

The Attraction of Words: Get It Right!

Gwyneth Fox
University of Aston
and Macmillan Education

ITALY 2008

Some topics:

- ☐ **Frequent** or not
 - ☐ **Added extra** definitions
 - ☐ **Linking** it together...
 - ☐ **Getting it right**
 - ☐ **Discourse** features
 - ☐ Away from the **literal**...
 - ☐ **Branching** out...
-

How do we know what to put in a dictionary?

We know by using a *corpus* – a large amount (200 million words plus) of contemporary written and spoken English. This is stored on a computer, and we can then analyse it and decide what is important for any particular dictionary.

Word frequency

English has approx 1,000,000 words

Most native speakers know about 40-45,000 words

BUT:

-
- ❑ 80% of everything we read, write, hear, and speak is made up from a core of *2500* words;
 - ❑ 90% of everything we read, write, hear, and speak is made up from only *7500* words.
-

Frequency stars

7500 is still a lot of words! So in the Macmillan English Dictionary we have divided them into three groups:

***	1 – 2500
**	2500 – 5000
*	5000 – 7500

Word frequency

Which are **not red** words in the following passage?

Snowy forests increase warming

Planting trees in snowy areas may worsen global warming as their canopies absorb sunlight which would otherwise be reflected by the snow, a study says.

Scientists have long argued that planting and preserving forests helps reduce global warming because trees absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and convert it to oxygen. Trees also assimilate water from the ground, helping to form clouds that shield the earth from sunlight.

Source: bbc.co.uk

Snowy forests increase **warming**

Planting trees in **snowy** areas may **worsen** global warming as their **canopies** absorb sunlight which would otherwise be reflected by the snow, a study says.

Scientists have long argued that planting and preserving forests helps reduce global warming because trees absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and convert it to oxygen. Trees also **assimilate** water from the ground, helping to form clouds that shield the earth from sunlight.

Using the corpus for definitions

'break out':

War broke out in Bosnia recently.

Fires have broken out all over Baghdad.

A riot broke out in front of the Danish Embassy.

Fights broke out in the nightclub.

Be careful, or trouble will break out.

'added extra' definitions

break out: if something bad such as a war or a disease breaks out, it starts

We got married a month before the war broke out... The fire must have broken out during the night.

rife: if something bad or unpleasant is rife, there is a lot of it. *Corruption in sports is rife... The investigation was rife with rumour and speculation.*

Collocation

Collocation is the way in which two or more words are used together more often than they would be by chance. For example, we talk about someone having '*high expectations*' or '*high hopes*'. We can also say '*low expectations*', but we do not say '*low hopes*'.

There are many different kinds of
collocation – eg

proverbs and idioms
binomials and trinomials
unique collocations
semi-unique collocations
phrases
lexical chunks

as well as the typical 'not by chance' ones

Idioms and proverbs

It's raining cats and dogs

He spilt the beans

The Republican Party is between a rock and a hard place

A stitch in time saves nine

Every cloud has a silver lining

Too many cooks spoil the broth

Binomials and trinomials

- ☐ here and there
 - ☐ up and down
 - ☐ husband and wife
 - ☐ ladies and gentlemen
 - ☐ hammer and sickle
 - ☐ to and fro
 - ☐ black and blue
 - ☐ bread and butter
 - ☐ morning, noon and night
 - ☐ here, there and everywhere
-

Unique collocations

taken aback
curry favour
purse your lips
boon companion
graven image
foot the bill
shrug your shoulders
take umbrage
lie doggo
(with) arms akimbo

Lexical chunks

it seems to me
more or less
in the first place
the fact is...
I think
I mean
you know/you see
what I mean is...
what I want to talk about is...
it's *interesting* that...
the *really sad* thing is that...

