A FREE TOOL TO HELP LEARNERS WITH ONLINE ENGLISH CHOOSING WORDS WHILE THEY WRITE

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English teachers know that learners often struggle to choose words that sound right together. Good word combinations, also known as collocations, affect fluency and readability. Compare the following sentences:

Fine use of collocations can highly improve readability.
Effective use of collocations can greatly improve readability.

Both these sentences are grammatically correct, yet there is little doubt that the second is more natural and easier to read than the first. This is because *effective use* and *greatly improve* are better word combinations, or collocations, than *fine use* and *highly improve*.

Collocation problems also include grammar errors, like *need of instead of need for in the following sentence:

There is an urgent need ~~of~~ for teacher support.

Collocations involving prepositions like the above are notoriously difficult for learners and represent a large proportion of errors in texts written by learners.

Other collocation problems are related to the vocabulary of a learner's first language. For example, Dr Şen Bartan reports that Turkish students, influenced by the Turkish collocation Kanıtları ortadan kaldırmak, produced errors such as *abolish evidence instead of the conventional English collocation destroy evidence.

There are also other less-noticeable issues, like a tendency to use only a limited set of familiar collocations, and not exploring new ways of expanding vocabulary.

Fortunately, that there are numerous resources designed to provide help with English collocations, including textbooks like Academic Vocabulary in Use, dictionaries like the Oxford Learner's Dictionary of Academic English, and collocation dictionaries like the Longman Collocations Dictionary and

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Thesaurus. There are also online corpus linguistics tools like SkELL (Sketch Engine for Language Learning) which can help.

However, learners wishing to use the above to improve their vocabulary when writing must stop writing to do so, which can distract them from what they were trying to say. Another limitation is that learners can only look up vocabulary when they realize that their word choices could be improved. However, they are often not aware of gaps in their knowledge.

ColloCaid is a new tool that can help EFL writers by offering collocation suggestions directly in the familiar environment of a text editor.
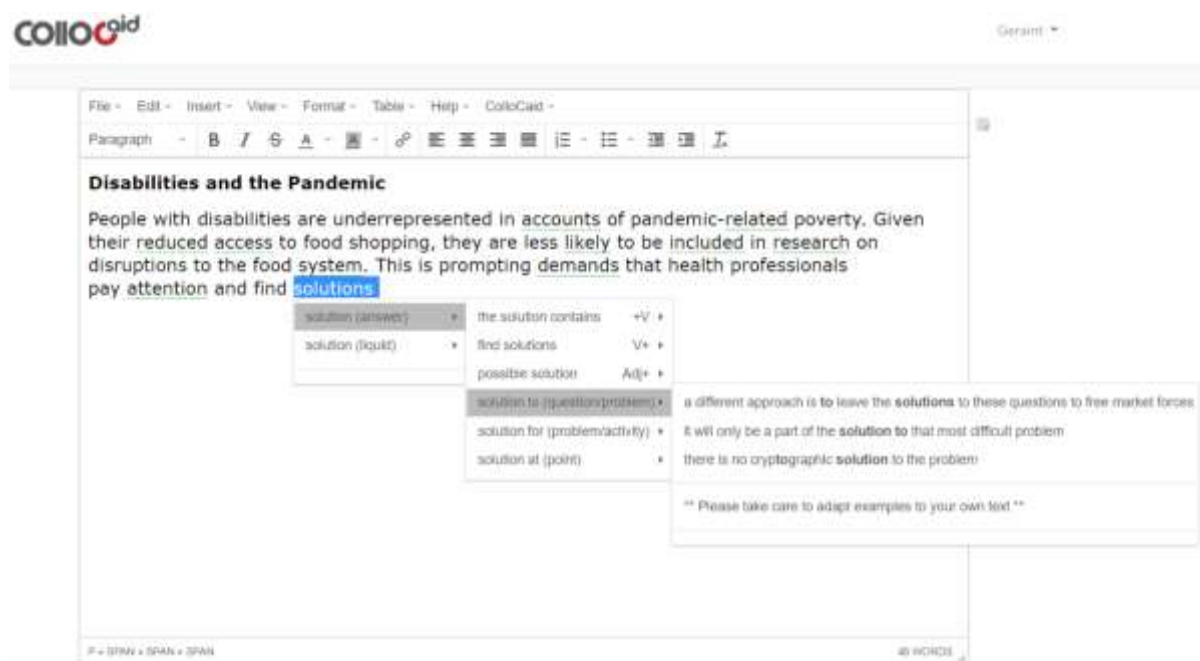
ColloCaid in action

The simple fact of having different collocation options highlighted on screen draws learners' attention to gaps in their knowledge, offering opportunities for learning new vocabulary. The collocations and examples provided come from genuine texts by expert writers. ColloCaid is easy to use and free, and EFL teachers can show their students how to use it in writing and gap-filling exercises. They can also use ColloCaid to check collocations when correcting essays.

See www.collocalid.uk