



## Using corpus linguistics to explain phrases that have similar meaning

Philip Greenblatt

### Abstract

In this article, a corpus-based study is performed on two phrases, *depend on* and *reply on*, to show how they are used in similar and different ways. These phrases are synonyms and can confuse learners of English. Moreover, it can be difficult for teachers of English to explain their usage using intuition and grammar books alone.

The results of the analysis reveal differences in how the phrases are used based on empirical data and illustrate how a corpus-based approach can be beneficial for students and teachers alike.

### 1. Introduction

*Rely on* and *depend on* are two phrases that have similar meaning. In a pedagogical situation, an English teacher may use linguistic intuition to differentiate between the two phrases before reaching for a dictionary or grammar book. However, it is not easy to explain how they are used to

learners of English and an initial response may well be that they are generally synonymous.

The definitions in Merriam-Webster Online dictionary overlap with 'to be dependent' listed as one of the meanings of *rely* and 'to place reliance or trust' listed as one of the meanings of *depend*. Turning to a grammar book (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman 1999, p. 402), *to rely on* and *to be dependent on* are listed in the same section about adjectives and verbs that co-occur with prepositions. They are listed as examples of set co-occurrences with no further details of usage or meaning. Perhaps most handy is the COBUILD dictionary, itself compiled with reference to the Bank of English corpus. *Rely* has two definitions and *depend* has five definitions. Unlike a regular dictionary, all are listed as a collocation with *on* and examples of usage are included for each entry (see appendix)

As Kennedy notes (1991, p.97) grammatical description is often concerned with the systemic possibility of word classes. This priority of semantic meaning is not helpful as even similar words, which are grouped together by conventional grammar, have individual characteristics (Sinclair 1991, p.81). Specific examples of usage are needed to explain how these phrases are used and in what contexts. Corpus linguistics can help us do this by allowing us to observe how language functions based on frequency in authentic texts.

In the present article corpus data is used to find patterns of usage that shed light on how these phrases function lexically and grammatically. In turn, illustrating how corpus linguistics can be used in foreign language instruction. The findings and observations are then be compared to the COBUILD definitions where applicable.

At first, I provide a brief summary of corpus linguistics before detailing the analysis and comparison of *rely on* and *depend on* using the web version of the British National Corpus (henceforth BNCweb).

## 2. Corpus Linguistics

Corpus linguists utilise computer technology to plan and design corpora for specific purposes (Hunston 2002, p. 2). Findings from these collections of naturally occurring examples of written and spoken language enable linguists to make claims

about the behaviour and usage of language as a whole.

### 2.1 Types of corpora

There are various types of corpora including general, specialized and learner corpora. The BNC is a general corpus, which as the name suggests, seeks to provide a general representation of language. Specialized corpora focus on any number of areas, such as academic spoken English. Learner corpora are compiled from second or foreign language learner texts.

It is important to note some fundamental distinctions between corpora. Diachronic corpora contain comparable texts from different periods, while synchronic corpora are ‘snapshots’ of one particular time. In addition, static corpora do not change once compiled, while dynamic or ‘monitor’ corpora are constantly added to (Bonelli 2010, p.22). The BNC is a synchronic, static corpus made up of texts from 1985 to 1991. Therefore, it could be argued that it is out-of-date depending on the nature of investigation. On the other hand, it is easier to ensure a balance of content in static corpora, which is why it was used in the present study.

### 2.2 Types & tokens

Words in a corpus can be referred to as types or tokens. Types are instances of unique words and tokens are the total number of instances including repeated words. The BNCweb contains 100 million

tokens (including punctuation), which is made up of 600,000 unique word types.

### 2.3 Variation

Some corpora contain metadata, which is information about texts such as the gender, sex, age or social class of the speaker. This metadata enables the user to see a breakdown of frequency across different categories, which can reveal differences and similarities of language use across different groups and contexts. Spoken texts only make up around 10% of the BNC. The written texts are categorized into various genres such as academic prose.

### 2.4 Concordance lines

Producing concordance lines is a common word-based method of analysis often used for teaching and translation related searches. Search queries can be for a single word-form, lemma or a series of words (Hunston 2002, p. 38). Lemma means all word-forms are considered together and is indicated by capitals. For example, HAVE indicates a search for all word-forms of have (have, had, having etc...).

The concordance lines can be unsorted, sorted alphabetically or grouped for purpose. The selected word is known as the node word and appears in the centre of the screen with the words that come before and after to the left and right. This can help reveal the behaviour of a word or phrase, or make any patterns of usage easier to observe; ultimately allowing associations

between patterns and meaning to be made.

