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**TEXTS/VOCABULARY.  
A PRACTICAL COURSE**



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<b>Foreword</b>
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It is well-known that vocabulary is of paramount importance to learning a new language and that it is intertwined with reading/comprehension and fluency. A lack of adequate vocabulary knowledge can certainly disrupt the process of learning and interfere with communication.

Dedicated to intermediate and upper-intermediate level students (B1-B2 *cf. Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*), the present handbook comprises 14 units of study, each of them structured on two levels (reading/comprehension exercises and vocabulary exercises), having as a starting point selected texts with various topics or subjects (*e.g.* nature, culture, travel, relationships, society, work and employment, crime and the law, technology, etc.). Its main purpose is to help students situate words in various contexts, make connections and develop fluency while using new vocabulary.

The handbook ends with a list of some of the most common collocations in English. Collocations are important in learning vocabulary, they bring a plus of fluency, make speech and writing more idiomatic, more natural, and thus similar to the discourse of a native speaker.

*The Author*



## 1. Natural Environment

The natural environment encompasses all living and non-living things occurring naturally, meaning, in this case, not artificial. It is defined by the interaction of all living species, climate, weather and natural resources that affect human survival and economic activity. The concept of natural environment could also be defined using two different, yet interrelated, components:

- Complete ecological units that function as natural systems without massive civilised human intervention, including all vegetation, microorganisms, soil, rocks, atmosphere, and natural phenomena that occur within their boundaries and their nature;
- Universal natural resources and physical phenomena that lack clear-cut boundaries, such as air, water, and climate, as well as energy, radiation, electric charge, and magnetism, not originating from civilised human actions.

The built or artificial environment is seen in contrast to the natural environment. In such areas where man has fundamentally transformed landscapes, such as urban settings and agricultural land conversion, the natural environment is greatly modified into a simplified human environment. Even in the case of acts which seem less extreme, such as building a mud hut or a photovoltaic system in the desert, the modified environment becomes an artificial one. Though many animals build things to provide a better environment for themselves, they are not human, hence, beaver dams and the works of Mound-building termites are thought of as natural.

People seldom find absolutely natural environments on Earth, and naturalness usually varies in a continuum, from 100% natural, in one extreme, to 0% natural, in the other. More precisely, we can consider the different aspects or components of an environment and see that their degree of naturalness is not uniform.

Natural environment is often used as a synonym for habitat, for instance when we say that the natural environment of giraffes is the savanna.

Evidence suggests that life on earth has existed for about 3.7 billion years. Although there is no universal agreement on the definition of life, scientists generally accept that the biological manifestation of life is characterised by organisation, metabolism, growth, adaptation, response to stimuli and reproduction.

An ecosystem (also called environment) is a natural unit consisting of all plants, animals and micro-organisms (biotic factors) in an area functioning together with all of the non-living physical (abiotic) factors of the environment.

Central to the ecosystem concept is the idea that living organisms are continually engaged in a highly interrelated set of relationships with every other element constituting the environment in which they exist. Eugene Odum, one of the founders of the science of ecology, stated: "Any unit that includes all of the organisms (i.e.: the "community") in a given area interacting with the physical environment so that a flow of energy leads to clearly defined trophic structure, biotic diversity, and material cycles (i.e.: exchange of materials between living and nonliving parts) within the system is an ecosystem."

The human ecosystem concept is then grounded in the deconstruction of the human/nature dichotomy, and the emergent premise that all species are ecologically integrated with each other, as well as with the abiotic constituents of their biotope.

A greater number or variety of species or biological diversity of an ecosystem may contribute to greater resilience of an ecosystem, because there are more species present at a location to respond to change and thus "absorb" or reduce its effects. This reduces the effect before the ecosystem's structure is fundamentally changed to a different state. This is not universally the case and there is no proven relationship between the species diversity of an ecosystem and its ability to provide goods and services on a sustainable level.

The term ecosystem can also pertain to human-made environments, such as human ecosystems and human-influenced ecosystems, and can describe any situation where there is a relationship between living organisms and their environment. Fewer areas on the surface of the earth today exist free from human

contact, although some genuine wilderness areas continue to exist without any forms of human intervention.

Wildlife includes all non-domesticated plants, animals and organisms. Domesticating wild plant and animal species for human benefit has occurred many times all over the planet, and has a major impact on the environment, both positive and negative. Wildlife can be found in all ecosystems. Deserts, rain forests, plains, and other areas – including the most developed urban sites – all have distinct forms of wildlife.

For the benefit of people and natural systems, environmental scientists and environmentalists recommend: elimination of pollution and toxicants in the air, water, soil, buildings, manufactured goods and food; preservation of biodiversity and protection of endangered species; conservation and sustainable use of resources such as water, land, air, energy, raw materials, and natural resources; halting human-induced global warming which represents pollution, a threat to biodiversity, and a threat to human populations; shift to sustainable and less polluting waste management including waste reduction, reuse, recycling, composting, waste-to-energy, and anaerobic of sewage sludge.

