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# Lexical Approach Activities

A Revolutionary Way of Teaching

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*Methods and activities for more effective teaching with less preparation*

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## **Introduction**

Very basically, a lexical approach to teaching means the primary focus is on helping students acquire vocabulary. This movement away from a grammar-based syllabus largely began in 1993 with the publication of “The Lexical Approach” by Michael Lewis. It was called an approach to differentiate it from a method. In English language teaching, methods are systems for structuring lessons while approaches are less concerned with how the lesson is structured and more concerned with the general focus of instruction. Teachers should be aware of this as there is some reluctance to adopt a more lexical approach because of the fear that it may mean revamping the way one teaches. In reality, teachers can use any methodology with a lexical approach from grammar translation to task-based learning. What changes is just the linguistic focus of the lesson.

While one might think the paradigm shift was away from teaching grammar structures towards teaching individual words, the linguistic focus of the lexical approach is really in between grammar and what we traditionally think of as vocabulary. What it focuses on are structures made up of words, meaning that the actual paradigm shift was away from individual words to clusters of words, or lexical chunks as they are commonly referred to. This new idea about the structural nature of the language does not exclude grammatical structures but instead recognizes that the language has far more structures than those that occur in the grammatical syllabus. Consider the statement below.

The Lexical Approach is based on the idea that language is made up of other structural elements besides what we traditionally think of as grammar.

In that statement, there are two distinct structures:

“X is based on the idea/belief/premise that + clause”  
“X is made up of Y”.

Both of these structures occur fairly frequently in the language with different variables. Yet neither one would be found in a grammar book. In his book, Michael Lewis suggested that teachers need to help students become aware of the lexical structures that commonly occur in the language. The idea is that if students become aware of some of the many lexical structures, they will have a lot more information about how to combine individual words to build coherent structures like phrases, expressions and whole sentences, which should ultimately emulate those used by native speakers. Many teachers have noticed that it is not use of grammar which separates higher level students from native speakers – often the student’s grammar will be better than a native speaker’s – but the way words are combined into lexical chunks.

## Grammar vs. Lexis

Grammar has been the focus of language teaching for centuries, yet it is vocabulary, or more specifically, lexis, which learners need to negotiate meaning. Consider the two groups of sentences below:

Incorrect Grammar	Correct Grammar
I go to zoo yesterday.	I went to the zoo yesterday.
I go to zoo now.	I am going to the zoo now.
I go to zoo tomorrow.	I'll go to the zoo tomorrow.

The first set of sentences is perfectly comprehensible because **meaning is carried not by grammar but by lexis**. A listener would be able to understand what the speaker meant because of words like “go”, “zoo” and “now”. In reality, we do not have to be grammatically correct to communicate effectively, but we need to be correct with our use of lexis. Consider how drastically the meaning of the above sentences would change if “tomorrow” was used instead of “yesterday” or if “park” was used instead of “zoo”.

Correct Lexis	Incorrect Lexis
I go to zoo yesterday.	I go to zoo tomorrow.
I go to zoo now.	I go to park now.
I go to zoo tomorrow.	He go to zoo tomorrow.

*A lexical mistake often causes misunderstanding, while a grammar mistake rarely does.*

John Sinclair, IATEFL 1996

*However unpopular it is with teachers, language which contains grammatical errors is unlikely to be misunderstood in context, but with lexical errors misunderstanding, incomprehension, or in rare cases even offence, are quite likely. Recognizing the lexical nature of language, and the centrality of lexis to the creation of meaning, and consequently to communicative power, demotes grammar – and in particular, the often unnatural, inaccurate grammar of standard EFL – to a subsidiary role.*

Michael Lewis 1997

Grammar has been the basis of language teaching for so long because there are a limited number of essential structures and they can be quite easily graded and organized into a syllabus. On the other hand, it's a daunting, if not impossible task to select vocabulary to focus on from a lexicon that consists of millions of individual words and lexical structures. This is the reason that most coursebooks are based on a grammatical syllabus.

One way that we can determine what vocabulary to focus on with learners is by looking at what words are most frequently used by native speakers. Because of computers, we now have access to data indicating word frequency and lists such as the Academic Word List have become popular.

It is interesting to look at the most frequent words of spoken English.

The top **200 words** represent about **60%** of spoken language.  
The top **2000 words** represent about **90%** of spoken language.

A surprisingly small number of individual words represent a very large part of the spoken lexicon. Most of the words which make up the top words of spoken English are high in frequency because of how often they combine with other words, many of them also on the high frequency list. The following chart of the most frequent words illustrates how these words can combine with each other to produce combinations, or lexical chunks, where the meaning of the individual words can change once they are put together. All of the constructions on the right are made exclusively from the words in the chart. There are many more that could be constructed from this list, and thousands more that could be constructed from the top 200, which is why they represents 60% of spoken language. The top 2000 words would produce hundreds of thousands of combinations.

**Most frequent 68 words of spoken English**

the	for	she	very	<b>take</b> to <b>take</b> in <b>take</b> that! <b>take</b> on <b>take</b> up <b>take</b> her out <b>take</b> my time <b>take</b> what you will <b>take</b> what you can <b>get</b>  <b>get</b> in <b>get</b> up <b>get</b> out <b>get</b> on <b>get</b> right <b>get</b> one up on <b>get</b> up and go <b>get</b> with it! <b>get</b> what you can
I	not	this	from	
and	but	there	because	
be	go	he	thing	
you	well	on	right	
it	think	all	people	
a	if	them	me	
of	at	see	out	
to	with	now	my	
in	so	come	time	
have	there	as	want	
that	just	your	an	
we	or	up	will	
they	would	mean	<b>take</b>	
<b>get</b>	can	when	some	
do	no	about	could	
what	then	which	make	

Because these constructions, or chunks, often have their own usage and/or meaning, **it is essential that we do not focus on individual words** when teaching lexically, as so much of the language we commonly use is actually made up of combinations of the most frequent words. To use a simple example, words like “get”, “out”, “back”, etc. combine with each other to produce numerous “lexical chunks” often with their own particular meaning and usage: e.g., “get out”, “out back”, “back out”, “get back”, “get back out”.

