



# Grammar and vocabulary exam preparation

Not all exams test grammar and vocabulary separately. Instead, the students' use of language might be assessed as an integral part of their writing and speaking exam. IELTS and TOEFL work like this. Other exams, such as FCE and CAE, additionally assess candidates on their lexical and grammatical knowledge in a section called 'English in Use'.

Other exam types that test grammar and vocabulary explicitly are those that are set as part of the national curriculum in certain countries, and those that are used internally by language schools and colleges. Many coursebooks also provide progress tests that include specific sections on the grammar and vocabulary that has been taught.

This section begins by looking at exam questions that directly test grammar and vocabulary. It's useful for you and your students to be aware of how each question type works. Furthermore, if you write your own tests or exams, it will serve as a handy checklist of question types to include.

Unit 25 provides teachers with tips they can give students before they do grammar and vocabulary questions.

The final two units address the challenge of preparing students for exams with a grammar and vocabulary focus, but at the same time improving students' ability to really learn it and use it well.

# 10 types of questions that exams often include to test grammar and vocabulary

Many exams include an explicit section that tests grammar and vocabulary. In Cambridge English exams, for example, the grammar and vocabulary paper is referred to as 'Use of English'. Grammar and vocabulary is also tested in other ways; for example, marks might be deducted for errors in a writing paper, or the grade for a student's spoken English could be affected by too many mistakes. Increasingly, grammar and vocabulary testing is incorporated into the reading section of exams, with candidates being required to insert individual items into a text.

The following 10 question types are ones that students will come across in exams. If you intend to write your own tests or exams, you might choose to include a range of these question types. Note that the units that follow provide more detail on how to help students prepare for these types of questions and will also help you create your own exams.

## 1. Multiple-choice sentence completion

Sentences with one word missing and a choice of three or four options are probably the most common form of test question. They can be found on placement tests given at the beginning of a course, on a mid-course test written by teachers, and on final exams. When writing them, try to include distractors that are synonyms, false friends or words that are grammatically similar. In the following example, the question is testing verbs that collocate with the noun *money*.

How much money do you think Malcolm \_\_\_\_\_ per day from working as a plumber?

- A. has    B. makes    C. takes    D. pays

Answer: B

## 2. Multiple-choice cloze text

Some exams include a section with a complete text that has between 8 and 15 missing words (known as a 'cloze test'). Students complete the text by choosing words from questions beneath. In the extract below, you can see the first part of a text and the first two multiple-choice questions. Note that if you are planning to write your own cloze test, you should make sure you gap words in separate sentences and that one answer does not rely on the previous one being correct.

Over half the world's population now lives in cities, and the constant (1) \_\_\_\_\_ of people leaving their traditional family homes in the countryside seems unstoppable. Young people in particular are going in (2) \_\_\_\_\_ of an education and higher-paying careers. The impact on the older families left behind can be considerable.

- 1    A. tide    B. line    C. road    D. trend  
2    A. find    B. look    C. spite    D. search

Answer: 1A 2D

## 3. Open cloze sentences

Unlike multiple-choice sentences (described in tip 1), an open cloze sentence does not provide a list of answer options. Students have to guess the missing word, so there should be only one possible answer. For this reason, the missing words are often smaller words that carry less content meaning, such as determiners (for example, *the*, *a* or *this*). So if we used the example sentence in 1, we might choose to gap a different word, for example:

How much money do you think Malcolm makes per day from working \_\_\_\_\_ a plumber?

Answer: *as*

## 4. Open cloze text

An open cloze text is a gapped text that does not give answer options. Traditionally, a cloze test was designed so that one word was removed after a set number of words. So, for example, the test designer might remove every seventh word or every eighth word. When designing your own test, however, you might want to target particular words, so the spacing might not be so systematic. Here is the same text extract as the one shown in tip 2, but now designed as an open cloze test:

Over half the world's population now lives (1) \_\_\_\_\_ cities, and the constant flow of people leaving their traditional family homes in the countryside seems unstoppable. Young people in particular are going in search (2) \_\_\_\_\_ an education and higher-paying careers. The impact (3) \_\_\_\_\_ the older families left behind can be considerable.

