The next function that we’ll look at is KWIC (Key Word in Context) lines. KWIC is a useful function for looking at the types of words that surround the target word, such as prepositions. Those are often difficult for English language learners.

Let’s take a look with our phrases from earlier that we used with the List function: “go for a run” versus “take a run.” First, we’ll look at “go for a run,” and we’ll see what types of words occur around this phrase. When we type “go for a run” or a word or a phrase into the search field, this will be represented here in this middle area.
Then, we can look for words that happen around it. If we click on these, then we’ll expand the number of words that we can see around “go for a run.”

If we click on KWIC here, after we put that in, this will give us our phrase and what’s happening around it. This is interesting. We have “go.” That’s a verb, so that’s highlighted in pink. Then, we have “for” which is a preposition, so that’ll be highlighted in yellow. Then, we have our article in gray, and then we have “run” which is a verb or a noun, and the noun is highlighted in blue. If it occurs as a verb, then it will be highlighted in pink. Here, we have “go for a run after breakfast,” “go for a run and a swim,” and
“go for a run anywhere.” Here, we can see we have a number of different types of words that follow the phrase “go for a run.” We can have articles. We can have prepositions or any number of words, so that’s that.

Figure 4. KWIC lines for “go for a run”

If we go back and we change “go for a run” to “take a run,” we might see some different patterns, so let’s say we have “take a run” and we click KWIC, we’ll notice here that we have “take a run,” “run” occurring as a noun. It’s highlighted in blue. Then, we have lots of prepositions. They’re highlighted in yellow, and we see in particular the preposition “at,” so “take a run at North Carolina.” “Kerry says that he’ll take a run at North Carolina.” This is probably talking about John Kerry and his presidential run. We can go back over here to the context. This comes from a news program. We also have “take a run at Tampa Bay,” “take a run at the whitetails,” “take a run at the White House.” We can see a lot of this stuff looks like it’s representing an effort, like to try to achieve something. Here, we have “take a run at the White House,” so this looks like probably “George Bush is waiting in the wings perhaps to take a run at the White House,” meaning he will try to become President. Here, we can see differences between these two phrases by using the KWIC function.
Again, KWIC doesn’t need to be used with phrases alone. It can be used with simple words as well, so if we want to see, for example, just “run,” and let’s say we want to see “run” as it occurs just as a verb, we can put that tag in there and then click on KWIC, and we’ll see what we get.

Here, we have “run” highlighted in pink just as a verb, and we can see that it’s followed by a preposition sometimes. It’s followed by nouns sometimes and more prepositions. We can see the types of patterns that occur around “run.”
A possible activity you could do is you could have your students work in pairs. You can have them put in a phrase like “take a run,” get rid of the POS tag, and then they can look at the patterns that are happening around “take a run.” We saw earlier that “take a run” seems much more restrictive in terms of the type of word that follows it, in particular prepositions and in particular just the preposition “at,” and then your students can look at that, and they can take note of the patterns around “take a run.” Then, they can compare it with “go for a run” or any two phrases that you want them to look at. Then, they can just look through the data, and they can discover for themselves what types of patterns mark certain phrases and differentiate them from other phrases or words.