## Features of the Lexical Approach

The Lexical Approach	is based on the	idea	that	language is made up of other structural elements besides what we traditionally think of as grammar.
		notion		
		premise		
		assumption		
		belief		

Noun/

Noun phrase + **is based on the** + abstract noun + **that** + clause

Using the Lexical Approach requires the investigation of spoken and written language in order to notice structures which are often ignored because they do not fall into the categories determined by the traditional understanding of grammar. Outlining the form of these structures (see example above), helps students acquire and use the structures and trains them to recognize other ones. The idea is not so much that students remember the structure of various lexical chunks, for there are far too many to remember, but that they become aware of the structural nature of the language beyond the traditional grammar structures. Once they have some awareness of how language is chunked together, they are more likely to notice the how a particular lexical chunk is structured and that dissection process is a step not only towards retaining that structure but also other structures like it.

### Concordance Printout

[/h] Our philosophy is **based** on the belief that  
 It is a package which is **based** on the philosophy which  
 opposition to the merger is **based** on the argument that the  
 over time - which is **based** on the concept that a  
 of Andrews's theorising is **based** on the premise that  
 Our forecast for 1996 is **based** on the assumption that  
 known. [p] Osteopathy is **based** on the notion that the  
 city of Bremen. The idea is **based** on the principle that  
 a rabbit out of a hat is **based** on the original in which  
 Portfolio management is **based** on the concept of  
 will disappear is **based** on the coincidence of two

Concordance printouts (from corpora websites) can confirm that something is a lexical pattern. A concordance is simply a random sampling of extracts from spoken and written texts based around a selected word or phrase. The concordance sample above confirms that “is based on the” is indeed part of a common lexical pattern (or “lexical chunk”). The concordance can also reveal more about the pattern. For example, it reveals that there is a noun or noun phrase before and after “is based on” and note the similarity some of the nouns that follow “is based on the”.

When demonstrating variable structures to students, a group of interchangeable items may be shown as all being possible substitutions in a particular part of the structure. In the example above, the five abstract nouns (idea, notion, etc.) are all shown as possible variables for that part of the structure. These are known as slot-fillers and we should usually keep the number of slot-fillers dealt with to around five (many more can be overwhelming) and where possible, the slot-fillers should be related in some way, e.g., abstract nouns for ideas/beliefs.

As mentioned earlier, the Lexical Approach focuses not on individual words but on clusters or chunks of words. Part of the reason for this is that individual words, particularly many of those which are high in frequency, can change meaning depending on the other words they are chunked together with. The five sentences below indicate how the word “take” can change depending on the words it is associated with.

What’s your **take** on this?  
 It didn’t **take** the first time.  
 You need to **take** in the top a little bit.  
 Have you **taken** into account the cost?  
**Take** the bull by the horns.

The Lexical Approach consists of three main types of chunks:

**Types of Chunks**

- **Collocations:** words of the four main parts of speech which go together, usually, but not always, two words.
- **Fixed expressions:** expressions which cannot be changed or can only be changed minimally. Most fixed expressions are idiomatic or are those used in polite speech (e.g., How’s it going?).
- **Semi-fixed expressions:** expressions which have at least one slot into which a number of different words or phrases can be inserted.

The list below indicates some of the lexical chunks in the five sentences with take. Below those are examples of how two semi-fixed expressions can be broken down and expanded.

Collocations: *take in, first time, little bit*

Fixed expressions: *take the bull by the horns*

Semi-fixed expressions: *It didn’t take the..., Have you taken into account...*

It didn’t	take	the first time
	work	
	happen	
	fit	
	succeed	

**slot-fillers**

Have you taken into	account	the	cost
	consideration		price
			rates
			expense

**slot-fillers**

**slot-fillers**

## *Lexical Approach Activities*

Studies have shown that learners tend to notice and remember words in chunks, particularly the ones which they consciously or unconsciously recognize as variable (semi-fixed expressions) because they can perceive that by changing the slot-filler, they can use the expression in many ways (it's "highly generative"). Imagine a learner sitting at the dinner table and he/she hears the following:

"Could you please pass the salt?"  
"Could you please pass the butter?"  
"Could you please pass the bread?"  
"Could you please pass the ketchup?"

The learner will store the fixed part of the expression, "Could you please pass the \_\_\_\_\_?" because their brain recognizes it as a structure which can be varied and applied in different situations to achieve a communicative end. Likewise in this popular song, the third line would be the most easily acquired by a learner because of its generative value, i.e., it can be used in a variety of ways (with different names).

Happy birthday to you  
Happy birthday to you  
Happy birthday **dear Maria**  
Happy birthday to you

## **Implications for Teaching**

The average educated native speaker knows about 40,000 individual words and between 250,000 to 300,000 lexical chunks. If you were to teach 10 items a lesson, five days a week, it would take about 120 years to teach them all! This calculation is based on the recommended number of new items that should be introduced in a lesson (10 – 15) and does not even take into account the fact that studies have shown that a word (lexical item) must be encountered or used about seven times before it is acquired!

What should become obvious is that we cannot teach the bulk of the lexicon. Then how do language learners go from absolute beginners to native-speaker level in a relatively short time, often in less than ten years? The answer is that most of the lexicon is not overtly taught but incidentally learned. Learners are constantly acquiring new lexical items whenever they come in contact with the language, be it listening to the teacher talk in class, watching a film or using the internet. Therefore, if the majority of lexis is incidentally learned, we should be focusing not on the tiny portion of the lexicon that we can “teach” in the classroom but on strategies to make the acquisition of the bulk of the lexicon more effective. How can we help students more easily acquire language during their exposure to it, both in the classroom and outside of it?

The most important learning strategy we can give students is just to train them to NOTICE lexical chunks during their exposure to language. First we have to raise their awareness of the fact that language consists of lexical structures, then we need to define the main types of lexical structures (collocations, fixed and semi-fixed expressions) and finally we need to develop some activities that help them notice the lexical chunks in spoken and written texts.