Answer: 1. *in* 2. *of* 3. *on*

Note that fewer content words (i.e. words that carry meaning) are gapped; instead, shorter words are targeted. These are likely to include pronouns, phrasal verbs, prepositions, conjunctions, articles and auxiliary verbs.

## 5. Word formation sentences

Word formation tasks give students the base form of a word, which they have to rewrite, using the correct form into a gap in a sentence or longer text. Lower-level tasks usually require students to form an adjective or a noun from a verb; at higher levels, students will need to add suffixes or prefixes. Here is an extract from a word formation task that uses a text:

Read the text and use the word given in capitals at the end of each line to form a word that fills the gap.

When you start looking for a new job, you could start by reading the (1)\_\_\_\_\_ sections of newspapers or searching online. Or, (2)\_\_\_\_\_ on the type of job you are looking for, there are lots of websites with the (3)\_\_\_\_\_ positions on offer. Another option is a job (4)\_\_\_\_\_ agency, which can try to place you with a suitable employer. The people who work there are (5)\_\_\_\_\_ trained to help and so you waste less time applying for anything (6)\_\_\_\_\_ or badly paid.

ADVERT  
DEPEND  
LATE  
RECRUIT  
FULL  
SUIT

Answers: 1. advertisement; 2. depending; 3. latest; 4. recruitment; 5. fully; 6. unsuitable

## 6. Key word transformations

Most students and teachers remark that key word transformation questions pose the greatest challenge on any exam. They are also challenging to write. Here is an example of such a question with the exam rubric:

Complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first sentence. Use between two and five words, including the word given, without changing it.

1 The scientist invented the solution while heating food in her kitchen.

CAME

The scientist \_\_\_\_\_ while heating food in her kitchen.

Answer: came up with the solution

In the above example, students will need to know the multi-word verb 'came up with' in order to answer the question. Transformations are a real test of a student's lexical and grammatical knowledge and their ability to manipulate language. They require plenty of practice prior to the exam so that students fully understand the type of thinking required. (See Unit 25 for more on this.)

## 7. Error correction

In recent years, error correction tests have featured less frequently in many exams. However, they can be a useful test of a student's ability to spot where there is a mistake and to then correct it. The most common format is a text with one mistake on each line. Alternatively, in a text of 10 lines, candidates may be informed that three of the lines do not have any errors. Here is the text that was shown in tips 2 and 4, adapted for this type of question, with a mistake on every line.

(1) Over half the world's population now lives at cities, and the constant flow of people (2) leaving their traditional family homes in a countryside seems unstoppable. Young (3) people in particular are going in search for an education and higher-paying careers. (4) The impact of the older families left behind can be considerable.

Answers: at -> in; a -> the; for -> of; of -> on

## 8. Additional word in a line

A variation on the error correction task described in tip 7 is to add one word from every line; students then have to indicate at the end what the extra word is. The example below uses the same text as above, adapted for this task. Smaller words tend to be targeted with this type of test.

There is one extra, incorrect word in each line. Delete the word and write it at the end.

1 Over half the world's population now it lives in cities and the constant flow of people it  
2 leaving their traditional family homes in the countryside seems as unstoppable. Young \_\_\_\_\_  
3 people in particular are going to in search of an education and higher paying careers. \_\_\_\_\_  
4 The impact on the older than families left behind can be considerable. \_\_\_\_\_

Answers: 1 it; 2 as; 3 to; 4 than

## 9. Definition match

In young learner exams, the reading tests are often in the form of sentence-level comprehension. This commonly involves students matching full-sentence definitions with words provided. It is ultimately a test of vocabulary and reading.

## 10. Near synonyms

Some tests ask students to identify a near synonym of a word in bold in a given sentence. The format is similar to a multiple-choice task, but unlike many multiple-choice grammar and vocabulary questions, this task essentially requires students to match items rather than complete gaps. A typical question might be:

Have you altered your presentation?

Which word is most similar in meaning to the word **altered**?

a written  
b delivered  
c given  
d changed  
e recorded

Answer: changed

# 10 things to say to students when preparing for an exam that tests grammar and vocabulary

When you are preparing students to complete certain types of exam question, there is plenty of useful advice you can give students. (They'll often need telling more than once!) Here are 10 things that teachers often need to say to students about the different types of questions on exams that test grammar and vocabulary (see Unit 24).

