

Interactive Language Learning Opportunities for Beginner and Intermediate ESL Learners

By Eman Elturki

FLAX: Best of Password

[Flexible Language Acquisition \(FLAX\)](#) is a digital library consisting of authentic language collections for diverse language needs and proficiency levels. These collections are drawn from sources such as the British National Corpus (BNC), Wikipedia, Google, and other ESL materials. It is a rich resource for ESL learners to explore and practice language in context. The *FLAX Distributed Collections* are designed for beginner and intermediate ESL learners. Two collections that are particularly useful in the *FLAX Distributed Collections* are: *The Best of Password* and *Earth Science*. The former contains articles and exercises that come from a magazine for learning English called *Password* and published in New Zealand, whereas the latter collection consists of articles and exercises for beginner levels focusing on earth science. These collections offer rich resources to learn and practice English independently. Students can read and listen to reading passages at their level, learn about parts of speech, expand their vocabulary including collocations, and practice what they have learned in the collection through interactive games. Since both collections have the same browsing options, this article focuses on *the Best of Password Collection*.

What does FLAX's Best of Password Offer?

Reading, listening, and learning about parts of speech in the reading.

Students can browse *the Best of Password* collection by title or level (Figure 1). The collection consists of four levels; beginner to intermediate. Students can read and listen at the same time. Passages are read at a pace and speed appropriate for the level. Students can listen to passage by clicking on the player widget.

The screenshot shows the 'The Best of Password' interface. At the top, there are navigation tabs: 'About Collection', 'Search', 'Browse', 'Activities', 'Collocations', and 'Wordlist'. A 'My Cherry Basket' icon is visible in the top right corner. Below the tabs, there is a section titled 'Browse Documents by Title'. Underneath, there are buttons for 'All', 'Level 1', 'Level 2', 'Level 3', and 'Level 4'. A list of documents is displayed, each with a bullet point and its title followed by its level in parentheses. The list includes:

- Adventure sports (Level 4)
- The beekeeper (Level 1)
- Family history, genealogy and whakapapa (Level 4)
- Fishing (Level 2)
- Going to the doctor (Level 1)
- Holiday plans (Level 1)
- The kiwi bach (Level 3)
- Kiwi food (Level 2)
- Lifelines (Level 1)
- Making goals for learning English (Level 2)
- A Maori creation story (Level 2)
- The parliamentary system in NZ (Level 3)
- Preserving Te Reo Maori (Level 3)
- Using the internet to study English (Level 3)
- What do you eat? (Level 2)
- Why do you need to keep your first language? (Level 4)
- Will you be my CUP? (Level 4)
- Witi Ihimaera -- a Maori writer (Level 4)
- Working on organic farms (Level 2)
- Writing poetry in English (Level 4)

Figure 1. *The Best of Password* collection and its different levels and features.

Another interesting feature is having specific parts of speech and highly frequent words highlighted in the reading by clicking on one of the tabs on the top right side of the page: wordlist, adjective, noun, preposition, and verb. For instance, by clicking on the wordlist tab, the most frequent words in English are highlighted. Through the dropdown list a student can select whether they want to see the top 100 most frequent words, the top 2000, academic words, topic-specific words, or keywords highlighted in the text.

Expanding vocabulary. Students have multiple opportunities to learn new vocabulary and explore word usages. Through “Search,” for example, students can search for specific words and see how they are used in the collection. For instance, by typing a word in the search engine, students can find articles, sentences, paragraphs, and collocations that contain the search word.

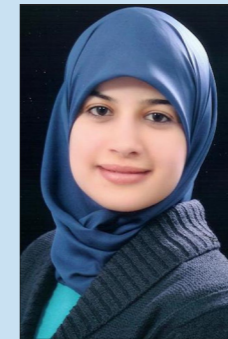
Furthermore, students can improve their vocabulary by learning about collocations (i.e. words that tend to occur together) through clicking on the “Collocations” tab. It lists all the words occurred in the collection. When students click on a word, they can see examples of collocations from the readings. Clicking on any word in the collocational string takes students to another page “Learning Collocations,” which provides a comprehensive list of collocations associated with the word as well as sentence examples when clicking on a particular collocation.

The “Wordlist” browsing option is another resource for students to develop general and academic vocabulary. Students can view words from the collection that are among the 1000 or 2000 most frequent words or academic words. Students can click on a word on the list to see how it is used in context. Another interesting feature is saving words and collocations to “My Cherry Basket” by clicking on the cherry icon and then printing the list out or saving it to their computers as a text file.

Playing with English. The “Activities” option takes students to language games built for the collection such as hangman, scrambled sentences, word guessing, collocation dominoes, and punctuation and capitalization. For example, through playing the “Hangman” game, students can practice spelling and then see a full report of what they have done right or missed by clicking on the “Summary Report”.

Conclusion

To sum up, *FLAX Distributed Collocations* are a rich resource for practicing English in an interactive way. It provides students with opportunities to improve their English independently and have fun with language.



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