Highlighting Multiple Words In Scrivener

Version 5

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Summary

This document shows how to use the Search function in Scrivener to find and highlight multiple manuscript words drawn from a specified list. Typically the list consists of items that should be removed, filtered, or replaced within a manuscript. This list could contain phrases, words, and parts of words. The words found can be specified as exact matches ('whole words only') to those on the list, or words starting or ending with those on the list. The document also presents several predefined lists, applicable to writers, that can be used in Scrivener, as well as a technique to highlight possibly overused words in a manuscript.

1 Introduction

Over my long career as a novice writer I have read many articles and books containing lists of words that should be removed, filtered, or replaced in a manuscript. I also found advice on how to use Microsoft Word to find and highlight the words in these lists rather than searching for each word individually.

However, I use Scrivener, not Word, and I had visions of exporting my work from Scrivener to Word, highlighting multiple words, editing those words in that document, and then importing it back into Scrivener. No way!

While roaming the web, I stumbled across *An Easy Technique to Make Your Writing Sparkle* by JJ Graham, `https://diymfa.com/writing/an-easy-technique-to-make-your-writing-sparkle/`, which outlined a method to find and highlight multiple words using Scrivener. This document is a result of my deep dive into that method.

2 Creating the Search String

The first thing to do is to select the words you want to highlight and use them to create your search string for Scrivener. I have selected the Overused Adverb list from *Words to Avoid in Writing: Weak Words to Find, Cut, and Replace* by Jason Hamilton, `https://kindlepreneur.com/words-to-avoid-in-writing/`, for this demonstration, namely

```
totally, completely, absolutely, literally, definitely, certainly, probably, actually,
 basically, virtually
```

In this list, I replaced the comma followed by a space, ", " with the vertical bar, "|",

```
totally|completely|absolutely|literally|definitely|certainly|probably|actually
|basically|virtually
```

Then I started this list with

```
\b(
```

and ended it with

```
)/b
```

obtaining my search string.[1]

```
\b(totally|completely|absolutely|literally|definitely|certainly|probably|actually
|basically|virtually)\b
```

which should all be on one line—no line breaks.

[1] This is an example of a Regular Expression (RegEx). See Section 12 on Page 14.

3 Finding Multiple Words

Now, within Scrivener loaded with your manuscript, click on the down triangle icon to the right of the magnifying glass, as seen in Figure 1.[2]

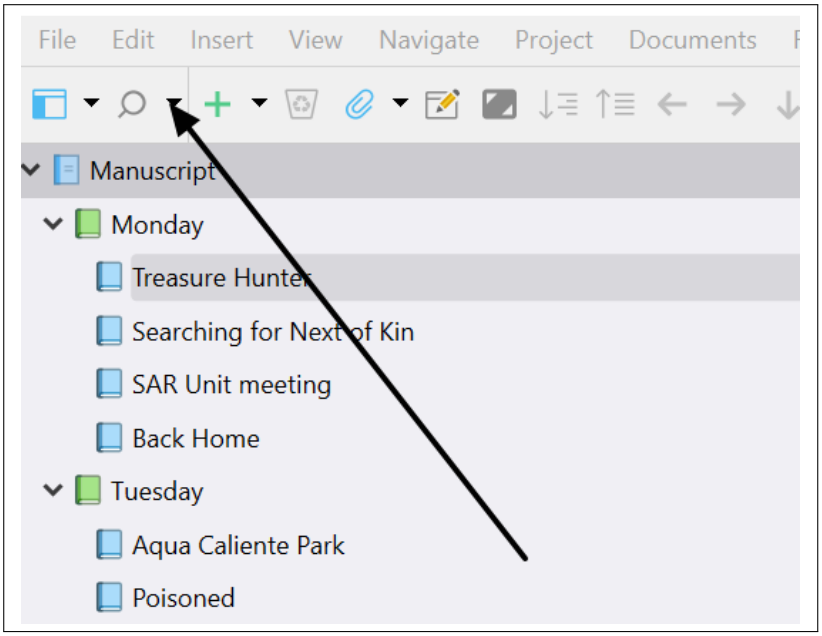

Figure 1: Scrivener Screen

This opens a drop-down menu, Figure 2, from which you select "Project Search."

