

# DukeWrites Enrichment Suite

## COCA: Doing advanced searches

*With Rene Caputo, ESL Specialist, Thompson Writing Program*

Hi, this is Rene Caputo, ESL specialist for Duke University's Thompson Writing Program. In this tutorial, you'll learn how to use the COCA resource to do advanced searches.

We'll start with a simple search and then build on that. Imagine you or someone you're working with used **the direction** ~ which I'll type here in our search field ~ in a paper. And you got feedback saying that the preposition [after that] could be improved.

In the parts of speech here, we're going to look for prepositions. There we go. Prep all.

We want to add a blank space between the direction and PREP for prepositions. In sections, I'll choose Academic, so that all our results are from academic sources. And then, click on find matching strings.

So, here we have prepositions that are used after **the direction** in COCA. At the top are the most frequent combinations. Of plus the direction in COCA ~ over 2200. And the frequency goes down [below there]. So: the direction of, in, for, from, to, etc.

I'm going to click on: the direction of. And we can see some examples there of how other writers have used that.

We have: the direction of the hillside, the direction of travel, the direction of EBP-2 movement, the direction of addressing the broader problem, of the neck transit, of evolution, and of the trajectory.

So, you can look at the language before, after, or both ~ of those highlighted words. And see if you notice any language patterns. What I'm noticing is that after the direction of, we have an article plus a noun ~ **the** plus a noun. We have **of** a noun. Or we have **of** plus an adjective and a noun. If you read more examples, you might find more patterns.

And let's go back to search. Let's now imagine that you're wondering what prepositions could be used before **the direction**. So, we just move PREP to the left of the search field. Add a blank space. PREP, blank space, the direction. And again, click on find matching strings.

We have here in our results: in the direction, under the direction, to, of, on the direction as our top examples of prepositions used to the left of **the direction** by academic writers ~ in the COCA resource. I'm going to click on: in the direction. And again, here you can decide would you like to explore the language before or after the highlighted words. I'm not going to do that here, but you could do that if that were your search.

And I'm going to go back to the search page again. So, let's imagine ~ after having looked at examples for prepositions after and prepositions before ~ that you decided that **in the direction of** fit your paper. [Adjusts search field to read: in the direction of.]

We don't need any more prepositions now. [In the parts of speech menu, chooses POS to replace PREP all.]

And that before **in**, you wanted some word that ends in **ed**. And the way you can do that in a search is: asterisk [enters \*] ed. So, let's try this search now. Asterisk ed in the direction of. [Note: appears in the search field as: \*ed in the direction of]

Find matching strings. And so now we have the results in COCA for academic sources: moved in the direction of, changed, biased, pointed, etc. ~ in the direction of.

So, that's quite an advanced search. COCA can help you with the preposition before and after ~ and with a word ending that you might want to use in your writing.

We're going to try one last search that's quite different. And I'm going to type here the equals sign and big. A blank space, and the word majority. [Note: appears in the search field as: =big majority]

Ok? Equals, big, blank space, majority. What does that mean? We're looking for a word that has the same meaning as big and that goes with the word majority. So, let's find matching strings.

So, here are our results. Vast majority is the most frequent. Great, large, substantial, significant majority are the next most frequent results in the COCA resource.

And let's go back to the search page, so you can see once again how I set up that search:  
= (equals), big, space, majority

And in sections, academic chosen, so that all the results would be from academic sources.

So, in this tutorial, you learned how to do several advanced searches using the COCA corpus to explore language use. I hope you have fun doing some searches and exploring COCA.