## 1. 'Read the instructions first.'

Students might have taken past papers many times and become used to the wording of the instructions. However, they should still read them again in the exam. It's reassuring and makes sure that – under exam pressure – they don't confuse question types.

## 2. 'Read the whole sentence/text before you answer.'

When preparing students to complete a cloze text or any kind of question involving some form of gapfill, always stress to students the need to read the whole sentence or text before they start answering questions or completing gaps. That's because information later in the text might impact on earlier answers. Here's an example of how the information in the sentence that follows the gap gives students a clue to the answer. If the student doesn't read the words following the gap, they could easily waste time thinking about what's missing and guessing the wrong word.

*I can meet him at the train station but how will I know what he \_\_\_\_\_ like? I've never met him before. (Answer: looks)*

## 3. 'What type of word do you think is missing from the gap?'

With cloze tests and word formation tasks, it's helpful if students get into the habit of predicting the type of word that is missing in a sentence. They should ask themselves if it's a verb, an adverb, an adjective or a noun, for example. Identifying the word type will help them guess the correct form of the word they need to write in.

## 4. 'What are some other forms of that word? Does it have a suffix or prefix?'

Encourage students to get into the habit of recording a new word and also looking up and recording its different word forms. For example, when they learn the word 'employ', ask them to find other forms of this word in their dictionary or to try to find other forms in a text. They should also try out different ways of recording these new words. One way is to give each student a word building table (see page 176 of the Appendix) to which they add words over time. Try to start this as early as possible in the course; in this way, word formation questions won't come as too much of a surprise. Note that it should become routine when working on past papers to add any of the words that appear in the word formation questions.

## 5. 'Is it testing grammar or vocabulary?'

Sensitise students to the idea that some questions test aspects of grammar and some test vocabulary. For example, sentence transformation tasks often test students' use of the passive, conditionals, past modals, comparative forms, reported speech, phrasal verbs, collocations and fixed expressions. One useful task is to bring in a set of past papers with sentence transformation tasks and to spend time with students identifying what is being tested in each case. Once a student has established whether a task is testing grammar or vocabulary, they can then try to identify what specific point of grammar or vocabulary is being tested.

## 6. 'Before you choose an answer, decide which answers are obviously wrong.'

With any kind of multiple-choice question, students might recognise the correct answer straight away but it's also worth checking why the other answers are clearly wrong. On a typical four-option multiple-choice question, one or two answers will be obviously wrong in some way. Once the student has narrowed things down to two options, they need to think more carefully, but at least they will have made the choice easier.

## 7. 'If you are stuck on a question, come back to it later.'

If a student is really stuck, they are wasting valuable time when they could be making sure they are answering other questions correctly. Even if they know this, under the pressure of an exam, some students will stop for too long on a difficult question. Over the period of an exam preparation course, students should establish which parts of a paper they find hardest and decide to approach those parts after they have completed the parts and questions they feel more confident with.

## 8. 'If you think there is more than one answer, you can write them both.'

It's unlikely on most exams that a gap should have two possible answers because most exam boards and exam writers try to avoid this. However, it can happen and so a student is allowed to write both answers. However, if one of the answers is wrong, then the whole answer is wrong. So as a general rule, students should write the answer about which they are 100% sure, rather than worrying about whether both are correct.

## 9. 'If you don't know the answer, then guess!'

If a student really doesn't have any idea what word needs to go in a gap or which one of the four options in the multiple-choice question they should choose, they should always write or choose *something*. Often, students feel that writing something wrong is a risk, when in fact there's nothing to lose, and anyway, there is always the chance they might get it right. In many cases, a risk-averse student might even have a hunch but won't write their answer in. This type of student needs to be constantly reminded not to leave any questions unanswered.

## 10. 'Use the last few minutes to check your answers and avoid any silly mistakes.'

This is good advice that you will probably give for any type of exam, but with grammar and vocabulary tests, because students are often supplying single words or even single letters (for example, on a multiple-choice question), it's easy to misspell something or to write answer 'C' when they meant to write answer 'D'. Students should always build in checking time at the end of an exam.