Once students have located the lexical chunks, they need to be analyzed so the learners can understand their construction, what they mean and how they are and might be used. Again, in keeping with the idea that we are trying to give students strategies to notice and process new language, the purpose of analyzing the chunks is not so much so that students understand those particular chunks but, more generally, that they gain practice in doing this sort of processing with new language and they develop some global knowledge of lexical structuring. To provide a simple example of this, if you have students find collocations in a text and then determine their structure, they will not only understand those collocations but they will be able to make some basic generalizations about collocations. Below are some collocations extracted from this paragraph.

Collocation	Form
lexical chunks	Adj. + N
keeping with the idea	V + Prep + N
give students strategies	V + N + N
process (new) language	V + N
gain practice	V + N
new language	Adj. + N
global knowledge	Adj. + N
simple example	Adj. + N
basic generalizations	Adj. + N

As mentioned above, students not only become aware of the particular collocations but they should be able to make more general assumptions about lexical structures. For example, two types of collocations seem to be most common in the previous paragraph, *adjective + noun* and *verb + noun*. One might conclude that these are the most common types of collocation in English, but further investigation of other texts would reveal that that might be true for *adjective + noun* collocations, but the frequency of *verb + noun* collocations is actually particular to this type of text, i.e., one that gives instructions.

The final step in the clarification stage with new lexical items is to illuminate the usage by supplying some slot-fillers. This is a good thing to do for several reasons. Firstly, it gives students multiple new lexical chunks rather than just one. Also, it emphasizes the structure by giving students other examples of it. And finally, it gives students an idea of the generative value of the structure, i.e., all the different ways it can be used.

gain	practice
get	
give	
provide	

## Lexical Chunk Resources

Lists of collocations and some fixed and semi-fixed expressions can be found in the *Oxford Collocations Dictionary*. Also, Scott Thornbury's *Natural Grammar* has a two-page spread of common structures for each of the top 100 words of the English language. There is sufficient material in each two-page spread so that a teacher could plan at least one lesson, if not two, around the structures featuring one particular key word. Below is an example from the page featuring *get*.

get [ + NP ] + to-infinitive

*Can you get Tim to tidy his room?*

- to talk about causing people to do things

One of the most valuable sources for lexical structures is corpora, huge databases of sampled English which can be searched for particular patterns and then results can be organized to display the data in a way that shows the different variations. There are many of these databases online and the following three are available free and are relatively easy to use.

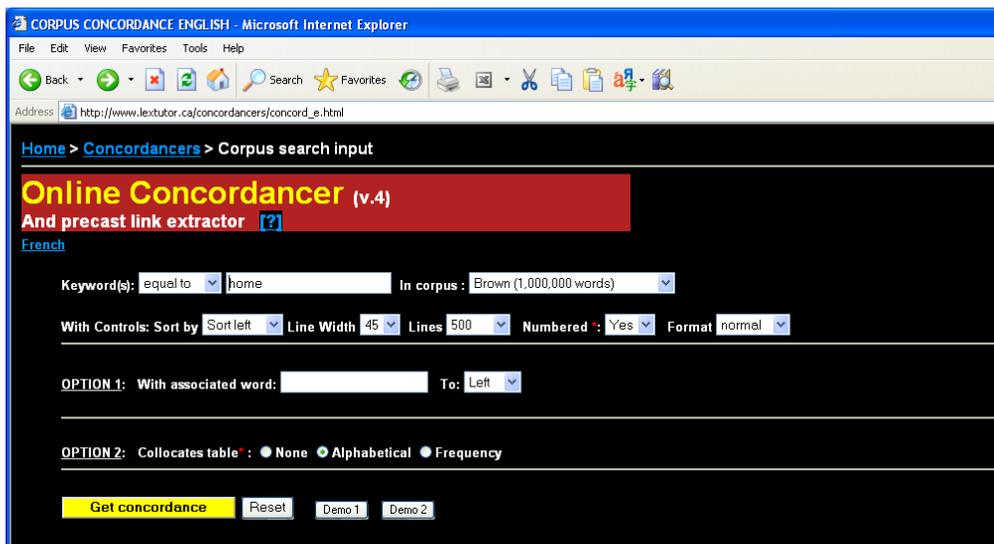
### Corpora Websites

**Lextutor** (Choice of various corpora)

[http://www.lex tutor.ca/concordancers/concord\\_e.html](http://www.lex tutor.ca/concordancers/concord_e.html)

Very easy to use. It is not possible to choose the part of speech of the collocates of your word but you can sort the words to the left or right of your target word. See below for sorted words left of "home".

### Lextutor



323 matter of fact you could probably find a new [home](#) development in every populated county in  
324 oad sweep of the Hudson River there is a new [home](#) development called "Oakwood Heights". As a  
325 re 12 is based on such a room built in a new [home](#) in the Washington, D.C. area in the Spring  
326 idea of including its facility in their new [home](#) projects, by financing and installing the  
327 ps to the attic room which was to be his new [home](#). Airless and dingy though it was, the  
329 3 1070 13 \_2.\_ Full payment of nursing [home](#) bills for up to 180 days following  
330 ould receive up to 300 days paid-for nursing [home](#) care under a "unit formula" allowing more  
331 of general, not payroll, taxes. #NURSING [HOME](#) CARE# The aged care plan carries these  
332 ion dollar a year federal grants for nursing [home](#) construction. He asked for another 10

