

“Corpus: The most useful research tool you didn’t know you needed.”

A corpus is a representative collection of texts, that can be used to research how people speak and what they say about different things.

Students and academics can also use a corpus to help them with writing and

word choice, to supplement or even replace usage guides.

There are free corpora for many languages on the web and it is really easy to search through one. There are also specialist corpora for specific domains of interest, such as child language, historical English or translation between several languages.

Choose a corpus:

Browse to <https://www.english-corpora.org> (use the desktop shortcut provided)

Choose iWeb - a comprehensive English-language corpus that searches representative texts sampled from the web

Use  to log in, giving email skillstoolkit@it.ox.ac.uk and password Penknife01

For help, use another browser tab to view this step by step guide alongside: <https://tinyurl.com/sa6nr2e> (or use the desktop shortcut provided)

How do people describe X ?

Find out what are the most common ways to complete a phrase, by searching for a phrase using a wildcard on the **SEARCH** tab

eg. school is like a *

* stands for any string of characters including the whole word

? stands for a single character, NOUN (in capitals) stands for any noun etc.

Tip: If you are getting error messages, click **Reset** on the **SEARCH** tab and try again

What is a typical collocate of Y ?

A **collocate** is a word that appears frequently with another: this can give you a good indication of how the word is used and the associations people may have with it

Click **+** at the top of the **SEARCH** tab and choose **Collocates**

Type climate in the Word/phrase box and click **Find collocates**

Review the list of words/phrases that appear with climate, and their frequencies

Try using the blue numbers to specify words before/after the search term (and distance)

What is the most common spelling of Z ?

You can also search for different spellings of a word or its other uses

Find out whether travelling or traveling is a more common spelling

Hint: use **List** and a wildcard symbol

Some more experiments (if you have time)

What are the most common 2-letter endings used with school? (hint: use ?)

What *verbs* are used immediately *after* the word school? (use **List** and VERB)

Try **KWIC** to see how a different layout can give you a better insight into your results (KWIC can be slow for long searches: try again if you get an error)

Try **Browse** for words to see what usage guidance a corpus can give you

You can also look at one of the more specialist corpora at www.english-corpora.org

Next steps

You can find links to more corpora in the Bodleian’s Libguides

Workshops in the IT Learning Centre show you how to use a corpus for your research and teaching