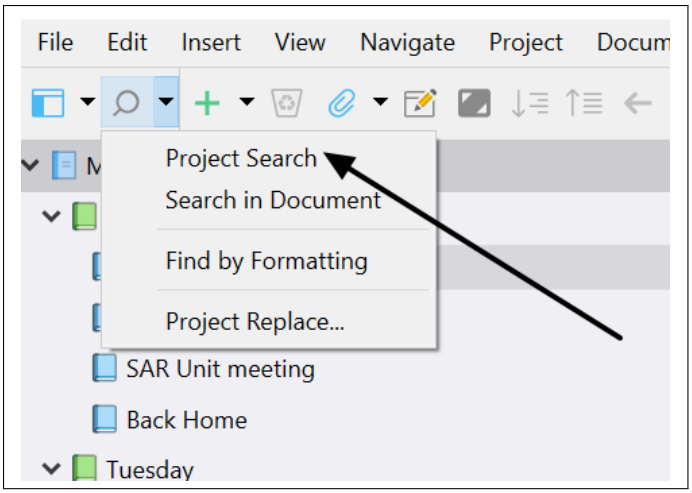

Figure 2: Drop Down Menu

This opens the search box, Figure 3.

[2]These images were created using *Scrivener 3 for Windows* (Version: 3.1.5.). All suggested key presses apply to that version of Scrivener.

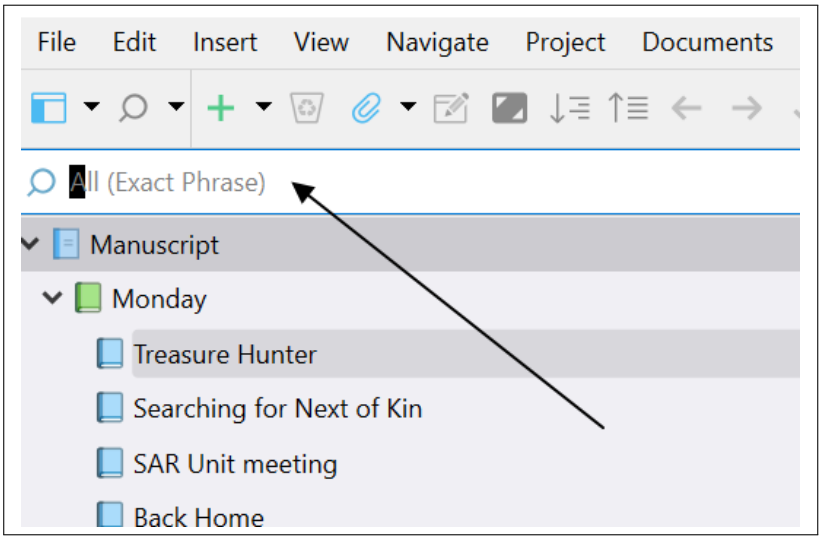

Figure 3: Search Box

Now paste the search string, created earlier, into the Search Box. See Figure 4.

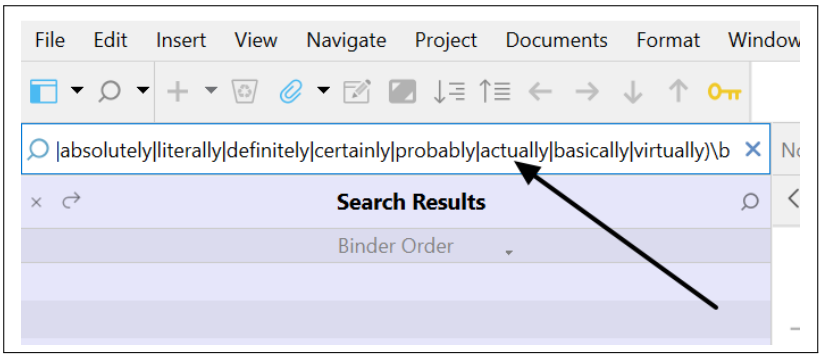

Figure 4: Search String Inserted and Results

This shows your current Search Results, which may differ from Figure 4. Ignore your results, but notice that the panel is colored, indicating we are no longer in the Binder.