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Odum, E. P. (1971). *Fundamentals of Ecology (Third ed.)*. New York: Saunders;

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural\\_environment](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_environment)

**Reading/Comprehension**

**1. Answer the questions:**

- a. Which are the differences between the natural environment and the artificial one?
- b. What is an ecosystem?
- c. Which are the most significant human interventions on the natural environment?
- d. Which are the main characteristics of the biological manifestation of life?
- e. Which are the most important challenges in preserving the natural environment, for the benefit of the planet and its inhabitants?

**2. State whether the following statements are true or false:**

- a. The natural environment encompasses only living things occurring naturally;
- b. Preservation of biodiversity and protection of endangered species is beneficial to people and the natural environment;
- c. Domesticating wild plant and animal species has a negative impact on the environment;
- d. Beaver dams and the works of Mound-building termites are natural environments;
- e. Wildlife can only be found in places untouched by human civilisation.

**3. Which of the following statements would provide the most logical continuation of the final paragraph?**

- a. Environment destruction caused by humans is a global problem and this is a problem that is ongoing every day. By year 2050, the global human population is expected to grow by 2 billion people, thereby reaching a level of 9.6 billion people.
- b. The human effects on Earth can be seen in many different ways. The main ones are the rise in temperature and the global warming which have been going on for the past 50 years primarily due to human activities.

**4. Using the information you have learnt in this unit, comment on the following quotation:**

"If our economies are to flourish, if global poverty is to be banished, and if the wellbeing of the world's people enhanced – not just in this generation, but in succeeding generations – we must make sure we take care of the natural environment and resources on which our economic activity depends" – Gordon Brown.

**Vocabulary Exercises**

**1. Match each word with the appropriate definition:**

- |                    |   |   |   |
|--------------------|---|---|---|
| <i>environment</i> | • | • | A major ecological community type (such as tropical rain forest, grassland, or desert);   |
| <i>ecosystem</i>   | • | • | The complex of a community of organisms and its environment functioning as an ecological unit;  |
| <i>climate</i>     | • | • | The complex of physical, chemical and biotic factors (such as climate, soil and living things) that act upon an organism or an ecological community and ultimately determine its form and survival; |
| <i>biome</i>       | • | • | The whole mass of air surrounding the earth;  |
| <i>atmosphere</i>  | • | • | The average course or condition of the weather at a place usually over a period of years as exhibited by temperature, wind velocity, and precipitation.   |

**2. Rearrange the words and the phrases in a) to e) to make correct sentences:**

- a. Global/ the dangers of/ by/ a wide global consortium/ studied/are being/of scientists/ warming;
- b. Variety/ can be/of/in/on Earth/the biosphere/found/or/life forms/living organisms/a/diverse;
- c. On Earth/ a natural environment/ has not been/ that/ significantly/ wilderness/ is/ by/ modified/ defined/ human activity/ as/ generally;

- d. Planetary ecosystem/the/ the atmosphere/ a key factor/of/ the Earth/ as/ in sustaining/ serves;
- e. In/ major disciplines/ there are/ Earth sciences/ four/ and/ Geography/ namely/ Geology/ Geophysics/ Geodesy.

**3. Rephrase the following sentences using your own words:**

- a. A body of water is considered a lake when it is inland, is not part of an ocean, and is larger and deeper than a pond;
- b. An ocean is a major body of saline water, and a component of the hydrosphere;
- c. Water within a river is generally collected from precipitation through surface runoff, groundwater recharge, springs, and the release of water stored in glaciers and snowpack;
- d. Ponds and lakes are distinguished from streams by their current speed;
- e. Humans impact the water in different ways such as modifying rivers (through dams and stream channelisation), urbanisation and deforestation.

**4. Match each adjective with an appropriate noun:**

- |                |                |
|----------------|----------------|
| 1. surrounding | a. forest      |
| 2. thermal     | b. mountains   |
| 3. sheer       | c. springs     |
| 4. dense       | d. cliffs      |
| 5. high        | e. countryside |

**5. Find the Romanian equivalents for:** *bank, bay, cave, cliff, coast, mainland, volcanic ash, layer, rainfall, sustainability, waste-to-energy, toxicants, oxygen cycle, climax community, rift zone.*

**6. Complete the sentences below with one of the following words:**     *photosynthesis*,     *biogeochemical*,     *landscape*,  
*environmental*, *temperature*.

a. The term natural.....is sometimes used as a synonym for wilderness;

b. Global .....cycles are critical to life, most notably those of water, oxygen, carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus;

c..... is a process used by plants and other organisms to convert light energy into chemical energy that can later be released to fuel the activities of organisms;

d. The water cycle involves the exchange of energy, which leads to ..... changes.

e. In some places, forests need help to reestablish themselves because of ..... factors.

**7. Give the synonyms of the following words:**

a. *abide by* .....

b. *dynamic*.....

c. *greens* .....

d. *immeasurable*.....

e. *junction*.....