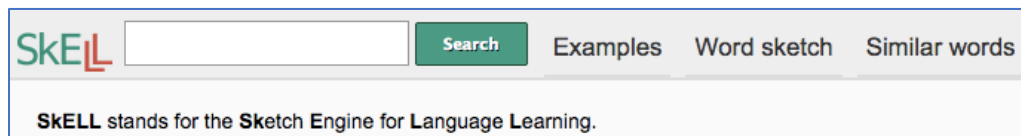**SkELL** SKELL is a free, online tool that helps you answer language questions and quandaries. When you search for a word or phrase, it provides language data in three formats, namely, Example sentences, Word sketches and Similar Words.

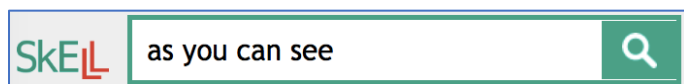Open it from here: http://skell.sketchengine.co.uk

The source of the data is a corpus of texts drawn from the internet and processed so that it represents the English language usefully for language learners. It contains about a billion words. SKELL makes it possible to ask your language questions to thousands of native speakers at the same time to get a consensus view on your question.

SkELL	[ ]	**Search**	Examples	Word sketch	Similar words

SkELL stands for the **Sk**etch **E**ngine for **L**anguage **L**earning.

Example sentences

Type a word or phrase into the search field, click Search and it will find and present on a single page the 40 most learner-friendly corresponding sentences in its corpus. SKELL searches for the **lemmas** of the words you enter, i.e. all its forms within the same part of speech, e.g. *change* ➔ *changed, changes, changing; good, better, best; tooth, teeth.* And it searches for words in all of their parts of speech, such as *change* as a noun and a verb. But it does not automatically search for other members of the word family, such as *unchangeable* and *changeability.*

You can request example sentences of (a) words, (b) multi-word units such as compound nouns, phrasal verbs, and (c) phrases such as sentence stems and idioms.

SkELL	as you can see	🔍

Using the dot-star wildcard between words allows any word to appear between them, such as a variety of pronouns or determiners. In phrasal verbs, objects which occur between the verb and the particle can be observed.

SkELL	put .* down	🔍

The dot-star wildcard can also be attached to a word or part of a word, e.g. .*lik.* presents sentences containing *like, dislike, likeable*, etc. This can provide other members of the word family, but not all words that match this search are represented in the 40 sentences as the program chooses sentences according to features of sentences, not according to words.

Unfortunately, contractions have to be treated with care: you need to put a space before the apostrophe, e.g. *I 'm*, except when the negative particle is involved: this has to be written as if it were a separate word, e.g. *could n't*.

Word sketches

Word sketches are collocation heaven. The word sketch format provides the collocates of lemmas which are very valuable for studying words in the context of other words.

The beauty of a word sketch is that the collocates are grouped into their grammatical relationships with the search word: for a noun, we see what verbs it typically uses when it is a subject and other verbs when it is an object. We see the adjectives that are used with it,
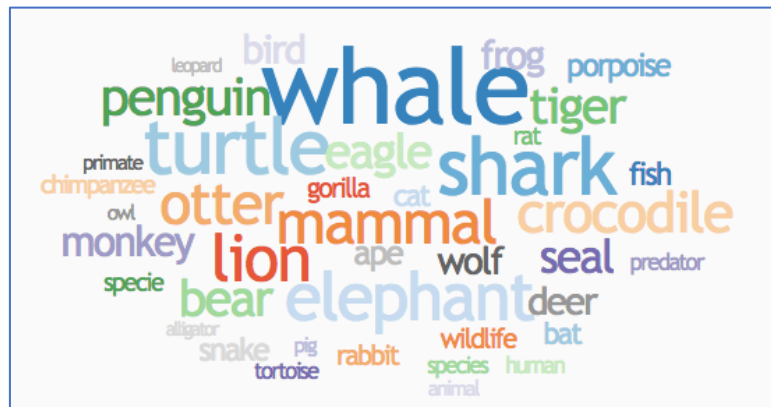

and we see other nouns that form compounds with it. *Dolphin* is as good an example as any.

The word sketch of *dolphin* tells us, for example, that somebody or some-thing *spots, trains, captures* and *finds dolphins*. And that dolphins *swim, watch* and *play*. It is a small step from here to syntax: subject – verb – object. The modifiers are other nouns that form compounds with *dolphin*.

Click on the **Context button** to see the collocation in its most typical wording. Click on a collocate to see 40 sentences containing the collocation.

Similar words

Enter a lemma and click Similar words to get up to 40 related words. The program chooses words which are used in similar ways in similar contexts in the corpus, which means that many will be near synonyms and some may be opposites. Polysemous words like *bark*, *chip* and *bar* attract words for their different meanings, which

can beget vocabulary discovery tasks. This is a screenshot of *dolphin's* Similar Words.

For more on SKELL

These notes were originally published in *Out of Your Seats* by Anette Igel and James Thomas 2018. See http://bit.ly/versatile_ooys. For more information and examples of searches and how to use the sets of words that searches return, see:

- SKELL's own website: https://www.sketchengine.co.uk/skell
- Instructional presentation: http://bit.ly/skell_ppt
- Forthcoming book (2019) http://bit.ly/versatile_skell