

EAL Medium Quiz

A Batch of Brainteasers

A batch of brain-teasers is about groups, or collectives.

English uses very specific words to refer to groups of particular things. This is perhaps not quite as complex as Mandarin Chinese, which uses different counting-words (but fortunately, not different sets of actual numbers) according to whether the things they are counting are alive or dead, flat or solid, and a whole load of other category divisions. But there are a range of fairly common 'collectives', and any English speakers that you meet conversationally will probably congratulate you if you know and use them correctly.



See how you get on with this 'batch of brain-teasers'!

1. Choose the word/s that will go into the gap/s to create the clearest English sentence.

There's a of traffic waiting to turn into the supermarket.

- ... great bunch ...
- ... load ...
- ... long line ...
- ... great deal ...

2. Choose the word/s that will go into the gap/s to create the clearest English sentence.

'When the children were let out of school on their last day, they went charging across the playground like a of elephants.'

- ... group ...
- ... flock ...
- ... herd ...
- ... troop ...

3. Choose the word/s that will go into the gap/s to create the clearest English sentence.

'I well remember the picture over the bed when we used to go and stay with my grandmother. There was a of sheep in an autumn field, and over their heads a of geese were flying into the sunset.'

- ... flock ... / ... flock ...
- ... group ... / ... flock ...
- ... flock ... / ... herd ...
- ... herd... / ... formation ...

4. Choose the word/s that will go into the gap/s to create the clearest English sentence.

'Few things are so dispiriting to wake up to, as a of dirty washing on the bedroom floor.'

- ... bunch ...
- ... load ...
- ... bundle ...
- ... group ...

5. Choose the word/s that will go into the gap/s to create the clearest English sentence.

'It says in the local paper that some architects' is hoping to build a of flats on the land opposite the station.'

- ... office ... / ... building ...
- ... practise ... / ... house ...
- ... practice ... / ... block ...
- ... firm ... / ... load ...

6. Choose the word/s that will go into the gap/s to create the clearest English sentence.

'How many full we can lay at the table for this smart dinner, will depend on how many big plates we still have in the'

- ... places ... / ... box ...
- ... covers ... / ... set ...
- ... people ... / ... kit ...
- ... settings ... / ... shelf ...

7. Rather confusingly (and as in French, among other languages), English uses the same word for the substance that trees are made of on the inside, and also a collection of trees that occupy a smaller area of land than a forest, perhaps up to about one hectare. What is our word that does both these jobs?

Plank

Wood

Timber

Trees

8. Choose the word/s that will go into the gap/s to create the clearest English sentence.

'On the table in the living-room is a whole of magazines that I never got round to reading.'

... stack ...

... heap ...

... pile ...

... wedge (/ wodge) ...

9. Choose the word/s that will go into the gap/s to create the clearest English sentence.

'If people are feeling hungry mid-afternoon, I'll bake a of scones.'

... bunch ...

... load ...

... batch ...

... tray ...

10. Choose the word/s that will go into the gap/s to create the clearest English sentence.

'He has had a whole of girlfriends down the years, but he never seems to have settled down permanently with any of them.'

... sequence ...

... bevy ...

... string ...

... load ...

ESL Medium Quiz A Batch of Brainteasers

1. Choose the word/s that will go into the gap/s to create the clearest English sentence.

There's a of traffic waiting to turn into the supermarket.

... great bunch ...

... load ...

... long line ...

... great deal ...

Assuming the vehicles are hoping to enter the carpark one after another, 'a line of traffic' is the most sensible collective term to use here. Otherwise, any of the others would 'roughly do'.

2. Choose the word/s that will go into the gap/s to create the clearest English sentence.

'When the children were let out of school on their last day, they went charging across the playground like a of elephants.'

... group ...

... flock ...

... herd ...

... troop ...

We speak of a herd of elephants, and also use this when talking about cattle (cows) on a farm: 'a dairy herd' would be one that the farmer kept for producing milk. A flock (Answer 2) applies to sheep, goats and other similar semi-domestic animals (llamas, for instance), and also ~ perhaps strangely ~ to birds.

3. Choose the word/s that will go into the gap/s to create the clearest English sentence.

'I well remember the picture over the bed when we used to go and stay with my grandmother. There was a of sheep in an autumn field, and over their heads a of geese were flying into the sunset.'