**Cobuild Concordance & Collocations Sampler** (Bank of English)

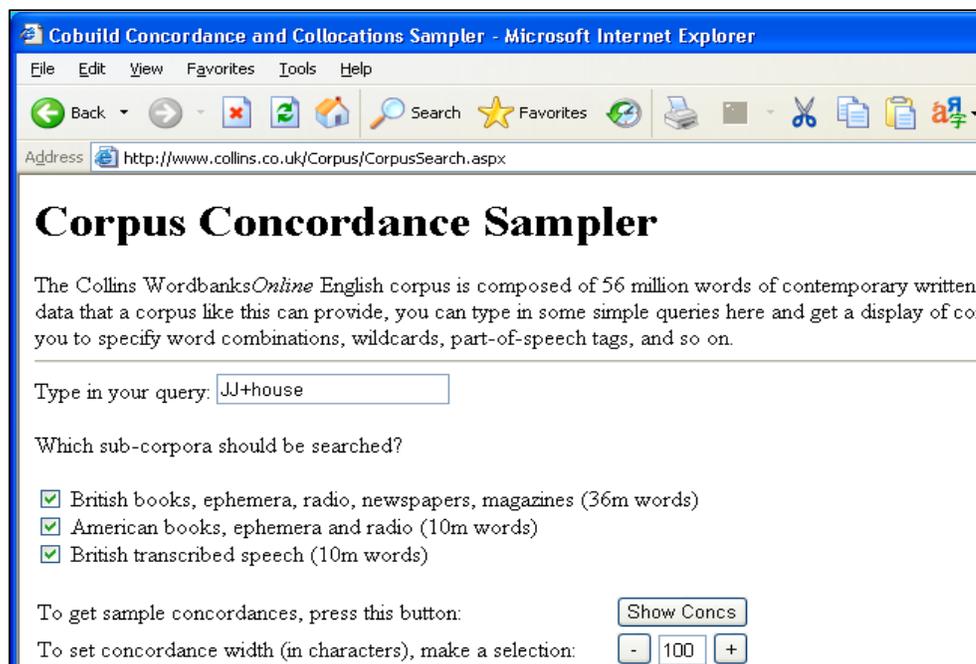
<http://www.collins.co.uk/Corpus/CorpusSearch.aspx>

For the Concordance Sampler, type your word or expression into the box. You can specify which parts of speech you want to come before or after it by using the **Part-of-Speech** tags. For example **JJ+house** will give you adjectives which appear before "house" (JJ+2house will give you adjectives two positions before house i.e., 1 word in between).

NOUN	a macro tag: stands for any noun tag	VCN	past participle verb
VERB	a macro tag: stands for any verb tag	VBG	-ing form verb
NN	common noun	VBD	past tense verb
NNS	noun plural	CC	coordinating conjunction
JJ	adjective	CS	subordinating conjunction
DT	definite and indefinite article	PPS	personal pronoun subject case
IN	preposition	PPO	personal pronoun object case
RB	adverb	PPP	possessive pronoun
VB	base-form verb	DTG	determiner-pronoun

boundaries, as a visit to any historic **house** in the United Kingdom will prove. Whilst have been brought into the White **House**. One adviser has suggested that there I'm well connected. A widower. My own **house**. Nice car." He was mocking himself. Some and seems to remember that the whole **house** cost less than that to buy. It is hard who lives in Joseph's magnificent old **house** overlooking Scarborough harbour, said: important match in front of a 43,000 full **house** at the Parc des Princes. [p] At the I mean [ZF1] and [ZF0] and it was a lovely **house** up [ZGY] barn [F01] Mm. [F02] a to come into [ZF1] the [ZF0] the large **house** where the father's got the banquet set. Anyway we think it's a nice **house** don't we. [FOX] Oh I'm sure MX'll like it. I wish we had time to look at a cheaper **house** because if I'd known that I only had six achieved his goals Jaguar detached **house** Managing Directorship. But his comfortable

**Bank of English**



**Cobuild Concordance and Collocations Sampler - Microsoft Internet Explorer**

File Edit View Favorites Tools Help

Back Search Favorites

Address <http://www.collins.co.uk/Corpus/CorpusSearch.aspx>

## Corpus Concordance Sampler

The Collins Wordbanks *Online* English corpus is composed of 56 million words of contemporary written data that a corpus like this can provide, you can type in some simple queries here and get a display of concordances. You can specify word combinations, wildcards, part-of-speech tags, and so on.

Type in your query:

Which sub-corpora should be searched?

- British books, ephemera, radio, newspapers, magazines (36m words)
- American books, ephemera and radio (10m words)
- British transcribed speech (10m words)

To get sample concordances, press this button:

To set concordance width (in characters), make a selection:

**Corpus BYU EDU**  
 (British National Corpus & American Corpus)  
<http://corpus.byu.edu/>

A little more complicated to use but extremely useful especially for listing in order the most frequent collocates of particular words. Over 100 million words British and over 400 million American.

**Corpus BYU EDU**

The screenshot shows the BYU-BNC website interface. The search string is "word". The context is set to "[aj\*]" and the POS list is "adj.ALL". The search results are displayed in a table with columns for "CONTEXT" and "KEYWORD IN CONTEXT (KWIC)".

CONTEXT	KEYWORD IN CONTEXT (KWIC)
1	SINGLE
2	RIGHT
3	WRITTEN
4	SPOKEN
5	GOOD
6	KEY
7	CORRECT
8	FINAL

Below the KWIC table, there is a section for "PART OF SPEECH: [AJ%]" and "SECTION: NO LIMITS". There is also a section for "CLICK ON TITLE FOR MORE CONTEXT" with a table of results:

CLICK ON TITLE FOR MORE CONTEXT	CONTEXT	KEYWORD IN CONTEXT (KWIC)
1 KD0 S_conv	n't it? Ready go! Erm er A man one word. Another <b>single word</b>	
2 KE3 S_conv	n't heard a word of this so far. Sorry. Not a <b>single word</b> . It loo	
3 JS9 S_meeting	to say that when Mr was there, he didn't mention one <b>single w</b>	
4 AC4 W_fict_prose	would be able to read all her thoughts from her face and that s	

Note in the box on the left that the selected word is “word” and to the right of CONTEXT, the number 1 has been chosen in the first box to select the collocates that come in the first space before our chosen word, in other words the words that come directly before “word”. If we had chosen 2, it would have given us the words that collocate with “word” in the first two places before it, i.e., it would have produced “**have**” because it is two positions before word in the expression “to **have** a word with...”. If you select a number in the second box, it will produce the collocates that come after the chosen word.

