

DukeWrites Enrichment Suite

Using Google Scholar: Improving Word Choice

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Hi, I'm Rene Caputo, the ESL Specialist with Duke University's Thompson Writing Program. And I'm going to show you how you can use Google Scholar to make informed decisions about your word choice.

Let's imagine that you're writing about your research and you want to use the verb focus. But you're not quite sure what preposition might be appropriate to use after that.

Let's try a search here. I'm going to search for: This research focuses. All in quotation marks. With an asterisk to represent the word we are looking for.

We can see here that we have over 73 thousand results in Google Scholar. Let's take a look. This research focuses on. Focuses on, focuses on. Scrolling down. Again we have: focuses on, on, on, on. Ha. On, on. And on. So, first page ~ all of them say focuses on.

Here on page 2: Focuses on, focuses on. Focuses on. Focuses on. Ok, so this one's different. This research focuses upon. And this is from an institution in the United Kingdom. Again, we have focuses on, on, and on.

With that information, I would change the asterisk in the search to on. And we can see that we have over 70 thousand results for: This research focuses on.

And now we can look for upon. And over 1000 results for: This research focuses upon. So, now you have two specific prepositions that are used quite frequently by scholars whose publications are here in Google Scholar. With this information, you could much more easily make a choice in the sentence you're working on with research focuses.

Let's imagine another scenario. Imagine you're working on an application essay ~ or perhaps a journal article. And you're going to be talking about an opportunity or opportunities. And you would like to have an adjective that focuses on some positive aspect of that, but you're not quite sure what adjective to use.

We're going to imagine that you've heard four different adjectives and try them out here. And see what is used more often.

I'm going to narrow the date range of the publications to say we only want results since 2016. So, we're going to start with unique opportunity in quotation marks. And we have over 67 thousand results, so that is very popular. Excellent opportunity, over 27 thousand results. Still quite high.

Let's imagine you heard someone say splendid opportunity sometime and you're wondering about that. About 900 results, so that's much lower than the other two we tried. Let's also imagine you've heard treasured opportunity. Ok, very low. Under 50 results.

So, if you were choosing among those four adjectives for opportunity, which would you consider most seriously for scholarly writing? For me ~ I would consider unique or excellent if those [four adjectives] were my choices and one of those fit the meaning that I intended. So, you can see how this can help you narrow, narrow your choices based on the evidence of other writers' articles.

Let's look at one more part of Google Scholar. Up here on the left corner where you have these lines, you have access to advanced searches. And you can see some of the different possibilities here.

I'm going to try Unique opportunity as an Exact Phrase. But with for on the end. And I'm going to say I'm interested in knowing about what these scholars have put in their titles. And I'll look for the years 2010 to 2020.

So, in Google Scholar we have, in the titles of articles, unique opportunity for: 111 results. And let's try switching the for to to. And ~ 110 results! So, those are fairly even in here, right?

That gives you an idea of the different kinds of searches you can do in Google Scholar to see what language choices other scholarly writers have made. From those, you can make informed choices about your word choice in your scholarly writing. I hope that you'll give some of these Google Scholar searches a try!