

"English Collocations — Make vs Do" Cheat Sheet



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A collocation is a pair or group of words that are commonly used together in natural English. Native speakers learn which words "go together" automatically, but learners often substitute a synonym that sounds wrong even though it should logically work. The most common collocation mistake is mixing up make and do — these two verbs are not interchangeable and follow different patterns.

Make vs Do — General Pattern	Use "Make" for	Use "Do" for
General idea	Creating, building, or producing something	Performing an activity, task, or general action
Result	Often results in something new existing	Focuses on the process or effort itself
Examples	make a cake, make a plan, make money	do homework, do the dishes, do a favor

- I need to make a decision by Friday. (NOT "do a decision")
- Can you do me a favor? (NOT "make me a favor")
- She made a mistake on the test. (NOT "did a mistake")
- We need to do some research before the meeting. (NOT "make some research")

Common Collocations with "Make" Collocation		Example
make a decision	choose between options	I made a decision to change jobs.
make a mistake	do something wrong	He made a mistake in the report.
make an effort	try hard	She made an effort to arrive early.
make a plan	prepare a course of action	We made a plan for the weekend.
make progress	move forward / improve	The team made progress this week.
make money	earn income	He makes money from freelance work.
make a difference	have an impact	Small actions make a difference.
make sense	be logical / understandable	Does this explanation make sense?
make an appointment	schedule a meeting	I made an appointment with the dentist.
make a promise	commit to something	She made a promise to call back.

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Common Collocations with "Do"	Collocation	Example
do homework	complete schoolwork	I have to do my homework tonight.
do the dishes	wash dishes	Can you do the dishes after dinner?
do a favor	help someone	Could you do me a favor?
do business	conduct commercial activity	We do business with that company.
do research	investigate / study a topic	She did research for her thesis.
do your best	try as hard as possible	Just do your best on the exam.
do exercise	perform physical activity	I do exercise every morning.
do damage	cause harm	The storm did a lot of damage.
do the laundry	wash clothes	I need to do the laundry this weekend.
do nothing	take no action	He just did nothing all day.

Beyond make/do, many other common verb pairs cause similar confusion. The verb you choose often depends on the specific noun that follows it — these combinations must usually be memorized rather than guessed from logic alone.

Other Common Collocation Pairs	Correct	Incorrect
take a shower / have a shower	✓ take/have a shower	✗ make a shower
take a break	✓ take a break	✗ make a break / do a break
have a conversation	✓ have a conversation	✗ make a conversation
pay attention	✓ pay attention	✗ make attention
catch a cold	✓ catch a cold	✗ take a cold / get a cold (informal only)
keep a promise	✓ keep a promise	✗ hold a promise
save time	✓ save time	✗ win time
miss the bus	✓ miss the bus	✗ lose the bus

- I took a shower before the meeting. (NOT "made a shower")
- Let's take a break for ten minutes. (NOT "make a break")
- We had a long conversation about the project. (NOT "made a conversation")
- Please pay attention during the lesson. (NOT "make attention")
- I caught a cold last week. (NOT "took a cold")
- He kept his promise to help us. (NOT "held his promise")
- This shortcut will save time. (NOT "win time")
- I missed the bus this morning. (NOT "lost the bus")