Collocations activities

- ❑ What adjectives are typically used with the noun 'progress' meaning 'the process of developing or improving'?
 - ❑ What verbs are typically used with the noun 'progress'?
-

Collocations at 'progress'

New heading
'Collocation'

New
adjs section

More explicit
rubrics

More collocates in
verbs section

Collocation

Adjectives frequently used with **progress 1**

- considerable, great, rapid, remarkable, significant, slow, steady, substantial, tangible

Verbs frequently used with **progress 1** as the object

- assess, block, chart, check, evaluate, follow, halt, hamper, hinder, impede, monitor, obstruct, review, slow, track, watch

Discourse

We need to know not only the meanings and collocations of words and how they are used, but *why* they are used, what we use them for. For example, how do we complain, criticize, apologise, etc?

Being polite

How many phrases can you think of that we can use when we are being polite?

Being polite

I'm afraid..

It'd be nice if..

I'd appreciate it if..

I'm sorry but...

Excuse me but..

I hate to bother/disturb/interrupt you but

I know you're busy/tired/in a hurry but..

Could you/we..

Would it be possible..

I thought that..

I wonder if/whether..

Macmillan English Dictionary

Extra information

Ways of giving your opinion

I think	the most usual and general way of giving your opinion
I reckon	a more informal way of giving your opinion
In my opinion/In my view	a more formal way of giving your opinion
It seems to me/All things considered	used for giving your opinion when you have thought carefully about a situation
If you ask me	used for giving an often critical opinion
To tell you the truth/To be honest/frank	a way of giving your opinion when you know that that people may not like what you say
Personally	used for emphasizing that you are giving your own opinion
To my mind/As far as I'm concerned	used for giving your own opinion, when you realize that other people may not agree with you

Examples:

I think if you work hard you'll do very well in the exam.

It'll be cheaper to take the plane, **I reckon**.

In my view, it was a big mistake not to try to buy the company last year.

Ways of expressing disagreement**I'm sorry, but...**

used when politely telling someone that you do not agree with them

Absolutely not/Of course not...

used for saying that you completely disagree with what someone has said

I don't know/ I take your point/That's true, but...

used as polite ways of saying that you do not really agree with someone

Speak for yourself...

an informal and sometimes impolite way of telling someone that your opinion is very different to theirs

Don't make me laugh/Are you kidding?/You must be joking...

informal ways of telling someone you completely disagree with them, and you think that what they have said is crazy

Examples:

Sorry/Excuse me/Pardon me, but it was never proved that he stole that car.

'I think I should accept the blame for the accident.' '**Absolutely not!/Of course not!/Nothing of the kind!** There's no way it was your fault.'

'Peter is really unfriendly sometimes.' '**I don't know**, he's always been very kind to me.'

'These taxes on petrol are far too high.' 'Well yes, **I take your point**. But maybe that'll encourage people to use their cars less.'

'She's a difficult person to work with.' '**That's true**, but she's a really good designer.'

'We don't mind walking from here.' '**Speak for yourself!** My feet are killing me!'

'I really think the Beatles are overrated.' '**Are you kidding?/Don't make me laugh!** They're better than any of the modern bands.'

➡ agree

Discourse

Language with attitude:

Nouns showing you dislike/disapprove of/ are annoyed by people

agitator, blue-eyed boy, bluestocking, boy wonder, careerist, the chattering classes, couch potato, crew, crony, culture vulture, drama queen, fat cat, goody-goody, jobsworth, jock, macho man, mandarin, the masses, nerd, nob, officialdom, pack, pedant, plutocrat, prude, pseud, rabble, smoothie, sneak, snitch, snob, social climber, sponger, swot, teacher's pet, terrorist, telltale, tree hugger, trimmer, womanizer, wonk, yuppie

Adjectives showing you dislike/disapprove of/are annoyed by people

argumentative, bourgeois, churchy, citified, conceited, cringing, flash, glib, godless, highfalutin', legalistic, macho, mercenary, nosy, pedantic, pious, plummy, pompous, posh, prudish, right on, skimpy, smooth, smug, sneaky, tarty, tight, touchy-feely, wanton

Macmillan English D

MACMILLAN
English Dictionary

Super Search Exercises

diplomatic

Alphabetical Index

diplomatic
diplomatically
diplomatic bag
diplomatic corps
diplomatic immun
diplomatic relation

Search Result (6)

diplomatic adjective
diplomatic bag noun
diplomatic corps noun
diplomatic immun noun
diplomatic relation noun
the Diplomatic Service