# 10 ideas for integrating grammar in the exam classroom

In exam preparation classes, a lot of time is spent practising exam skills and doing practice tests. Students tend to be very motivated by this type of task, and therefore it can be quite a challenge to incorporate any type of grammar teaching that is not explicitly relevant to a particular part of the test. However, teachers often realise that what students would actually benefit from most at some points is not more exam practice but actual language practice.

## 1. Selecting grammar points

Most exam coursebooks will incorporate some grammar, but it can be quite limited. If you want to focus on a particular grammar point not covered by the coursebook, but are unsure whether it is at the right level, then this website [www.englishprofile.org/english-grammar-profile](http://www.englishprofile.org/english-grammar-profile), which divides grammar points into CEFR levels, can help. As much of the data is based on a corpus of candidates' errors in Cambridge exams, it is particularly relevant when choosing points to focus on. Another way is to think about the frequency with which a grammar point is likely to occur. For example, comparisons are very common in writing tasks, but also occur frequently in many other sections of a test, so 'comparatives' is a grammar point worth focusing on. Finally, take a look at examples of one part of the test you are teaching, for example, speaking, and make a note of structures that would commonly be needed. For example, in IELTS Speaking, part 3, the most common question types cover grammatical areas such as the past, the future, hypothesising, comparing and contrasting, and cause and effect.

## 2. Error correction

When you have taken in your students' work and marked it, make a note of some of the most common errors they have made. Select one sentence from each student's writing and type it into a worksheet. You may want to adapt the sentences slightly if there are too many errors in each one. Ideally, you would select sentences with just one or two key errors. Print out enough copies of the worksheet so that students working in pairs have one per pair. Ask students to try to correct the mistakes in the sentences. Check the answers as a class. If you have time, you could introduce some fun by making it into the following game: students have to give you a number from 1 to 5 gauging how confident they are that they can correct a particular sentence. If their correction is right, they gain that number of points. If it is wrong, they lose that number of points. The winner is the one with the most points.

## 3. Practising tenses

The first part of many speaking exams focuses on familiar topics such as hobbies, holidays, last weekend and future plans. These types of questions give students a chance to show their ability in the three key areas: the past, the present and the future. Ask students to draw a table with three columns. Write the following topics on the board:

- My hobbies
- My last holiday
- My ambitions
- My school days
- My home
- My work
- My last weekend

Tell students to select three topics and to write one at the top of each column. Then tell students to think about useful vocabulary and grammar for their answer. Elicit some important grammar points. Then ask students to give you sentences on those topics using the grammar point mentioned. Review any tense errors the students make. Next, on the back of their sheet, they should write the three topics in big letters so that other students can read them from a distance. Students should then move around the room holding up their sheet, asking and answering questions about their chosen topics.

## 4. Gerunds and infinitives

Gerunds and infinitives can be a flexible and easy-to-learn language topic for speaking about likes and dislikes. Students can easily change between talking about the past, present and future with structures like 'enjoy doing', 'like playing', 'prefer to go', etc. Write a range of verbs on the board to express likes and dislikes, for example, *enjoy*, *prefer*, *didn't like*, *hate*, *would like* and *hope*. Choose one verb, such as *study*, and show how students can switch between past, present and future; for example:

- I enjoyed studying French at school.*
- I enjoy studying English.*
- I would like to study Business.*

Give students sets of questions that elicit these structures. In pairs, students should ask and answer them. Possible questions could include:

- What did you enjoy about school?*
- What subjects do you enjoy studying?*
- What would you like to study in the future?*
- What did you like playing as a child?*
- What do you like to do in your free time?*
- What hobbies do you hope to take up in the future?*

## 5. Conditionals

It is quite common in speaking exams for students to have to hypothesise and talk about imaginary situations. Write a sentence in the second conditional on the board. For example:

*If I could meet any famous person, it would be the leader of my country.*

Write the structure underneath:

*If + past simple + would + infinitive without to.*

Rub out the second half of the sentence and ask students to finish it with their own ideas. Ask them to show their sentences to a partner and to explain why they would like to meet that person. Next, write three more sentence halves on the board for students to complete, for example:

- If I had to choose one word to describe my favourite actor ...*
- If I were the leader of my country ...*
- If I could have any job ...*

Next, students write three sentences of their own using the second conditional. They share these with a partner and discuss the ideas in them.