Hunston (2002, p. 42) points out that 'corpus cannot show correctness of language', only what is 'central' and 'typical' usage, which is observable through frequency of meaning, collocates or phraseology. 'Typical' refers to of individual words or phrases, and 'centrality' refers to categories of language, such as a verb tense.

Conversely, 'prototypical' refers to intuitions speakers may have about what is 'typical' and 'central', however these are not always supported by the evidence.

### 2.5 Collocation and colligation

Collocation is the tendency for two words to co-occur or for one word to attract another. Colligation is the term for grammatical collocations. Co-occurrences can be motivated, has a logical explanation, or unmotivated, does not have a logical explanation. These co-occurrences may be intuitively obvious; however, a corpus is required to perform reliable statistical analysis (Hunston 2002, p.68). The term significant is used to indicate whether a co-occurrence reflects a pattern rather than just a chance happening, which would therefore be insignificant.

As with concordance observations, significance is measured statistically. Two ways of measuring co-occurrence significance are Mutual Information (MI) score, which shows the strength of the collocation, and t-score, which shows the

certainty of the collocation. They both hinge on two calculations: observed instances, that is how many times the co-occurring word is observed in the span, versus expected instances, that is how many times the co-occurring word might be expected to be found, given the frequency of the word in the corpus as a whole. A t-score value of 2 or higher and an MI score of 3 or higher is seen as significant (Hunston 2002, p.71-2).

Hunston notes Burrows (1992) and Stubbs (1995) observations that these calculations are based on randomness or non-randomness, which is somewhat strange when applied to language. This is because only grammatically correct occurrences should be considered. However, as the process of determining the correctness of language can be difficult, they are still viewed as useful means of calculating significance.

The span is the number of words either side of node word that are included in the search. The default span for BNCweb is three words to the left and three words to the right (3:3); however, the number of words to the left and right can be set by the user.

### 3. Methodology

The first step in the analysis was to look for patterns and phraseology in a random set of 100 concordance lines for each phrase. Hunston advocates 100 hundred lines as appropriate size when looking for general patterns based on

frequency of occurrence (Hunston 2002, p.52). The second step was to interpret the strongest patterns in terms of collocation, colligation, semantic preference and semantic prosody. To check the strength and certainty of these patterns and to reveal new patterns based on data from the whole corpus, t-score and MI lists were then referenced.

When examples are used from the sample concordance lines, the line number is listed in brackets.

### 4. Analysis

In the BNCweb, *RELY on* has 3482 hits in 1463 texts with 35.42 instances per million words and *DEPEND on* has 7962 hits in 2174 texts with 80.99 instances per million words (fig.1 below).

Searching for the lemma of each phrase increases the number of hits within the corpus and widens the range of possible usage patterns. In other words, having the maximum amount of data implies that any findings will be as representative as possible.

This is borne out by the fact that *DEPEND on* occurs over twice as many times as *RELY on*, whereas the base form of both phrases occur roughly the same number of times at around two thousand. Interestingly, for *RELY on* the base form is the most frequent type with 57.54% of the tokens, yet for *DEPEND on* there is an even spread of occurrences between *depends on*,

RELY on 4 types and 3482 tokens				DEPEND on 4 types and 7942 tokens			
No.	Lexical item	Occur.	Percent	No.	Lexical item	Occur.	Percent
1	Rely on	1900	54.57%	1	Depends on	2824	35.47%
2	Relied on	650	18.67%	2	Depending on	2266	28.46%
3	Relying on	548	15.74%	3	Depend on	2184	27.43%
4	Relies on	384	11.03%	4	Depended on	688	8.64%

**Figure 1:** Frequency breakdown

*depending on*, and *depend on* accounting for approximately one third of tokens each.

As Kennedy observed in his study of *between* and *through* (1991, p.98), it is immediately clear that there is a difference in the words that most frequently occur close to the node. This is even more apparent when looking at statistical lists by t- score and MI.

The first step however was to look for frequently recurring words in the concordance samples. Upon initial examination, the most noticeable reoccurring words precede the node phrases.

#### 4.1 Collocations with preceding word

Beginning with *RELY on*; the first pattern to emerge is *to* occurring 23 times one to left of the node in the span (L1). As the grammar book suggested, it occurs as a set phrase with the base form. Furthermore, *have/had* frequently precedes *to* in the L2 position. The examples of this pattern in the sample lines imply a semantic preference of necessity, e.g. *you have to rely*

*on your instincts* (6) or *the people who lived there had to rely on rainwater* (23).

