.... Light
  - ....what this means? substantial meal
  - ...if you have any/some...? slap-up
  - I’ll have the....for starters and the... gourmet
  - ...for the main course, please
  - Can I have my steak...
  - rare/medium/well done
  - The fish was delicious, thank you

**Eating and drinking**

- I could really do with a refreshing drink.
- I’m dying of hunger!
- I have a healthy appetite,
- I had a hearty breakfast only three hours ago!
- Crisps will only spoil your appetite.
- The set menu is reasonably priced. Let’s go in.
- I love home-cooked food,
  international food/cuisine,
- I had a Chinese/Mexican/French meal in a
  restaurant
- I love Chinese/Mexican/French food/cooking/

---
3. Emotion:
There are strong links between memory and emotion. If something makes you happy or sad, you remember it more. For example, how does the word or expression make you feel?

**EMOTIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>-ING</th>
<th>-ED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Making the same mistakes can be annoying</td>
<td>I get annoyed when Ze keeps talking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find history really boring</td>
<td>Sometimes I get bored with homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The terrorist attack in Paris was frightening</td>
<td>My sister is frightened of bees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find waiting in queues frustrating</td>
<td>I get frustrated when I can't understand English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find that studying English can be exhausting</td>
<td>When I work late, I often get easily exhausted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeing Beyoncé live was really exciting</td>
<td>I get excited when I go on school trips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find Egypt a fascinating city</td>
<td>My brother Ze is fascinated with/ by Astrology +</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**COLLOCATIONS ADJ-NOUN**


**PHRASAL VERBS/IDIOMS-feelings** *(From Collins Phrsal verbs unit 10)*

**NEGATIVE**

| I’m fed up with this film                                           |
| i feel so bad about letting down my friends                        |
| I’m feeling a bit down about my exams                              |
| The loud music was starting to get to Maria                        |
| Raj is feeling a bit out of sorts today.                           |

**POSITIVE**

| I’m really looking forward to my holidays                          |
| I bought a book to cheer myself up                                 |
| I’m hoping for a nice present at Christmas                         |
| Lee is over the moon about his new job                             |
4. Decision-making:
The more decisions you make about an expression, the better you will remember it. Below are a few tips on how to DO THINGS with your vocabulary.

- Match a collocation with something that rhymes with it. For example, to English speakers, “dying of hunger” sounds like “die younger”. What does it sound like in your language? It doesn’t have to make sense; it can be silly!

- You could decide what part of the speech or what type of collocation they are (verb-noun/adverb-verb collocation etc.)

- Try to use the expression in a complete sentence (I’m dying of hunger at the moment). Then think of where you would say it or who you would say it to.

(I’m dying of hunger.)
• Number or rate the expressions from 1 (favourite / most useful) to 5 (least favourite/useful). Then compare your list with a friend or classmate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eating and drinking</th>
<th>favourite = 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>least = 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 have a quick snack.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 I could really do with a refreshing drink.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 I’m dying of hunger.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 I have a healthy appetite.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 I had a hearty breakfast only three hours ago!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 The set menu is reasonably priced. Let’s go in.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I love home-cooked food,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 international food/cuisine,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 I had a Chinese/Mexican/French meal in a restaurant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 I love Chinese/Mexican/French food/cooking/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• You could also categorize the expression on your page according to where you would say it – at the bank, out with friends, etc. or who you would say it to or who you might say it about – your brother, a great artist, etc.

**Personality collocations**

- Have selfish streak (my brother)
- Razor-Sharp mind (my friend Tolio)
- Vivid imagination (Adele singer)
- Brutally honest about sth (when I'm angry)
- Make a snap decision (when I'm in a rush)
- Keep your temper (in class!)
- Lose your temper (playing football-Thiago)
- Good company (my best friend Roisin)
- Highly Intelligent (Einstein of course)
• Test your memory. Close the page. Can you write the expressions from memory?

In a Restaurant
- Customer requests
  - Could you tell me...
  - What time is it?
  - If you have a drink...
  - If you have another...
  - For the main course, please
  - Can I have my meal...
  - Rare, medium, well-done
- The food was delicious, thank you

- Setting and drinking
  - I would really do with a refreshing drink.
  - In spite of hunger
  - I have a healthy appetite.
  - I have had a far too fill my three hours ago.
  - Grapes will only spoil your appetite.
  - The set menu is reasonably priced. Let’s go in.
  - There’s some cool food.
  - International hood cuisine.
  - It is an other Mexican French meal in a
    restaurant.
  - Have Mexican French food cooking!

- Make yourself a gap-fill with the expressions. After a few days, return to them. Can you remember the missing word?

**TEST to do**

- I think I’ll have a _____ snack
- I could really do with a _____ drink
- I’m _____ of hunger
- Cira has a _____ appetite
- I love a _____ breakfast
- Sometimes
- Too much chocolate can _____ your appetite
• **Write questions** with the expressions. You could then ask a friend these questions. Do they know the collocation? Can they answer the question?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What do you have for a quick snack?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What drink do you find refreshing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you dying of hunger now?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have a healthy or bad appetite?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What kinds of food spoil your appetite?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When do you like to have a hearty breakfast?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Put your finger or hand over one side of the page, or sentence. Can you complete the sentence?
• Translate sentences or expressions into your own first-language. Then, after three days, return to your translation. Can you retranslate the sentence back into English again?

- Have a quick snack
- I really need a refreshing snack
- I’m dying of hunger
- I have a healthy appetite
- Chips spoil your appetite
- I love home cooked meals

- Prenez une collation rapide
- J’ai vraiment besoin d’une collation rafraîchissante
- Je meurs de faim
- J’ai un appétit sain
- Les puces gâchent votre appétit
- J’aime les plats cuisinés maison

- Have a quick snack
- I really need
- Dying of

• **Personal Practice:** read a sentence aloud and repeat it to yourself. Don’t say it silently. Think of who you would say it to, or where/why/when you would say it. What emotions and images do you associate with it?

- Finally, sit in a quiet place and ask another student or friend to test you on the expressions or collocations in your notebook.

And, after all that, just get out there and use your English – as much as possible, in as many different situations as possible. And enjoy yourself – making new friends, getting on at college or work, and, of course, keep learning, keep revising, and keep it personal.

*Good luck!*