## 6. Narrative tenses

Many speaking tasks ask students to recall and tell a story from their own past. Give students copies of the story below or display it on the board. Ask students to complete the gaps using the past simple and past continuous. Check their answers. They then tell their partner about a memorable journey they went on.

I remember a trip I once (1) \_\_\_\_\_ (go) on with my school. We (2) \_\_\_\_\_ (have) a two-week exchange programme with a school in England. In the morning we (3) \_\_\_\_\_ (attend) classes, and then in the afternoon, we (4) \_\_\_\_\_ (do) different activities. At the weekend, the school (5) \_\_\_\_\_ (arrange) trips and visits. One weekend, we (6) \_\_\_\_\_ (take) the bus to London. We (7) \_\_\_\_\_ (visit) different historical sites, and in the afternoon we (8) \_\_\_\_\_ (be) free to do whatever we (9) \_\_\_\_\_ (want). While we (10) \_\_\_\_\_ (walk) around the shops we (11) \_\_\_\_\_ (check) the time very carefully. After a while, I looked at the time and saw that it (12) \_\_\_\_\_ (be) already 5pm. We were supposed to meet our teacher at 5pm! We (13) \_\_\_\_\_ (run) back to the stop as quickly as we could and at the same time we (14) \_\_\_\_\_ (try) to call the teacher. As we (15) \_\_\_\_\_ (turn) the corner, we (16) \_\_\_\_\_ (see) the bus drive away. One of the teachers (17) \_\_\_\_\_ (stand) there looking very annoyed. The bus (18) \_\_\_\_\_ (stop), and so we (19) \_\_\_\_\_ (take) a train home with a very angry teacher!

## 7. Comparatives

Many speaking and writing tasks require students to form comparative and superlative structures. Similarly, reading and listening papers often require students to understand concepts that involve comparison. One way to revise a range of comparative structures is to encourage students to discuss statements involving comparisons. Give students the 10 statements below, all of which relate to topics that commonly come up in exams. Ask them to tick the ones they agree with. Then, in pairs, students compare their opinions and give reasons. While they are doing this, monitor the discussions and make a note of any mistakes students make. Write a selection of these mistakes on the board and ask students to correct them. In later lessons, you can prepare a lesson to cover any major weak areas you noticed.

1. Living in a city is better than living in the countryside.
2. Modern houses and apartments are much smaller than older ones.
3. Doctors have the most stressful job of all.
4. Old people are not as positive as young people.
5. The environment is being damaged much more rapidly nowadays.
6. Speaking online is almost as good as meeting face to face.
7. Young people are less likely to get a good job after graduating these days.
8. The longer you spend studying, the more successful you will be.
9. Today's top sportspeople receive a lot more money than is necessary.
10. People were less stressed when there was less technology in society.

## 8. Present perfect

Many speaking tests ask students about their own personal experiences. As a result, students will often need to use the present perfect simple and the present perfect continuous. On the board, write 'present perfect simple' and elicit the structure used to form this: *have + past participle*. Do the same for the present perfect continuous (*have/has been + verb + -ing*). Write the following uses on the board and ask students to match them to the simple or continuous form:

- ▶ Emphasises how long (Answer: *ppc*)
- ▶ Emphasises how many (Answer: *pps*)
- ▶ Focuses on the activity (Answer: *ppc*)
- ▶ Focuses on the result (Answer: *pps*)

Copy the following questions onto the board or give them to students on a handout. They ask and answer the questions in pairs.

- 1 How long have you been studying English?
- 2 Have you travelled anywhere this year?
- 3 What's the most interesting book you have read recently?
- 4 What have you been doing to prepare for the exam?
- 5 How has life changed in your country in the last 10 years?
- 6 How has the working world changed in the last 20 years?
- 7 How long have you been working in your current job?
- 8 Have you ever learnt to play a musical instrument?

Elicit answers to the questions. Correct any mistakes made with the present perfect simple or continuous.