Macmillan English Dictionary

Advanced Search

Search For : Type a word here

Category : Headwords

Part of speech : Any part of speech

Grammar : Any grammar

Region : Any region

Style : showing disapproval

Frequency : Any style

Subject :

- ☐ formal
- ☐ very formal
- ☐ humorous
- ☐ often humorous
- ☐ impolite
- ☐ informal
- ☐ very informal
- ☐ journalism
- ☐ mainly journalism
- ☐ literary
- ☐ mainly literary
- ☐ offensive
- ☐ old-fashioned
- ☐ showing approval
- ☒ showing disapproval
- ☐ spoken
- ☐ mainly spoken

Search Result

EDITION

★★

...ing or creating

...ding to diplomatic
...elled.

...y that does not

...verb
...diplomatically.

...g official

Macmillan English Dictionary

MACMILLAN
English Dictionary

Super Search Exercises

diplomatic

Alphabetical Index

diplomatic
diplomatically
diplomatic bag
diplomatic corps
diplomatic immunity
diplomatic relations

Search Result (6)

diplomatic adjective
diplomatic bag noun
diplomatic corps noun
diplomatic immunity noun
diplomatic relations noun
the Diplomatic Service

Macmillan English Dictionary

Advanced Search

Search For :

Category :

Part of speech :

Grammar :

Region :

Style :

Frequency :

Subject :

Clear Go

Search Result (100)

backcloth noun
backstage adverb
backstage adjective
balcony noun
box noun
cameo noun
circle noun
company noun
compère noun
compère verb
curtain noun
dancer noun
dark adjective
direct verb
direction noun
director noun

DITION

ont of your
turn round
a theatre stage
r you because
s or of not doing
e influenced or
was tied to her
propos of

cosmetic

- ☐ the cosmetic industry
 - ☐ cosmetic products such as lipstick and eye shadow
 - ☐ Some nuts produce oils suitable for cosmetic use.
-
- ☐ Alterations to the building have been only cosmetic.
 - ☐ The government made cosmetic changes to the bill.
-

lecture

- ☐ All lectures start at 7.30pm.
 - ☐ He gave a series of lectures on chemical reactions.
 - ☐ She had been given a long lecture on the subject by Anna.
 - ☐ He's lectured on economics for many years.
 - ☐ She's been lecturing for ever!
 - ☐ He lectured them on their duties to each other.
 - ☐ Old people always lecture us on our behaviour.
 - ☐ 'Don't lecture me, Dexter', she warned.
-

emphasizing

We have a large number of ways in English of emphasizing what we are saying or writing.

Intensifying adverbs

absolutely, agonizingly, amazingly, awfully,
completely, deadly, deeply, definitely, **delightfully**,
desperately, dreadfully, enormously, entirely,
exceptionally, **excruciatingly**, exhaustively,
exorbitantly, **extortionately**, extraordinarily,
extremely, fabulously, fantastically, fiercely,
frighteningly, fully, furiously, greatly, grossly,
horrendously, horribly, hugely, immensely,
impressively, incredibly, indescribably, infinitely,
intensely, **ludicrously**, madly, magnificently,
majestically, obscenely, particularly, peculiarly,
perfectly, phenomenally, pitifully, positively,
preposterously, **prohibitively**, purely, outstandingly,
really, refreshingly, ridiculously, so, terribly,
terrifically, totally, tremendously, truly, unbelievably,
utterly, very, well, wholly, wildly

Emphasizing phrases

How many phrases can you think of that you can use to emphasize what you are saying?

a few emphasizing phrases

- ☐ on no account
 - ☐ under no circumstances
 - ☐ ...no doubt/question but that...
 - ☐ and (*I cried and cried/years and years...*)
 - ☐ beyond belief
 - ☐ big time
 - ☐ be a bundle of...
 - ☐ now that's what I call...
 - ☐ the mother of all...
 - ☐ the ... to end all ...
 - ☐ on the contrary
 - ☐ to the core
 - ☐ with a vengeance
 - ☐ how/what/where in the world...
 - ☐ a world of difference
-

Looking at learners' language

Two year collaborative project between Macmillan and the Centre for Corpus Linguistics, University of Louvain:

- world-leading centre for learner-corpus research
 - high-profile, well-published team, led by Sylviane Granger
 - serious research basis, rigorous methodology
 - real depth, but user-friendly presentation
-

100 Get it right boxes

- ❑ Focus on providing help with language problems – not focus on errors
- ❑ Clear selection criteria, based on frequent well-attested learner problems
- ❑ Boxes show authentic learner errors, and give appropriate alternatives
- ❑ Serious, detailed information

Finally he asked her out.