... flock ... / ... flock ...

... group ... / ... flock ...

... flock ... / ... herd ...

... herd... / ... formation ...

'Flock' is right both times here (see Hint on Question 2, above). You may not have known, beforehand, that geese (singular: goose) were birds; but from the context, what else could they be ~ except, perhaps, aeroplanes?

4. Choose the word/s that will go into the gap/s to create the clearest English sentence.

'Few things are so dispiriting to wake up to, as a of dirty washing on the bedroom floor.'

... bunch ...

... load ...

... bundle ...

... group ...

At least a 'bundle' of clothing (or other fabric; or indeed, documents or firewood) looks as though someone has made a slight effort to gather it together. A 'load' could either mean a significant quantity ('a heavy load to carry'), or perhaps enough washing to fill a typical machine, on one occasion. The term 'bundle' is also used to mean the ~ often quite large ~ mass of documents assembled for reference in a trial in court: photographs, reports, witness statements etc. And we can use this noun (like many others) as a verb: one could 'bundle the children upstairs to the bathroom', as quickly as possible, after coming indoors from a wet or muddy walk.

5. Choose the word/s that will go into the gap/s to create the clearest English sentence.

'It says in the local paper that some architects' is hoping to build a of flats on the land opposite the station.'

... office ... / ... building ...

... practise ... / ... house ...

... practice ... / ... block ...

... firm ... / ... load ...

A group of architects (or other professionals, such as lawyers, accountants or dentists) is usually known as a 'practice' (not 'practise' with an S, which is the verb meaning 'to rehearse or prepare a skilled performance'). One unit of flats within the same building is 'a block'.

6. Choose the word/s that will go into the gap/s to create the clearest English sentence.

'How many full we can lay at the table for this smart dinner, will depend on how many big plates we still have in the

... places ... / ... box ...

... covers ... / ... set ...

... people ... / ... kit ...

... settings ... / ... shelf ...

One complete 'place' (of knives, forks, plates glasses etc.) is known in the catering trade as a 'cover'; matching plates would usually come in a 'set' (or if very formal, possibly a 'service').

7. Rather confusingly (and as in French, among other languages), English uses the same word for the substance that trees are made of on the inside, and also a collection of trees that occupy a smaller area of land than a forest, perhaps up to about one hectare. What is our word that does both these jobs?

Plank

Wood

Timber

Trees

'A wood' consists of several trees, and if you chop down the trees, you will have wood that you could burn or use for making things.

8. Choose the word/s that will go into the gap/s to create the clearest English sentence.

'On the table in the living-room is a whole of magazines that I never got round to reading.'

... stack ...

... heap ...

... pile ...

... wadge (/ wodge) ...

'Stack' is the tidiest word, suggesting that they are all facing the same way up. Any of the other answers are possible, but they are all more or less untidy; a 'pile' would show some sign of once having been a 'stack', but a 'heap' is more or less shapeless.

9. Choose the word/s that will go into the gap/s to create the clearest English sentence.

'If people are feeling hungry mid-afternoon, I'll bake a of scones.'

... bunch ...

... load ...

... batch ...

... tray ...

A batch is the right term here. 'Tray' might also be possible, assuming that all the scones were cooked at the same time and in the same shaped container. ('Scones' are smallish, fist-sized, fresh sweet or savoury buns. The classic context for them is as part of a 'cream tea', where the scones are split open and eaten with fresh thick cream ~ or just possibly, failing that, butter ~ and jam, accompanied by a fresh pot of tea.)

10. Choose the word/s that will go into the gap/s to create the clearest English sentence.

'He has had a whole of girlfriends down the years, but he never seems to have settled down permanently with any of them.'

... sequence ...

... bevy ...

... string ...

... load ...

For some reason ~ possibly the mental picture of a line one-after-the-other ~ we speak of 'a string of racehorses' and perhaps 'a string of girlfriends'. 'Bevy' is usually applied, alliteratively, to 'beauties', but this seems rather sexist and old-fashioned nowadays. 'Sequence' suggests an element of planning, which one would hope was unlikely in these circumstances unless the man is a real schemer (which would explain why no woman would wish to settle down with him). 'Load' is rather informal and frankly somewhat rude.