

COMMON INTENSIFIERS AND EVALUATION PHRASES IN SPOKEN ENGLISH

In order to find out more about common intensifiers and evaluation phrases used in current spoken English, let's check the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). To conduct the analysis, follow the steps below:

1. Go to Google and search for COCA Corpus
2. Once you are at COCA front page, click ENTER
3. Register by creating your own account: type in your user name and password

Once you are registered, you can begin to search the corpus.

Let's find out which adjectives go with the following intensifiers in evaluation phrases we use in spoken English. Work with a partner.

1. **TOTALLY** 2. **ABSOLUTELY** 3. **SO**

Task 1: "Totally" Search

1. First, type IT [one space] 'S TOTALLY in the box next to WORD (S)
2. Under DISPLAY click on LIST
3. Click on POS and choose ADJ.ALL
4. In the box next to WORD (S) you will see IT [one space] 'S TOTALLY [j*]
5. Leave one space after [j*] and put a period at the end of the phrase. It will look like this:
IT [one space] 'S TOTALLY [j*] [one space].
6. In Section 1, choose SPOKEN
7. Then, click on SEARCH
8. On the right, you will see many examples of IT'S TOTALLY + ADJ listed from highest to lowest in frequency of usage.

What do you notice? What kinds of adjectives follow TOTALLY? List the **top 15 adjectives** that follow "IT'S TOTALLY" in the table below. Include the number of their occurrences.

Now repeat the search by typing "THAT'S TOTALLY" in the box next to WORD (S). Follow the steps 2 to 7 above. What do you notice? What kinds of adjectives follow TOTALLY? List the **top 15 adjectives** that follow "THAT'S TOTALLY" in the table below. Include the number of their occurrences.

| IT'S TOTALLY -----. | # | THAT'S TOTALLY -----. | # |
|---------------------|---|-----------------------|---|
| DIFFERENT | 6 | WRONG | 8 |
| UNTRUE | 3 | UNTRUE | 5 |
| NATURAL | 3 | TRUE | 3 |
| WRONG | 3 | UNDERSTANDABLE | 3 |
| SAFE | 3 | INACCURATE | 3 |
| CRAZY | 2 | INCORRECT | 3 |
| COOL | 2 | FALSE | 2 |
| INAPPROPRIATE | 2 | INAPPROPRIATE | 2 |
| INACCURATE | 2 | RIDICULOUS | 2 |
| FAIR | 2 | UNACCEPTABLE | 2 |
| IRRESPONSIBLE | 2 | UNREALISTIC | 2 |
| IRRELEVANT | 2 | UNFAIR | 2 |
| VOLUNTARY | 2 | WEIRD | 2 |
| FALSE | 2 | UNWEARABLE | 1 |
| UNFAIR | 2 | UNWARRANTED | 1 |

Task 2: "Absolutely" Search

Repeat the same search for "IT'S ABSOLUTELY + ADJ" and "THAT'S ABSOLUTELY + ADJ." What do you notice? What kinds of adjectives follow ABSOLUTELY? List the **top 15 adjectives** that follow "IT'S/THAT'S ABSOLUTELY" in the table below. Include the number of their occurrences.

| IT'S ABSOLUTELY -----. | # | THAT'S ABSOLUTELY -----. | # |
|------------------------|----|--------------------------|-----|
| TRUE | 22 | RIGHT | 101 |
| WONDERFUL | 10 | TRUE | 50 |
| AMAZING | 8 | CORRECT | 10 |
| RIDICULOUS | 8 | FALSE | 10 |
| RIGHT | 7 | WRONG | 10 |
| UNTRUE | 6 | RIDICULOUS | 8 |
| BIZARRE | 6 | UNTRUE | 8 |
| DELICIOUS | 5 | INCORRECT | 5 |
| FALSE | 5 | FINE | 4 |
| OUTRAGEOUS | 5 | CLEAR | 3 |
| STUPID | 4 | ABSURD | 2 |
| NECESSARY | 4 | CONSISTENT | 2 |
| GREAT | 4 | CRITICAL | 2 |
| WRONG | 3 | FALLACIOUS | 2 |
| GORGEOUS | 3 | IMPORTANT | 2 |

Task 3: “So” Search

Repeat the same search for “IT’S SO + ADJ” and “THAT’S SO + ADJ.” What do you notice? What kinds of adjectives follow SO? List the **top 15 adjectives** that follow “IT/THAT”S SO” in the table below. Include the number of their occurrences.

| IT'S SO -----. | # | THAT'S SO -----. | # |
|----------------|----|------------------|----|
| GOOD | 32 | CUTE | 24 |
| BEAUTIFUL | 30 | NICE | 24 |
| IMPORTANT | 29 | SWEET | 20 |
| EASY | 23 | TRUE | 12 |
| SAD | 21 | GREAT | 8 |
| FUNNY | 19 | IMPORTANT | 7 |
| GREAT | 19 | INTERESTING | 6 |
| INTERESTING | 19 | GOOD | 6 |
| SIMPLE | 17 | FUNNY | 6 |
| CUTE | 14 | COOL | 5 |
| HARD | 14 | BEAUTIFUL | 5 |
| BAD | 13 | FANTASTIC | 4 |
| TRUE | 11 | UNFAIR | 4 |
| CONFUSING | 10 | WONDERFUL | 3 |
| COOL | 10 | SIMPLE | 3 |

Task 4: Discussion

Now look at the search results and answer the following questions. Discuss your findings in class.

1. The corpus results can help you see *tendencies* in language usage. What kind of adjective (positive, negative, or neutral in meaning) is “**TOTALLY**” mostly used with? Give an example.
2. What kind of adjective (positive, negative, or neutral in meaning) is “**ABSOLUTELY**” mostly used with? Give an example.
3. What kind of adjective (positive, negative, or neutral in meaning) is “**SO**” mostly used with? Give an example.
4. Look at the **top 5 adjectives** across all tables above. Which adjectives seem to have the highest frequency in these COCA corpus data?

Task 5: Exploring Students’ Talk

Now it’s your turn to explore how students on campus use intensifiers and descriptive adjectives to express an evaluation. Answer the following questions with the help of your Conversation Partner:

1. What other informal intensifiers do students use? Give an example.
2. You hear the evaluative phrases “IT’S/THAT’S SWEET/SICK/ INSANE/RIDICULOUS” very frequently on campus. Explain and illustrate the meaning of each phrase.