This multiple word co-occurrence, *have + to + rely on*, illustrates the point that collocations are often more than two words in length (Kennedy 1991, p.98).

Modals and quasi-modals, such as *have to* frequently occur with all types within the span. The most common in the sample is *can/could/cannot/can't/could not* co-occurring 14 times predominately with the base form. For example, *an artist cannot rely on one person's taste* (5) and *she could rely on his discretion* (19). In these examples, it is a person's tendency to like or dislike and a person's behaviour that can or cannot be relied on.

These initial observations for *RELY on* are supported by the definitions in the COBUILD dictionary. Firstly, need (*have + to*) and secondly, being able to rely on someone's behaviour (*can + rely on + someone*).

Conversely, *can* only occurs once in the L1 position with *DEPEND on*. The strongest

pattern is *will*, which occurs 11 times in the L1 position and twice in the L2 position with the base form e.g., *its suitability will depend on two factors* (72) and *that will depend on how good he is on the day* (6). As with *RELY on*, these examples illustrate the first definition in the COBUILD dictionary, which is ‘*one thing depends on another*’.

#### 4.2 Statistical significance

At this stage, it is useful to look at the t-scores for the phrases to test the certainty of these observations. Hunston notes that looking at data like this can be a shortcut to discovering the phraseology, but warns that any patterns must be investigated further in the concordance lines (2002, p.77).

In figure 2, notice that *have* and *to* are the top ranked L2 and L1 words and the high ranking of *can* in all its word-forms, which confirm the observations from the sample. Based on the data we can also see that *be* is ranked third in the L1 position. Of the 118 occurrences, 105 precede *relied on* and 13 precede *relying on*. In addition, the modals *can* and *could* in positive and negative forms often precede *be*, e.g. *the court cannot be relied on to imply a term* (36).

In figure 3, the statistical data also confirms the observed recurrence before *DEPEND on*. *Will* is the top ranked L1 word and *would* ranked seventh. *Will* is also highly ranked in L2 and L3 positions.

Modality is expressed before both

Ranking by t-score (no restrictions)			
L3	L2	L1	Node
we	have	to	<b>RELY on</b>
can	can	not	
they	had	be	
could	could	can	
you	not	which	
be	rather	they	
,	need	could	
not	able	who	
party	ca	n't	
which	do	than	

**Figure 2:** Ten highest ranked preceding collocates RELY on L3:L1

Ranking by t-score (no restrictions)			
L3	L2	L1	Node
of	it	will	<b>DEPEND on</b>
or	does	,	
different	much	it	
this	will	not	
per	or	all	
but	this	which	
their	these	would	
its	that	much	
much	different	also	
will	very	may	

**Figure 3:** Ten highest ranked preceding collocates for DEPEND on L3:L1

phrases; however based on this evidence the words that collocate are different. This is something that would not be intuitively apparent, as for example, *can depend on* is not grammatically incorrect, yet it only occurs 26 times in the corpus.

##### 4.2.1 Pronouns

*It* is the second ranked L1 word, with almost 90% of the occurrences before

*depends on* predominately in spoken texts. It is also the top ranked word in the L2 position.

Conversely, the top ranked subject pronouns preceding *RELY on* are *we* and *they* in the L3 position, with *you* and *who* also featuring highly. Therefore, it appears that people are predominantly relying on something and things are dependent on something or someone. This hypothesis is supported in the sample concordance lines, e.g. *they used to rely on incessant effects* (40). Interestingly, a person or group occurs after the collocation *it + depends + on*, e.g. *it depends on whether you interest her* (81) and *it depends on what academic lawyers consider relevant* (90).

#### 4.2.2 Pronouns following the node

The occurrence of pronouns following the node is more balanced. For *RELY on*: *their*, *his*, *them*, *your* occur in the R1 position, whereas for *DEPEND on*: *you* and *your* are most prevalent, occurring R1 to R3 (fig. 4 & 5).

The top R1 to R3 words *the size of* can be taken as a complete collocation, whilst not occurring in the sample, is listed in the first COBUILD definition.

