DukeWrites Enrichment Suite
COCA: Doing advanced searches
With Rene Caputo, ESL Specialist, Thompson Writing Program

Hello, this is Rene Caputo, ESL specialist for Duke University's Thompson Writing Program. In an earlier screencast tutorial, we explored how you can do a simple search in this COCA corpus for parts of speech. And now, we'll explore that more. We'll start with a simple search and then build on that.

Imagine that you or someone you are working with used "the direction" in a paper and the feedback said that the preposition usage was not correct and needed to be improved. How could we start to explore prepositions with "the direction"?

Let's go ahead and type in the search field: **the direction**. This is parts of speech here and we're going to look for prepositions. There we go ~ prepositions. And do a search.

If you remember from the earlier tutorial, this is an error message that's very common here. And if you don't remember how to fix it, here we go again. Just add a blank space and search.

Now we can see some of the common prepositions that follow "the direction." We have of, in, from, for, to, and some others. Gives you a really good idea. If we want to see some sample sentences, we can click on one of those, wait a moment, and we'll see some sample sentences.

You could explore what words come before that or after that. And if you saw a particular example that you were interested in, remember on the left you could click here and get more information.

Let's go back again to our search. Under Sections, if you recall, we can go down and say, "You know what, we only want to look at academic sources here. And we could search again. And now we'll have academic sources to look at.

So, clicking on "the direction of" here, on the left we see Academic sources. So, if we were interested in a particular sentence, and seeing more of the paragraph, we can click anywhere here under "Click for more context." And have not only the paragraph, but also more information on the source.

So, let's go back to our search again. Well, imagine we wanted to look at what happens on the left side of "the direction." And we decided that "of" is the preposition that we want to look at on the right.

Well, here we have the symbol for preposition. And we're just going to put it on the left. And we're going to add that space and we're going to search again.

So now we have some examples here, not only of the preposition on the left (on the right ~ hahaha) but also on the left! So, we can see, "in the direction of, under the direction of, to, on, of, about, with, at the direction of."

And again, if we want to explore one of these more, perhaps the most common of those, we can click on that, wait a moment, and now we have examples of "in the direction of." So that's pretty powerful. Not only the ability to look at prepositions on the right side, but also on the left side.

I'm just going to show you one more search in this tutorial. Let's go back to the search one more time. And now we know that we're thinking about "in the direction of."

Let's imagine that you wanted to use a word before this that had an ending of "ed." We could do an asterisk here and an "ed" and add a space. And search again.

And now we just have some examples. We can see "moved in the direction of, pointed in the direction of, and changed in the direction of, biased, looked, located" are some of the possibilities with the "ed" on the left. And again, we can look at those examples.

So those are some more things that you can do to explore language use in the COCA corpus. Have fun exploring! And I'll see you next time.