Below the CONTEXT box, is the POS LIST box (Part of Speech List), from where adj.ALL (all adjectives) was selected from the drop down list. It shows up in the CONTEXT box as [aj\*] and produces all the most frequent adjectives that collocate directly in front of “word”, e.g., *single word*, *right word*, *written word*, etc. Note that you can also set the type of source in the two boxes below, e.g., “newspaper, academic, etc.”

If you click on one of the collocates that is listed in the frequency list, the concordance shows up below showing excerpts from the source containing the collocation.

## Lexical Approach Activities

### Find Someone Who...



Speaking



Listening



Reading



Writing

Vocabulary

Grammar

Pronunciation

Warmer/Icebreaker

This warmer is a standard activity which has been adapted to focus on different lexical structures all involving the word “get”. It illustrates how *The Lexical Approach* is an approach, not a method, meaning it will work with existing methodology and activities. In this case, it merely involved planting the lexical chunks into “find someone who...” instructions. This particular activity could work with many other lexical chunks.

Find someone who...

...likes to get their own way.

...takes a long time to get back to people.

...wants to get married.

...is getting together with friends the day after tomorrow.

...got out of bed on the wrong side today.

...has got to be at work early tomorrow.

...hasn't got over a break-up.

...often got into trouble at school.

...got his/her tonsils taken out.

### Songs



Speaking



Listening



Reading



Writing

Vocabulary

Grammar

Pronunciation

Warmer/Icebreaker

Songs are a rich source of lexical items, particularly commonly used semi-fixed expressions. When gapping song lyrics for use as a listening exercise, gap lyrics to get students to focus on useful lexical chunks rather than individual words. An example below:

#### I Will - The Beatles

#### Gapping songs

Who [knows how long] I've loved you

[You know I] love you still

Will I wait a lonely lifetime

If [you want me too], I will

For [if I ever] saw you

I didn't [catch your name]

But it never really mattered

I will always [feel the same]

Love you forever and forever,

Love you [with all my] heart.

Love you [whenever we're together]

Love you [when we're apart]

And when [at last] I find you

Your song will fill the air

Sing it loud [so I can] hear you

Make it [easy to be] near you

For the [things you do] endear you to me

You know I will

#### Giving clues

You can also ask students to listen for certain constructions by supplying them with clues for each one. Or if you want to make it easier for them, give them a written copy of the lyrics along with the instructions See example below.

### Brown Eyed Girl - Van Morrison

Hey where did we go,  
Days when the rains came  
Down in the hollow,  
Playin' a new game,  
Laughing and a running hey, hey  
Skipping and a jumping  
In the misty morning fog with  
Our hearts a thumpin' and you  
My brown eyed girl,  
You my brown eyed girl.

Whatever happened  
to Tuesday and so slow  
Going down the old mine  
With a transistor radio  
Standing in the sunlight laughing,  
Hiding behind a rainbow's wall,  
Slipping and sliding  
All along the waterfall, with you  
My brown eyed girl,  
You my brown eyed girl.

#### Find the following collocations and expressions.

1. A question about where you went with someone.  
[Where did we go?]
2. A question about what became of something that existed in the past.  
[Whatever happened to...?]
3. A collocation to describe someone's physical appearance.  
[brown eyed]
4. An expression for where something is that cannot be seen.  
[Hiding behind a... ]

### Lexical Chunk Dictation



Speaking  
Vocabulary



Listening  
Grammar



Reading  
Pronunciation



Writing  
Warmer/Icebreaker

This is a quick and easy way to guide students towards lexical chunks that you want them find in a text. First you need your own copy of the text. Then on your text, underline some of the lexical chunks you want students to look for. Then give students a copy of the text and have them work in pairs. Tell them you are going to dictate a list of clues for structures in the text and they have to write down the clues. When you are dictating them, give students some clues about their form and the meaning e.g., “A noun plus noun collocation for a type of weather.” (morning fog). Once you have dictated them all, students work in pairs and find them in the text. If you want, you can make it a competition to see who can find them all first. See the example below for “Brown eyed girl”.

Hey where did we go,  
Days when the rains came  
Down in the hollow,  
Playin' a new game,  
Laughing and a running hey, hey  
Skipping and a jumping  
In the misty morning fog with  
Our hearts a thumpin' and you  
My brown eyed girl,  
You my brown eyed girl.

Whatever happened  
to Tuesday and so slow  
Going down the old mine  
With a transistor radio  
Standing in the sunlight laughing,  
Hiding behind a rainbow's wall,  
Slipping and sliding  
All along the waterfall, with you  
My brown eyed girl,  
You my brown eyed girl.

1. A four-word question about a past habit.  
[Where did we go?]
2. A noun plus noun collocation for a type of weather  
[morning fog]
3. A noun plus verb collocation for a physical response to excitement  
[hearts thumping]
4. A collocation to describe someone's physical appearance.  
[brown eyed]
5. A question about what became of something that existed in the past.  
[Whatever happened to...?]

## A Task-Based Approach



A good way to get students to notice lexical chunks in a text is to tell them that they will have to use those chunks later in a task. The task should relate to the original text. For example, if students were to read about someone's experience on a holiday, their task could be to describe a holiday that they had or would like to have and they would have to look for lexical chunks that they could use for that task. The source could also be a spoken text. Keeping with the holiday idea, an easy way to do this in a class is to tell students about a holiday you had and ask them to write down any chunks (e.g., expressions) that they think they could use when they describe their holiday. Not only is this an effective classroom activity but it teaches students a valuable strategy for language acquisition, that being listening or reading for useful language that you can use later.

Often the type of task you can assign becomes obvious when you look at the original text. For example, with the song "I will" (see above) the final task could be to write a love letter. Below are some chunks that students could extract to do that task.

You know I love you.  
 If you want me to...  
 Whenever we're together...  
 I will always feel the same  
 with all my heart  
 when we're apart  
 when we're together

Of course, once the students have extracted the language, you should get variable chunks up on the board and, where possible, elicit other slot-fillers that could be used. This is to give students some latitude with the chunks when they finally do their productive task. If the productive task is writing, you can specify that you want students to use a certain number of chunks.