#### 4.3 Increasing the span - Someone & something

The person, group or entity that is to be relied on or depended on invariably occurs

Ranking by t-score (no restrictions)			
Node	R1	R2	R3
<b>RELY on</b>	the	own	of
	a	support	to
	their	for	for
	his	fact	's
	them	clause	and
	your	from	or
	its	information	clause
	an	to	as
	him	people	that
	you	exclusion	than

**Figure 4:** Ten highest ranked following collocates for *RELY on* R1:R3

Ranking by t-score (no restrictions)			
Node	R1	R2	R3
<b>DEPEND on</b>	the	size	of
	how	you	and
	whether	type	's
	what	circumstances	you
	your	number	.
	their	nature	between
	its	factors	circumstances
	which	particular	being
	where	much	're
	who	amount	or

**Figure 5:** Ten highest ranked following collocates for *DEPEND on* R1:R3

close enough to the node to appear on the query results screen. However, in a few cases it comes in the preceding sentence or clause. The maximum span in the BNCweb is 10:10, however, a span that is too wide would include words that are not directly related to the node and therefore skew the results. Based on these factors a span of 5:5, rather than the default 3:3, was used for the following statistical references -



L5:L1 for words preceding the node and R1:R5 for words following the node.

#### 4.4 Nominal collocates

In this section, the focus is narrowed to nominal collocates to establish what people, groups or entities co-occur with each phrase. Firstly, I set out nouns preceding the node, and secondly, nouns following the node.

In addition, as reoccurring nouns are less frequent than functional words, the nouns that do occur need to be grouped together into semantic areas to establish any patterns and to determine semantic preference. To do this a greater reliance on statistical lists was required, as more data than the 100 sample lines is needed.

##### 4.4.1 Preceding the node

To look for the top ranked nouns, t-score

results were restricted to 'any noun' and the span set to 5:1. The semantic fields of phrases can be profiled by grouping the nouns into semantic areas (Hunston 2002, p.78). Therefore, the tables presented here contain only the nouns, to allow for easier observation of patterns and areas (fig. 6 below).

For *RELY on* there are words connected to the legal process (*party, plaintiff(s), defendant(s), prosecution, court(s)*); institutions & organizations (*government, authorities, banks, employer, firms*); people (*people, person, Mr, others, buyer*); reason or support (*argument, theories, facts*); and amount (*extent, need*).

However, the most apparent way to group these nouns and therefore the predominant category is that of people (*people, person, Mr, others, buyer, party, plaintiff(s), defendant(s)*).

#### Nominal collocates - Top 25 ranked by t-score occurring L5 to L1

##### Before *RELY on*:

party, people, mr, plaintiff, argument, government, extent, buyer, defendant, prosecution, others, firms, person, courts, theories, court, banks, employer, systems, facts, defendents, individuals, need, authorities, plaintiffs

##### Before *DEPEND on*:

success, lot, future, amount, life, choice, system, survival, course, extent, value, turn, level, answer, effect, outcome, rate, method, case, effectiveness, size, selection, cost, income, decision

**Figure 6:** Preceding nouns listed in order one to twenty five



The main tendencies of the top preceding collocates for *DEPEND on* are connected to amount or extent (*amount, extent, value, level, rate, size, cost, income*); consequence (*success, outcome, future, survival, life, answer, effect, effectiveness*); act of resolution (*decision, selection, choice*); and procedure (*system, course, method*).

Therefore, the occurrence of people before *RELY on* and the absence of people before *DEPEND on* corresponds with the pronoun usage that was observed earlier e.g.:

If people had to **rely on** borrowing directly from other people (25)

I don't think success would absolutely **depend on** it [selling to third parties] (10)

As a note of caution, some of the collocations connected to the legal process

such as, *party* have a high t-score but occur in a small number of texts. Hunston points out that there is a danger that collocations with words of low frequency in the corpus as a whole will appear to be significant. Therefore to establish a meaningful association there needs to be further evidence in the sample (Hunston 2002, p.71). This is also true of some of the nouns following the node.

#### 4.4.2 Following the node

In figure 7 below, the top two ranked nouns by t-score for *RELY on* are *support* and *clause*, with values of 7.1 and 6.1 respectively. However, whereas *support* has 57 hits in 54 texts, which are spread over a range of categories, *clause* has 38 observed hits in only eight texts. In fact, 26 of the hits are from two books *Drafting standard terms of trading & Drafting commercial agreements*.