## 9. Countable and uncountable nouns

This grammar point comes up in many exam papers in different ways. One error students often make is with subject-verb agreement, particularly in the case of students with certain L1s. If this is something you often find yourself commenting on in students' work, it can be useful to have a number of tasks prepared to revise the topic. These can be simple controlled tasks such as:

### Choose the correct option.

Despite the government strategy, unemployment *have/has* continued to rise.

### Correct the sentence.

The data in the chart show the number of app sales per year.

## Correct the sentence.

All the information \_\_\_\_\_ (take) from 2010 to 2015.

As you go through a course, create a list of sentences like this and keep them in a Word document. You can take many of these from the students' own work. Then, in feedback sessions on writing (where students will have made many of these mistakes), you will always have a set to hand for use in short practice tasks in class.

## 10. Pronouns and referencing

It is important for students to avoid repeating the same words over and over again in both their speaking and their writing. Fluent speakers avoid repetition by using synonyms, or by using pronouns to refer back to earlier ideas. These can be both personal/possessive pronouns (*you, he, she, him, it, ours, their, etc.*) and reflexive pronouns (*myself, yourself, themselves, etc.*). One simple task you can create to revise the use of pronouns is this: copy out a text from a coursebook or website that provides model answers to writing questions. This might be the coursebook you are using or an IELTS website, for example. Create your own gapfill task by blanking out the pronouns. Put these pronouns in a box and ask students to complete the gaps using the pronouns. You could also blank out any synonyms that have been used to create cohesion and to provide variation in the language used.

*"To build my students' confidence with the grammar items in exams, I prepare practice tests and ask them to work in small groups of 3-4. I encourage them to ask each other questions so they learn from others."*

**Magda Dygala, teacher and trainer, Poland**

Just as it can be hard to find time for grammar in an exam class, it can also be tricky to fit enough vocabulary work in. However, it is important to spend time incorporating vocabulary into your classes. Doing so also provides an opportunity to add in a game for some light relief.

### 1. Academic vocabulary

There are several generic academic wordlists, such as the Academic Word List (AWL), compiled by Averil Coxhead. These contain non-subject-specific academic words, none of which are in the list of the 2,000 most common words in English. There are other wordlists, but this is probably the most well known, and the one you are likely to find in coursebooks. Due to the academic nature of the words, they are likely to make up around 10% of the vocabulary in tests such as IELTS, TOEFL, FCE and CAE. To highlight the academic words in a text for your students, you can enter the text into a highlighter such as the one here: [www.nottingham.ac.uk/alzsh3/acvocab/](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/alzsh3/acvocab/). The software can also create a gapfill text that allows your students to practise using the words correctly.

### 2. Topic vocabulary

There are certain topics that recur frequently in many exams. These include health, the environment, education, globalisation, crime, technology and society. Creating or finding vocabulary sets that relate to each topic is useful for students. Often, a reading or listening text will contain enough topic-related vocabulary to make a comprehensive set, and so you can create a topic-related vocabulary list from them. There are also topic-related vocabulary sets available on the English Profile website: [www.englishprofile.org/wordlists](http://www.englishprofile.org/wordlists). You can select words by topic and by the CEFR level appropriate for your class. Encourage students to make their own vocabulary topic sets, either in the form of flashcards or in a vocabulary notebook. The brain often remembers words better when it can make associations between them so topic-related vocabulary lists are ideal for aiding memorisation and recall.

### 3. Crosswords

Crosswords can be a fun way to revise vocabulary. You can use online programs such as the one here: [www.discoveryeducation.com/free-puzzlemaker/](http://www.discoveryeducation.com/free-puzzlemaker/) to create a simple crossword with definitions of the words. To make it more interactive, print out two copies of the incomplete crossword that the website creates for you. On one copy, write half of the words into the gaps. On the other one, write the remaining words. Make enough copies of each one so that students working in pairs can have a copy of each version of the crossword. Without showing their crosswords to each other, students define the words in their crossword so that their partner can complete the gaps.

### 4. Describing words

Another way to revise vocabulary is to write target words onto individual cards. You will need to create sets of about 50 or 60 words per group, so the easiest way is probably to type the words into a table and then cut them up. Put students into groups of four. In each group, students organise themselves into teams of two. The students take turns describing words to their partner. The describer must not say the word itself, of course. Their partner must guess the word as it is being described. While this is happening the other pair should

time one minute. If a pair describes and guesses the word correctly within one minute, they keep the card. Next, it is the other pair's turn to describe and guess while the first pair keeps time. The winning pair is the one with the most cards at the end.