<b>You know I</b>	<b>love</b> like adore care about	<b>you.</b>
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Lexical Approach Activities

If you want a really easy way to assess this task, you could ask students to underline the ones they used and award them a score based on how many they have. Below is an example of a student's writing done in this way based on an article about citizenship.

Brazil is a country full of possibilities but citizenship is underestimated due to the fact that people don't trust the country's political organization.

Young people don't enjoy working towards the betterment of one's community. They don't want to serve in the army, or do volunteer work. Although it's a country with freedom of religion, they don't enjoy going to church. They often agree about denying political duties but demanding their political privileges.

It's safe to conclude that Brazil needs to be encouraged to increase the young people's sense of citizenship.

**Corpora Searches**

<input type="checkbox"/>	Speaking	<input type="checkbox"/>	Listening	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Reading	<input type="checkbox"/>	Writing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Vocabulary	<input type="checkbox"/>	Grammar	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pronunciation	<input type="checkbox"/>	Warmer/Icebreaker

Students actually enjoy searching for items using concordance printouts from a corpus. Make sure they are focusing on just the words near the highlighted ones and keep the task simple. You can make it into a game by challenging pairs or groups of students to come up with the most lexical chunks meeting a certain criteria. Below is a portion of a concordance that students used to find colour collocations based on the following categories:

<b>Food or Drink</b> (mustard-yellow)	<b>Nature or People</b> (straw-yellow)	<b>Two-Colour Collocations</b> (orange-yellow)
<b>Two-Colour Collocations with "y"</b> (greeny yellow)	<b>Two-Colour Collocations with "ish"</b> (greenish yellow)	<b>Adjective + Noun for Strength/Temp.</b> (brilliant yellow, hot pink)

Talbot, a gleaming green Rolls and the mustard-yellow 1928 Austin, complete with its 'dickie' or linked to the starter and carry large day-glo yellow flags. [p] The grey gate will continue to as in this case, I would opt for gloss yellow. [p] In September 1960 wg768 - serialled W1.5-1.8m/5-6ft. F3-6. Z8-9. Aureus", greeny yellow stems, spines and leaves turn clear yellow shoots appear. The whole bush becomes butter-yellow, toning down later in summer. Full sun W45cm/18in. F7-9. Z4-9. Moonbeam", light lemon-yellow flowers, scented foliage, multi-branched preppy. He had a very British thatch of straw-yellow hair, combed floppily to one side. I wanted had sunk into the wood. It was beautiful light yellow wood, from a tree that grew in the yard hot side of the line, and case ground green-yellow. G.E. Minagear num;5scpl0mg19x. Takeouts in several weeks. F2- 3. `Primavera", pale canary-yellow flowers, yellow-orange autumn colour, a neat clump and produces double, egg-yolk-yellow blossoms that keep coming if you cut off Bumpy Dog, Whiskers the cat, Noddy's bright yellow car - parp! parp! - fully licensed to be sun. [c] flower name [/c] [p] Smooth, pale yellow flowers, darker at the tips. [c] flower of vines in new leaf, on the rich, brilliant yellow of broom, the pink and white of eglantine but brighter yellow foliage in summer, orange-yellow in winter. Purple flowers. H25- 30cm bull; Paint is original Volkswagen greenish yellow in excellent condition [p] bull; Three-singing in her ears and saw nothing but vivid yellow flashes. Giddily, she felt her body being

When using several corpus sheets that students have to search through for lexical chunks in different categories, as in the example above, try hanging sheets of paper in the classroom, each one with the category written on top (i.e. “colour collocations based on food or drink”, “two-colour collocations with y”, etc.). Then divide students into groups and give each group a different colour marker. Distribute the concordance printouts to the groups and students search through them and when they find a lexical item that fits one of the categories, they have to run up to the correct hanging sheet and write it down. For further explanation, see the activity directly below.

## Papers on Walls



This is a fun text-based activity which gets students out of their seats and raises awareness of lexical structures. You will need to decide on at least three categories of lexical structures you want your students to find in a text. For example, you could have them find different types of collocations (e.g., Noun + Noun, Adjective + Noun, Adverb + Verb, Verb + Noun, etc.). Each category is written on the top of a sheet of paper and the papers are posted around the classroom. Students work in teams, usually of two or three, and compete against other teams in an attempt to add the most items to the sheets. Each team is given a different coloured marker and told that they cannot add two items in a row. This keeps them moving around the class. Since the teams are each given just one marker, the members of a team will have to work together to help the person with the marker add to the sheets. Clever teams will split up so that the other members are not with the writer but waiting at other sheets with ideas. You can let students in on that strategy so that they don't end up bunched up around one sheet. Alternatively, before starting the activity, you could give the teams a couple of minutes to discuss strategy.

Below is a sample of constructions that students added to sheets posted around the classroom based on verbs followed by gerunds or infinitives. In this case, rather than finding complete structures in a text, the students made them up using corpora printouts that listed just the most common verbs or gerunds following each particular main verb (See “Infinitives after ‘PROMISE’”).

<p><b><u>Do you promise...</u></b>                      to <i>be</i> a good friend                      to <i>pay</i> the bill                      to <i>do</i> your homework                      to <i>come</i> back                      to <i>marry</i> me                      to <i>get</i> in touch</p>	<p><b><u>Can you imagine...</u></b>  <i>travelling</i> around the world  <i>having</i> an affair  <i>working</i> in Canada  <i>living</i> on the moon  <i>being</i> with me</p>	<p><b><u>Have you decided...</u></b>                      to <i>be</i> alone                      to <i>go</i> to Paris                      to <i>save</i> money                      to <i>have</i> children                      to <i>change</i> home stay                      to <i>leave</i> the country</p>	<p><b><u>Do you miss...</u></b>  <i>being</i> with your family  <i>seeing</i> your friends  <i>eating</i> Mexican food  <i>walking</i> in your city  <i>having</i> a girlfriend  <i>being</i> with your friends</p>
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**Corpora printout**

Sample of a corpora printout used for the above activity (from <http://corpus.byu.edu>)