### Nominal collocates - Top 25 ranked by t-score occurring R1 to R5

#### After **RELY on**:

support, clause, information, advice, memory, income, defence, fact, evidence, skill, power, system, accounts, people, help, experience, exclusion, promise, judgement, assumptions, assumption, knowledge, others, ability, friends

#### After **DEPEND on**:

size, circumstances, factors, type, nature, number, ability, level, amount, context, degree, conditions, quality, income, age, weather, individual, extent, kind, situation, availability, strength, view, rate, facts

**Figure 7:** Following nouns listed in order from one to twenty-five

In contrast to *RELY on*, the t-score values for *DEPEND on* appear to be more reliable, which is to be expected because of the greater amount of data. For example *size*, the top ranked noun, has 180 hits in 137 texts with a value of 13.1. Moreover, there is a marked increase in observed frequency and t-score value for nouns following the node when compared to statistics for nouns following and preceding *RELY on* and nouns preceding *DEPEND on*.

As with the top ranked collocates that preceded *RELY on* some of the words could be connected with legal profession, namely the semantic areas of indicators (*evidence, fact, information, memory*) and conclusion or vindication (*judgement, assumptions, assumption, defence*). Other main tendencies include expertise (*experience, knowledge, ability, skill, power*) and assistance (*support, advice, help, promise*).

Although less prominent than preceding the node, there are three words connected with people (*people, friends, others*) and in keeping with previous findings there is only one word connected with people following *DEPEND on* (*individual*).

Notice that the some of the top collocates following *DEPEND on* in the semantic area of amount or extent (*size, type, level, degree, extent, strength, quality, length*) also frequently occurred preceding the node. The other main tendencies are state or condition (*circumstances, factors, context, conditions, outcome, nature,*

*success*); and financial (*success, income, rate, value, price, amount, number*).

Based on this evidence *RELY on* is more frequently followed by nouns that relate to people or qualities a person or group has. Whereas *DEPEND on* is more frequently followed by nouns that relate to inanimate factors or circumstances e.g.:

a local authority may **rely on** its power (60)  
no archbishop henceforth could **rely on**  
papal support (62)  
speed of response will again **depend on** the  
size of the analysis (74)  
SFA members as dealing as principal or as  
agent **depending on** the circumstances (80)

#### 4.5. Mutual Information

At this point, it is useful to look at the MI data to examine the lexical behaviour of the phrases (fig. 8 below). The MI values are similar for both phrases because as opposed to t-score data the MI-score is not dependent on the amount of data available (Hunston 2002, p.73).

Some words that were found in the t-score data also appear in the MI data. For *RELY on* the legal or official words (*plaintiff(s), clause, and buyer*); for *DEPEND on* the words connected with condition, size and consequence (*circumstances, factors, size, outcome and survival*). E.g.:

the plaintiff could not **rely on** it in order to  
obtain summary judgment.(42)  
exports to be maintained **depends on**

---

**Mutual Information - Top 25 ranked words occurring L5 to R5 (no restrictions)**


---

**Before & after RELY on:**

non-linguistic, intuition, donations, inference, clause, goodwill, exclusion, nutrients, instincts, overtime, exemption, charitable, plaintiffs, seller, taxpayer, submission, instinct, plaintiff, brochure, assumptions, prosecution, judgement, skill, reasoning, buyer

---

**Before & after DEPEND on:**

livelihoods, livelihood, dosage, vary, viscosity, elasticity, varies, distinctiveness, impedance, severity, bonuses, viability, factors, circumstances, goodwill, size, exact, availability, generosity, prosperity, survival, magnitude, configuration, timing, outcome

---

**Figure 8:** Nouns listed in order from one to twenty five (5:5)

several factors. (51)

the survival of historic houses **depended on** 'not dying' and daughters-in-law. (94)

Notice that a person, *plaintiff*, is reliant on something to obtain a judgement. Conversely, although *daughters-in-law* occur following *depended on*, they are just another factor on which the survival of historic houses depend. This is similar to exports being dependent on factors.

Furthermore, there are five people related words in the top twenty-five for *RELY on* (*plaintiffs, plaintiff, buyer, seller, taxpayer*) and none for *DEPEND on*, which also supports the earlier findings.

*DEPEND on* has the main tendencies of state of being (*viscosity, elasticity, distinctiveness, impedance, severity, viability, generosity, availability, prosperity*); factors (*configuration, size,*

*circumstances, factors, timing, magnitude, dosage, outcome*) and necessities of life (*livelihoods, livelihood, survival*). *Goodwill* is the only word which occurring the top twenty-five for both phrases.

In addition to people, *RELY on* has the main tendencies of reasoning (*reasoning, intuition, instinct(s), assumptions, judgement, inference, skill*); charity (*donations, goodwill, charitable*) and process (*exemption, exclusion, submission*).

