

DukeWrites Enrichment Suite

Word and Phrase: Exploring collocates

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Hi, I'm Rene Caputo, ESL specialist with Duke University's Thompson Writing Program. In this tutorial, we are going to take a closer look at the Word and Phrase corpus, doing a few searches together.

We have the URL up here and I'm pointing it out because on my computer and browser, I need to enter the www to access this site. Otherwise, I just get an error message. So keep that in mind as you're heading towards this site.

Let's click on Frequency List. We're going to explore a few examples of how you might use this resource to improve language usage. So for our first example, imagine that you or someone you're helping wrote this phrase: **this research will broaden my eyes.**

And the professor's comment was that "broaden my eyes" sounded just a little bit awkward for U.S. English. It's easy to sound awkward when you're not using your native language, because certain words typically sound natural together to native speakers, while other words don't.

And in this case, eyes with the broaden sounds a little bit unnatural for U.S. English. Let's do a search for broaden. If you remember from our previous tutorial, one of the benefits of Word and Phrase is it provides a list of some of those words that sound natural with your search word. And those words are called collocates.

In this example, we have: broaden my eyes. We are trying to find a noun that gives the same feeling as eyes or eyesight. We look at the noun list; we can see scope might be a possibility. I like horizon and I like perspective.

Let's do a click on horizon and take a look at some of those examples. Remember that our first phrase was broaden my eyes, so let's go down here. We see a few different forms of broaden and we see broaden my horizons. Broaden my horizons seems to be quite acceptable here, so that would be one possibility to replace broaden my eyes.

I'm going to go back up to broaden and look at perspective. And scroll down again. So we have a few different forms of broaden ~ and my. And even though horizons was plural, perspective is singular. So broaden my perspective is another good possibility. So that's our first example and that was a verb in the search field and a noun collocate.

So, let's try another kind of search. Imagine for our second example that you or someone you're helping wrote: treasured opportunity. And again the comment was that treasured opportunity sounds a little bit awkward for U.S. English, so we're going to search for the word opportunity. And this time, we are looking to replace treasured, which is an adjective. Well, let's see, we have: great, unique, better, rare. I'm going to try unique.

So, we have lots of examples here and notice that quite a few of these are Academic. So unique opportunity, if you were writing an academic paper, sounds as if it would be useful. Also remember that the yellow color in this color coding is a preposition and we can see that it's very common to say: a unique opportunity for. And then you might also examine what kind of word comes after that, but unique opportunity for seems to be very common. So that's our second example and that was a search for a noun with an adjective collocate.

Let's try one more example. Imagine that you or someone you're trying to help wrote: different with. And again, some kind of comment to let you or the other writer know that different with wasn't quite right. So, let's go ahead and do a search for different. And we look at the collocates and here we have miscellaneous. And of the words here, it looks like **from** is the right word. So, different with ~ with is a preposition. And different from. So if you remember from our previous example, prepositions are in yellow.

We can scroll down. And we see, yes, lots of examples of different from. You can look at what comes before and after that. Different from the seems to be pretty popular. So, different from is a natural-sounding pair for U.S. English.

Well, those are just three examples of the different kinds of searches you can do on Word and Phrase to improve language usage. I hope you've found that helpful and that you'll try some searches of your own.