

# COLLOCATION

Collocation is the tendency of words to occur in regular combinations and can be seen as a cohesive device in that it contributes to textuality and generates expectations in hearers/readers. For instance, in a text about journalism, mentions of *freedom* (and not "liberty") *of the press* are very likely in English.

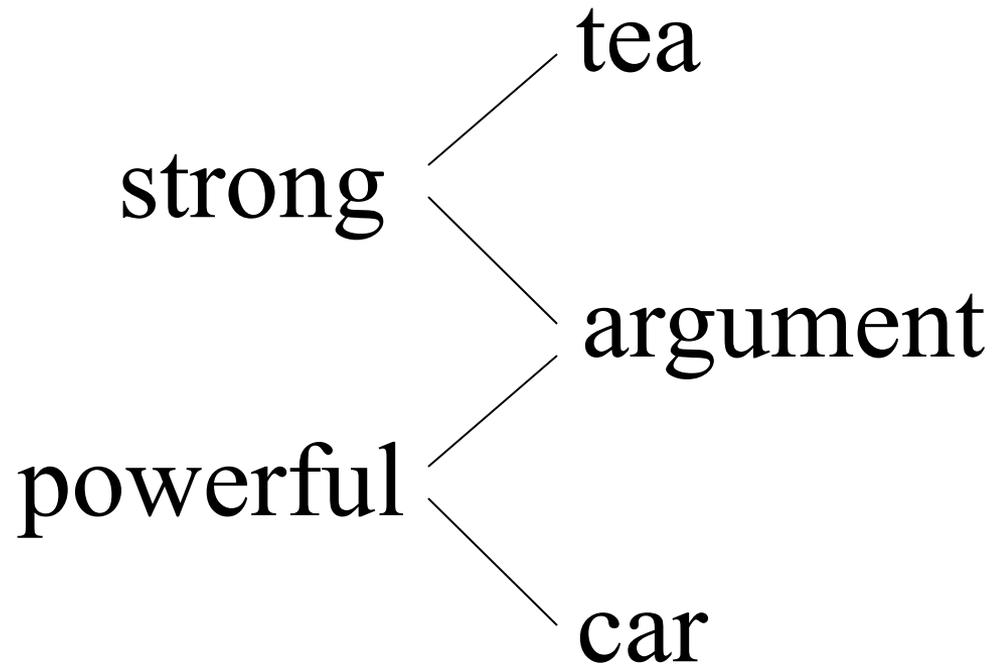
The notion of collocation contributes to explaining why an utterance sounds clumsy and unnatural even though it is grammatically correct.

**The adjectives *broad* and *wide* are similar in meaning but occur in different collocations:**

***broad agreement, broad daylight, broad shoulders***

***wide area, wide experience, wide margin***

# An example



- Words can predict their own environment to a greater or lesser extent
- Some items predict the **certain** occurrence of others:  
**fro** > **to and** as in “**to and fro**”  
**kith** > **and kin** as in “**kith and kin**”

**Most words fall in a middle category, where ties are not as strong - these ties, however, have a psychological reality and constrain speakers' choices.**

A few examples:

**to do a favour; to give a look; to launch an appeal**

**black coffee; French window**

**strong coffee; weak tea; heavy smoker;  
deeply moved; to illustrate vividly**

**rancid butter; artesian well; aquiline nose**

## Adjective + noun collocations

YES: a real thing

NO: a genuine thing

YES: a genuine article

NO: a real article

These trainers are the genuine article. Those others are just cheap imported copies.

She's a genuine person. If she promises something, she'll do it.

You can describe something 'in great detail' (NO: in big detail)

This handbag is made of genuine/real leather [both adjectives are possible]



## **Adverb + adjective collocations**

highly / keenly / very competitive (NO: greatly)

very / widely / vastly different (NO: greatly)

fully aware

- Collocations are typical of both general and specialized language and can be characteristic of a given register or genre.
- In addition to common collocations, each community of speakers will tend to use its own set of regular word combinations.
- In the case of academic texts or texts used for professional purposes, collocations also contribute to the author's acceptance in the research or professional community
- Even the *forms* of words can enter different collocations

# Which collocation is more likely?

1. a strong car / a powerful car
2. a strong tea / a powerful tea
3. auburn hair / auburn carpet
4. a doleful party / a doleful expression
5. a lengthy room / a lengthy meeting

# References and online resources

Some examples presented here are taken from *English Vocabulary in Use*, by M. McCarthy and F. O'Dell, Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Other references

Please check out this website:

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

for more examples and exercises.