## 5. Summary & conclusion

This study has examined two near-synonymous phrases *RELY on* and *DEPEND on* to illustrate how corpus linguistics can help reveal differences based on frequency of usage. The BNCweb was used to investigate recurring words and collocations in 100 lines of randomized concordance data for lemmas of the respective phrases.

Statistical data, namely t-score and MI, was also used to check the certainty and strength of the collocations and to look for additional patterns in the corpus as a whole. Although this was only a preliminary study that requires further hypothesis testing and *rely on* and *depend on* are synonyms that share similar structures such as preceding modal expressions, there is evidence that in this corpus that the recurrent collocations and therefore associated semantic areas differ. Most apparent is that people or qualities of a person or group has occur more predominantly with *RELY on* especially preceding the node. Whereas for *DEPEND on*, amount or extent is the most prominent semantic area.

These observations are supported by the definitions in the COBUILD dictionary, even though it is compiled from the Bank of English corpus, rather than the BNCweb, which was used in this study.

Further areas of study could include verb tense and other parts of speech. Sinclair advises that no instances should be overlooked when looking concordance data, however, I have only had space to look at the most apparent tendencies (1991, p. 94). Distribution data could also provide insights into differences in categories and domains of usage and reveal factors that may skew the results.

An obvious limitation of BNCweb is that it is comprised of mainly written texts.

Any limitations of the corpus would also need to be investigated and taken into account before any statements about language as a whole could be made (Kennedy 1991, p.103).

In conclusion, whilst further study may be required to make definitive statements about the two phrases investigated in the present study it is clear that empirical usage information from corpus linguistics is not only more useful to a learner of English than purely systemic possibility, but is also more reliable than intuitive judgement when an English teacher seeks to explain and demonstrate differences in language.

## References

- Bonelli, E.T. (2010) Theoretical overview of the evolution of corpus linguistics, in O’Keeffe, A and McCarthy, M (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Corpus Linguistics*, London: Routledge, p. 14-27.
- Celce-Murcia, M. and Larsen-Freeman, D. (1999) *The Grammar Book: An ESL/ EFL Teacher’s Course* (2nd ed.), Heinle & Heinle
- Kennedy, G. (1991) “Between” and “Through”: The Company They Keep and the Functions They Serve, in K. Aijmer and B. Altenberg (ed.), *English Corpus Linguistics Studies in honour of Jan Svartvik*, London: Longman p95-110.

Kennedy, G. (1998) *An Introduction to Corpus Linguistics*, London: Longman  
 Hunston, S. (2002) *Corpora in Applied Linguistics*, Cambridge: CUP  
 Sinclair, J.M. (1991) *Corpus Concordance Collocation*, Oxford: OUP

**Appendix:** Collins, COBUILD Advanced British English Learner's Dictionary

**rely** Word forms: relies , relying , relied

Definitions 1. verb

If you rely on someone or something, you need them and depend on them in order to live or work properly. ⇒ [V + on/upon] They relied heavily on the advice of their professional advisers.

2. verb

If you can rely on someone to work well or to behave as you want them to, you can trust them to do this. ⇒ [V+on/upon] I know I can rely on you to sort it out. ⇒ [V+ on/upon] The Red Cross are relying on us.

**depend** Word forms: depends , depending , depended

Definitions 1. verb

If you say that one thing depends on another, you mean that the first thing will be affected or determined by the second. ⇒ [V + on/upon] The cooking time needed

depends on the size of the potato. ⇒ [V + on/upon] How much it costs depends upon how much you buy.

2. verb

If you depend on someone or something, you need them in order to be able to survive physically, financially, or emotionally. ⇒ [V + on/upon] He depended on his writing for his income. ⇒ [V + on/upon] Choosing the right account depends on working out your likely average balance.

3. verb

If you can depend on a person, organization, or law, you know that they will support you or help you when you need them. ⇒ [V + on/upon] 'You can depend on me,' Cross assured him.

4. verb

You use depend in expressions such as it depends to indicate that you cannot give a clear answer to a question because the answer will be affected or determined by other factors. ⇒ [V] 'But how long can you stay in the house?'—'I don't know. It depends.' ⇒ [V + on] It all depends on your definition of punk , doesn't it?

5. phrase

You use depending on when you are saying that something varies according to the circumstances mentioned. ⇒ I tend to have a different answer, depending on the family.