**Infinitives after “PROMISE”**

1	<a href="#">BE</a>	<a href="#">47</a>
2	<a href="#">PAY</a>	<a href="#">31</a>
3	<a href="#">MAKE</a>	<a href="#">17</a>
4	<a href="#">DO</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
5	<a href="#">GIVE</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
6	<a href="#">BRING</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
7	<a href="#">PROVIDE</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
8	<a href="#">KEEP</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
9	<a href="#">COME</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
10	<a href="#">TAKE</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
11	<a href="#">HAVE</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
12	<a href="#">PERFORM</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
13	<a href="#">MARRY</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
14	<a href="#">GET</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
15	<a href="#">GO</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
16	<a href="#">OBEY</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
17	<a href="#">RETURN</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
18	<a href="#">LEAVE</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
19	<a href="#">HELP</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
20	<a href="#">DELIVER</a>	<a href="#">5</a>

Note: to get a list of verbs in the infinitive form, you need to put a 2 next to the context box to indicate the 2<sup>nd</sup> position after the word. This will allow for “to” in the first position.

Once you’ve got the structures on the papers, you can ask students to use them in a productive activity, either a speaking or writing task.

**Lexical Chunk  
Hot Seat**

	<i>Speaking</i>		<i>Listening</i>		<i>Reading</i>		<i>Writing</i>
	<i>Vocabulary</i>		<i>Grammar</i>		<i>Pronunciation</i>		<i>Warmer/Icebreaker</i>

This is a lexical version of a popular vocabulary game. The game uses two chairs which are placed in front of the board and facing away from it (allow some space between the board and the chairs and some space between the chairs). The students are divided into two teams which assemble in front of each chair. Then one student from each team sits in the chair. They will have their backs to the board but all other students can see the board. The teacher then writes a word on the board and each team gives their teammate in the “hot seat” clues so they can guess the word, without saying the word itself. The first hot-seat student to guess the word gets a point for their team and then another member from each team sits in the hot seats and the teacher writes another word on the board.

To use it lexically, first have the students learn the individual words. Then list the words on the board. Put two students in the seat and put one of the individual words into a useful lexical chunk (collocation or expression). The students have to tell their teammate in the hot seat how many words are in

the expression and the construction of the expression. For example, for “to have low self-esteem”, the construction would be: **Infinitive + Adjective + Noun** (or compound noun, if you’d like). You can help the students at first by writing the construction on the board, but they should learn to figure them out by themselves. If you are working with a vocabulary list from a book and you cannot find useful lexical chunks for some words on the list, you can leave them out of this game. Below are lexical chunks that were formed from a list of words from a coursebook article on why people turn to crime.

to	<b>commit</b>	a crime
to	<b>foster</b>	an idea
	<b>petty</b>	crimes
to become	<b>commonplace</b>	
	<del><b>bear-out</b></del>	(skipped)
to have a	<b>motive</b>	
to have low	<b>self-esteem</b>	
to be	<b>marginalized</b>	from the society
serious	<b>consequences</b>	

### Slot-filler Relay Race

 Speaking	 Listening	 Reading	 Writing
 Vocabulary	 Grammar	 Pronunciation	 Warmer/Icebreaker

This is a great way to get the students to come up with slot-fillers for semi-fixed expressions. Once they have picked out some expressions from a text, elicit the expressions from them and make note of them either by underlining them in the text or listing them on a sheet of paper or on the side of the board. Then get them into two teams and have each team line up in front of the board. To make sure the lines stay far enough back from the board, point out a “line” on the floor which they must line up behind (at least a metre back from the board). Explain that one team should start by choosing an expression from the list and they will be given a minute (or two, your choice) to come up with slot-fillers for it. It needs to be done as a relay race where the first member of the team takes a marker, races up to the board, fills in a slot-filler, hands the marker to the next student to add another slot-filler and goes to the back of the line. When time is up, eliminate incorrect slot-fillers and award a point for each correct one. Then the other team takes their turn. Below are some sample slot-fillers that were provided for a semi-fixed expression from the Beatle song previously mentioned. Note that when there are two slots, you can insist that each student has to fill in both at the same time.

Who	<b>know(s) how long I've</b>	loved you.
My teacher		studied English.
Nobody		been here.
My mother		been in Toronto.
My friends		been drinking.

## Slot-filler Search



Speaking  
Vocabulary



Listening  
Grammar



Reading  
Pronunciation



Writing  
Warmer/Icebreaker

This is similar to the previous activity in that students have to provide slot-fillers for semi-fixed expressions taken from texts. However, this activity gives them expressions that are variations of those in the text and they have to search the text to find the original expression. This task gives them practice with reading skills as they will need to skim and/or scan the text to find the original expression. In addition, the activity demonstrates how semi-fixed expressions can be varied and, since the variations can be provided by the teacher, it's ideal for lower level students who may not be entirely sure how to recognize and manipulate semi-fixed expressions.

To set the activity up, use a text that students have been working with, a reading or listening tapescript, and pull out a few important semi-fixed expressions, e.g., 5 – 10.. Then write variations of them by changing the slot-fillers. Before starting the activity, write the semi-fixed expressions on the board. To make it easier for students to do, write them in the same order they appear in the text. To make it more challenging, mix them up. Then divide the students into two to five pairs or groups. Give each group a different coloured board marker. Tell students to look back through the text and find the original expressions. When they do, one person from each pair/group comes to the board and writes one of the original slot-filler above the changed one in one of the expressions. Then that student returns to their team and gives the marker to another member, who can come up and change another slot-filler. For semi-fixed expressions with more than one slot-filler, you can allow them to change both at once but it makes it more challenging, more collaborative and more active if they can only change one as their teammate can then get the marker from them and change the other one. When all the expressions have been changed, count up how many contributions have been made in each colour to determine the winning team.

Here are some sample changed semi-fixed expressions taken from the first paragraph of this text. They are in the same order that they appear in the text.