Get it right: ask

The verb **ask** is never used with the preposition **to**. It takes a direct personal object, so you can:

- ask someone something
- ask someone what/where/why/how etc

✗ The speaker ~~asks to the men~~ how many children they have.

✓ The speaker asks the men how many children they have.

✗ It is an interesting question that every European should ~~ask to himself~~.

✓ It is an interesting question that every European should ask himself.

✗ The women have to get permission, but no-one ~~asks to the men~~ where they are going.

✓ The women have to get permission, but no-one asks the men where they are going.

askance /ə'skæns/ adv. look askance (at sb/sth) to show

Get it right: think

The verb **think** is rarely used with an infinitive. Don't say 'think to do something'.

When **think** means 'to consider facts in order to understand something or make a decision', it is often used in the **-ing** form and in the following structures:

- **think of doing something**
- **think about doing something**

✗ Britain changed its policy and many countries are ~~thinking to do~~ the same.

✓ Britain changed its policy and many countries are thinking of doing the same.

✓ Britain changed its policy and many countries are thinking about doing the same.

✗ Researchers should ~~think to use~~ methods that don't require animal testing.

✓ Researchers should think of using methods that don't require animal testing.

✓ Researchers should think about using methods that don't require animal testing.

When **think** means 'to believe', the usual structure is a **that**-clause:

✗ A lot of people ~~think to have~~ more sex appeal if they drive a powerful speedy car.

✓ A lot of people think (that) they have more sex appeal if they drive a powerful speedy car.

However, the infinitive can be used in this meaning, but only in the passive structure **be thought to do something**:

Many secret organizations *are thought to be* at work in the country.

think² /ɒnk/ you have a think British to think about

Get it right: knowledge

Knowledge is an uncountable noun, so it is never used in the plural:

✗ *Students don't understand how to use ~~these knowledges~~ in real life.*

✓ *Students don't understand how to use this knowledge in real life.*

✗ *We can exchange our experiences and strengthen ~~our knowledges~~.*

✓ *We can exchange our experiences and strengthen our knowledge.*

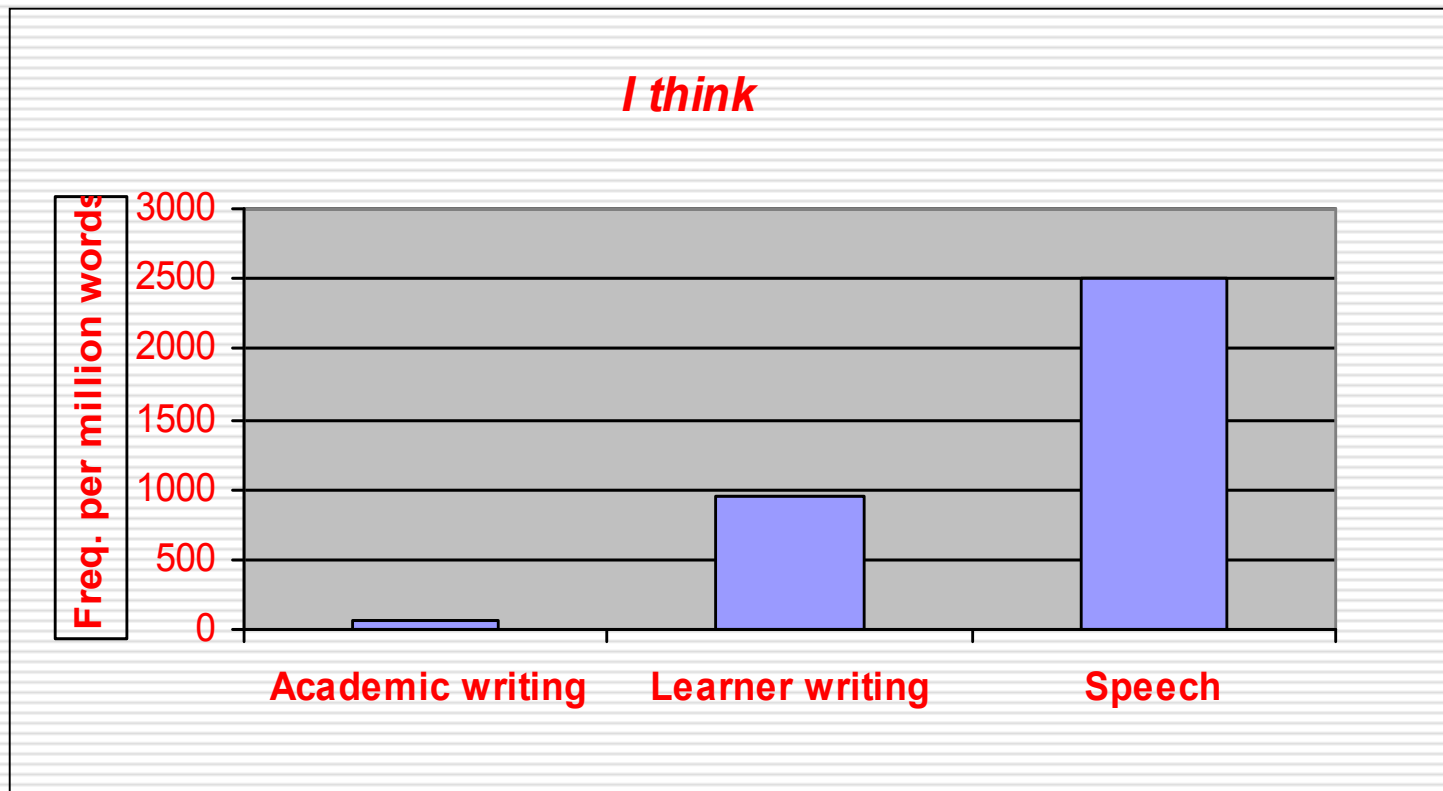
Knowledge is sometimes used with **a**, but only in the pattern **a knowledge of something** (or **a good/deep/thorough etc knowledge of something**):

Effective use of language necessitates a good knowledge

'Improve Your Writing Skills'

- 50-page section, designed for writing in academic or professional environments:
 - covers 12 key writing functions, 6 grammar issues (articles, verb patterns, countability etc.)
 - based on comparisons of native-speaker writing (BNC etc.) and learner writing (ICLE)
 - emphasis on *overuse* or *underuse* (not 'this is wrong!')
 - major aid to avoiding plagiarism – new, more idiomatic ways of expressing what you want to say
 - include Get it Right boxes, collocation boxes, frequency charts

Frequency charts in 'writing sections'



Metaphor

Metaphor is very common in all languages. Here are a few simple metaphors in English:

