DukeWrites Enrichment Suite

COCA: Introduction and Registration
With Rene Caputo, ESL Specialist, Thompson Writing Program

Hi, I'm Rene Caputo, Duke University ESL specialist with the Thompson Writing Program.

We're going to take an introductory look at the Corpus of Contemporary American English, also known as COCA. In this tutorial, you'll learn about what the COCA resource is, what you might use it for, and how to register.

To get to the website, do a search for COCA and BYU. BYU is Brigham Young University. That is where creator Mark Davies and his team are based.

Let's go ahead and click into the site here and talk about the word corpus for a moment.

A corpus ~ you can see that word here ~ is a body or a collection. This particular corpus is a collection of more than 1 billion words from the eight genres that are listed here:

Spoken ~ those sources are tv and radio [news] broadcasts; fiction, popular magazines, newspapers, academic texts, and with a large update in 2020, tv and movie subtitles, blogs, and other web pages. That update greatly expanded the number of words in the COCA corpus.

So, why use COCA? In COCA, you can search for how a particular word or phrase has been used by others ~ in writing or in speaking. The results of your search will share examples of language that others have used. You can look at those examples to inform and improve your language use and your writing.

To get started, you want register for the site. You can do that in the top right here where you see the profile icon.

On this page, click on register. And you can see the simple entries that you are to make here. Your name, email address, the password you create, country, and some information about your background, so the COCA staff will understand what you're going to use COCA for.

Here, you need to agree to the terms. And right below that, it's going to ask you to input some letters that we can't see right here on our screen. All of that is pretty quick.

After you submit, you're going to be asked if you're associated with a particular university, so that'll just take a moment.

And then, you'll need to check your email and click on the link there. And just follow the directions you see, which will tell you to close or restart your browser (such as Firefox, Safari, or Chrome).

After you do that, you can return to the COCA page and log in where we saw that profile login. If you forget to log in, you will be reminded after a few searches.

And you might occasionally be asked to consider donating to support the maintenance of the corpus, but that's optional. It would, however, support the work of the team at Brigham Young that updates the site and related corpuses or corpora.

That's it for our introduction to COCA. In our next video, we'll try a few searches together.