Schools have to provide lunches for students  
Children have to search the room to find the hidden presents  
The incident demonstrates how teenagers can be cruel  
Public transportation is ideal for people who live in the suburbs

After students have found the original slot-fillers, spend some time talking about the construction of each semi-fixed expressions and, if you'd like, get students to write some other variations of them, either in class or for homework.

## Suggestions for Teaching Lexically

Because the lexicon is far too vast to “teach”, the Lexical Approach puts the emphasis on getting students to notice lexical chunks during their exposure to English. This is called “noticing” or “consciousness raising” and is considered the key for language acquisition. The teacher’s role is to help the students develop their “noticing” skill, or in other words, to turn **input** (language exposure) into **intake** (language acquisition). Hopefully, the development of the students noticing ability will go beyond the classroom and occur whenever they encounter the language.

- Don’t teach vocabulary out of context. Try to avoid teaching isolated words. Either collocate them (e.g., bank account, savings account, etc.) or include the word in a realistic structure (I’d like to open an account).
- With semi-fixed expressions, give other examples of similar words/chunks that are also used in that structure. Generally, don’t give more than five examples and try to relate the words in terms of function and/or meaning.
- Don’t spend too much time on fixed expressions, particularly idiomatic ones, as they are normally not used that frequently (When is the last time you heard someone say “He’s always blowing his own trumpet”? and they do little to develop strategies for processing other structures (He’s always blowing his own nose???)”).
- Get some collocation dictionaries and encourage students to use them when using classroom material (i.e. “Go through the reading and find the collocations that go with the following words...” “Now use the collocation dictionaries and find other similar collocations for those words.”). Also, they can use the collocation dictionary to embellish their writing. (Instead of “We went on a trip to Niagara and stayed in a hotel”, “We went on an **overnight** trip to Niagara and stayed in a **first-class** hotel.”)
- Develop or adapt exercises to get students to notice collocations and other lexical chunks in their course material. After doing reading or listening comprehension have students go over the text/tapescript and pick out certain topic-related or function-based lexical chunks.
- Use Teacher Talking Time to give students practice in noticing lexical items in your speech.
- Use a task-based approach. Tell students before they read or listen to a text that they will have to do a task relating to the text and have them listen or read for topic or function-related lexical chunks they think they can use for the task (e.g., “Read this description of a holiday and look for expressions to talk about YOUR last holiday”). Then compile what the students have extracted on the board, expand semi-fixed expressions, clarify form, meaning and pronunciation, where appropriate. Then have them use the language in a task relating to the text (e.g., students then talk about their last vacation). Telling them before they deal with the text that they will have to use the lexis they find, is a good way of encouraging noticing and acquisition.

- Systematize! If you show how individual words are related in lexical structures, you can dramatically increase the amount of vocabulary that can be dealt with in a lesson. For example, in the colour-collocation lesson (see Activities), over 60 collocations were dealt with in a one-hour lesson. That is because conceptually there were only seven different lexical chunks (collocations with food and drink, etc.) and once students understood the concept it was easy to plug different but related elements into the collocations.
- Tell students that whenever they encounter the language they should be listening or reading for chunks of language that they can use. Assign homework tasks to get them to do it.

## **Recommended Books**

***Implementing the Lexical Approach*** Michael Lewis LTP 1997 (now Thomson/ Heinle)

***Oxford Collocations Dictionary*** OUP 2002

***Teaching Collocation*** Michael Lewis ed. LTP 2001

***Natural Grammar*** Scott Thornbury OUP 2004

## Appendix

### Text-based Lexical Lesson Framework

<b>Main Aim:</b> -Students learn meaning and usage of target lexis <b>Sub Aims:</b> -Reading comprehension -Noticing lexical structures -Writing practice -Speaking practice		<b>Materials:</b> -Listening tapescript or reading text -board markers	
STAGE	FOCUS	PROCEDURE	TIME
Warmer	S-S	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use any warmer which gets Ss thinking about the topic/content and introduces the text.</li> </ul>	5 - 10
Gist Read	S	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assign a gist question and students read or listen to the text to answer it. Give a time limit for a gist reading task</li> <li>Elicit the answer.</li> </ul>	5 - 10
Reading for Comprehension	S	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assign comprehension questions.</li> <li>Students read or listen to the text and answer the questions.</li> <li>Elicit the answers (you can have students pair check before you do this).</li> </ul>	5 - 15
Language Analysis	S or S-S	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assign topic or task-related noticing task e.g., "Read the text and look for collocations and/or expressions that are used to talk about movies". Tell students to underline the lexical chunks on their copy of the text or tapescript. You can make the noticing task more effective by linking it to a productive task, e.g., "Read the text and look for collocations and/or expressions that you could use to write a movie review."</li> </ul>	10 - 15
Clarification	T-Ss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Elicit the lexical chunks that the students found and write them on the board.</li> <li>Explain meaning where necessary and elicit and/or provide slot-fillers in semi-fixed expressions.</li> <li>Where appropriate, do pron practice, especially stress patterns.</li> </ul>	10 - 20
Controlled Practice	S-S	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Get students to practice using the lexical chunks in speaking. For example, they ask their partner a question which would elicit one of the lexical chunks in the answer (e.g., Q "How would you describe the acting in the film?" A "Brad Pitt <b>delivered a good performance as ...</b>"</li> </ul>	5 - 10
Production	T-Ss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assign a writing task and specify that students have to use the lexical chunks that they extracted from the text. You can specify how many you want them to use or just give a minimum number. The task can be related by genre to the original text, i.e., if it was a movie review, students write a movie review.</li> <li>To make it easier to mark, you can ask them to underline them. Then when you assess their writing, give them a mark based only on the use of the lexical chunks, which means you only look at what is underlined and don't bother correcting the text. Or mark them solely on how many they use, making it really easy.</li> </ul>	10 - 15
<p><b>Homework:</b> Tell students to listen or read for lexical chunks when they are outside of class and assign them a number of chunks you want them to bring in to the next class (3 is a good number). You can ask for them to be related to the text or not (e.g., more lexical chunks related to movies). This encourages them to notice lexical structures whenever they encounter the language, thus encouraging autonomous learning and accelerated acquisition.</p>			