### 5. Collocation memory game

Create a set of cards displaying collocations that you would like students to learn. For example, you could make a set of cards showing 'academic verb + preposition' collocations: for example, *focus on*, *associate with*, *argue against*, etc. On one set of cards write the first word of each collocation; on another set of cards write the collocates. It can help if these two sets are on different-coloured paper. Ask students to match the collocates. When you are happy that they are all correctly matched, students spread out the cards face-down. They then play 'pairs', trying to match the collocates again. When all the pairs have been found, students write sentences using three or four of the collocations.

### 6. Synonyms

Many reading and listening tests require students to have a broad knowledge of synonyms, so it's a good idea to incorporate synonyms work into your classes wherever possible. One way to do this is to put a set of synonyms that you want students to learn onto cards. Put one word on each card and create one set of cards per pair of students. Students first match the synonyms to each other. If there is time, they could then play a 'pairs' game, trying to match the synonyms again. This can be a good pre-reading task for weaker students or a revision task for stronger students. There is a set of common synonym cards on page 173 of the Appendix that you can use to try out this activity.

### 7. Task commands

Exam tasks contain many set words and phrases that indicate how a student should approach a piece of writing (for example, *account for*, *define*, *evaluate*, *discuss*, *suggest*). It is important that students understand these words and phrases when analysing the task instructions, so it is useful to spend some time on their meaning. Copy and cut up the cards on page 174 of the Appendix. Ask students to match the words to the definitions. Check the answers as a class. Display two similar exam-task instructions on the board and ask students to identify how they are different. You could use the example instructions given below or ones that relate to a topic you are currently working on.

*To what extent should the government be responsible for protecting the environment?  
Summarise the main ways the government can help to protect the environment.*

### 8. Organising vocabulary into groups

Students may find it easier to remember words if they are organised into groups. This can be done by topic, for example, 'people associated with crime'. Another way is to group words by function and use. Write the following headings on the board:

*Similarities      Difference      Addition      Examples      Conclusion*

Write an example under one of the headings, for example, *for instance* under the 'Examples' heading, or *in summary* under the 'Conclusion' heading. Then ask students to suggest one more for word or phrase for each of the other columns. Copy and cut up

the cards on page 175 of the Appendix. Students put these into groups according to the headings on the board. Check the answers as a class. Students record the words and phrases in their vocabulary books or on vocabulary cards for future use.

### 9. Word building

When students learn a new word they sometimes overuse the base form because that's the form they learnt first. It can be useful to encourage students to manipulate words into different forms. This can help with any productive section of a test but especially sections that focus on vocabulary and grammar. Use a table to encourage students to record multiple forms of a word. For example, select eight to 10 items you would like students to learn from a reading text or that you think would be useful in a writing task and create a table for students to complete. For example, for this essay question, you could give students the table below to complete:

*To what extent should the government be responsible for protecting the environment?*

Verb	Noun	Adjective	Adverb
1 _____	government	governmental	X
X	2 _____	responsible	responsibly
protect	3 _____	protected	X
X	environment	4 _____	5 _____

(See page 176 of the Appendix for a photocopyable version of a word-building table.)

### 10. Nominalisation

Nominalisation means changing a word into a noun. Academic English uses more nouns, particularly abstract nouns, than other genres. This has the effect of conveying an objective, impersonal tone. For example, instead of saying *Student numbers are increasing rapidly*, an academic report might say, *There has been a rapid increase in student numbers*. To get students thinking about how they might introduce more nominalisation into their written work, write a set of adjectives on the board and ask them to tell you the noun form. These could be related to a specific essay you are looking at or some transferable ones such as; *growing (growth)*, *successful (success)*, *developing (development)*, *increasing (increase)*, *technological (technology)*, *secure (security)*, *improving (improvement)*. Next, ask students to add an adjective or noun to the nouns they have written, thereby creating a collocation, for example, *internet security*, *economic growth*, *political development*, etc. Check students' collocations and ask them to incorporate three or four into complete sentences.