*She **flew past me on her bicycle.***

*Turing was the **father** of the modern computer.*

*He gave me a **cold** look and an **icy** stare.*

*She was **deluged** with begging letters*

*Another company is about to **bite the dust.***

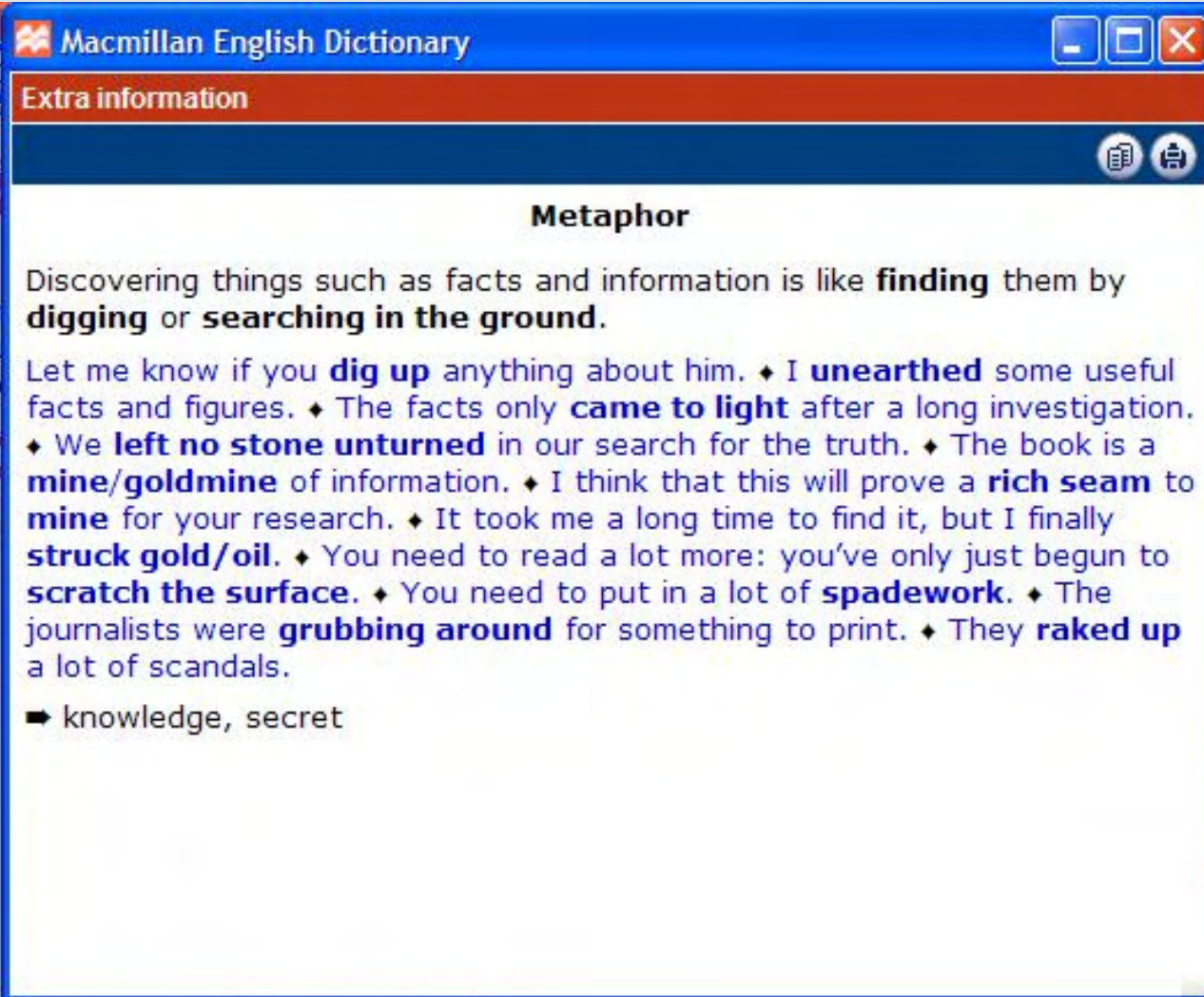
*There has been a complete news **blackout.***

Winning

Winning a competition or game is like **hitting** or **killing** your opponent.
Losing is like being **injured**.

Winning

- ❑ Scotland **beat** England 1-0.
 - ❑ They were **thrashed** by Chelsea.
 - ❑ The home team **annihilated** the opposition.
 - ❑ They were **knocked out** of the competition.
 - ❑ The home team took a real **battering**.
 - ❑ We **hammered** them in the final
 - ❑ She **slaughtered** me last time we played tennis.
 - ❑ There was **a sudden death** play-off for third place.
-



Moving on from the very common words:

The CD-ROM includes a thesaurus: every sense of every word has a list of either synonyms, antonyms, hyponyms (parts of...), meronyms (types of...)

All this, and much more, can be found in learners' dictionaries – including of course the new Macmillan English Dictionary. It's a pity that learners do not realise how much help they could get from a dictionary of this kind.