Observe that, to the left of the search string, is second magnifying glass, shown in Figure 5.

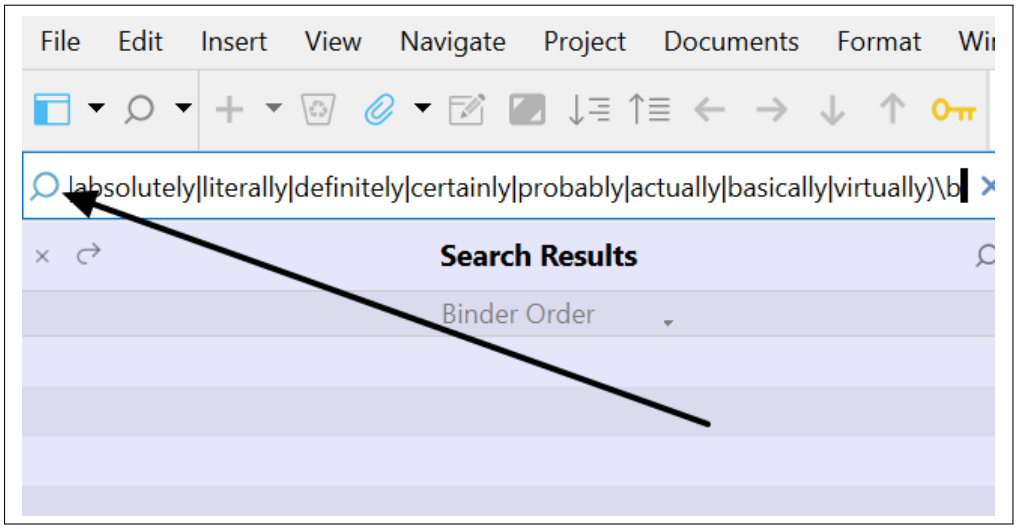

Figure 5: Second Magnifying Glass

Click on it to find a long list of options. Figure 6 shows the top of that list.

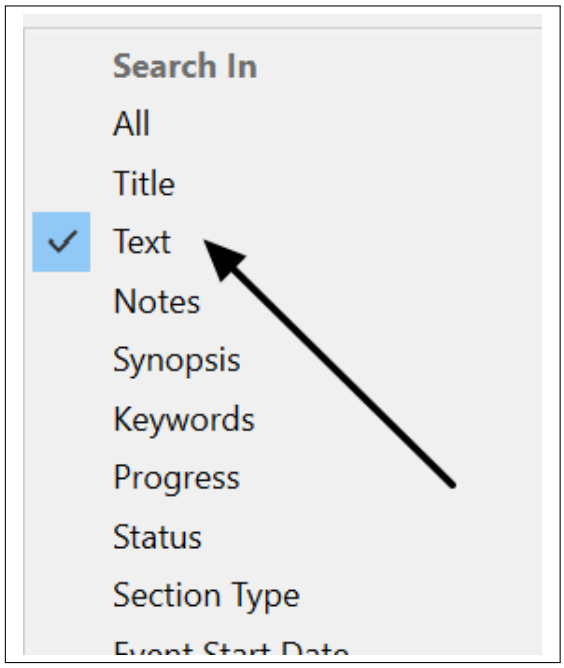

Figure 6: Top Part of Options List

Here we have two choices, either "All," which searches everything, or "Text," which only searches our text. I have selected Text because I don't wish to highlight items in my notes, etc.

Now repeat the process of selecting the second magnifying glass, and look near the bottom of the options list to the area marked Operator in Figure 7, and now select "RegEx." This tells Scrivener my search string is going to be a Regular Expression.

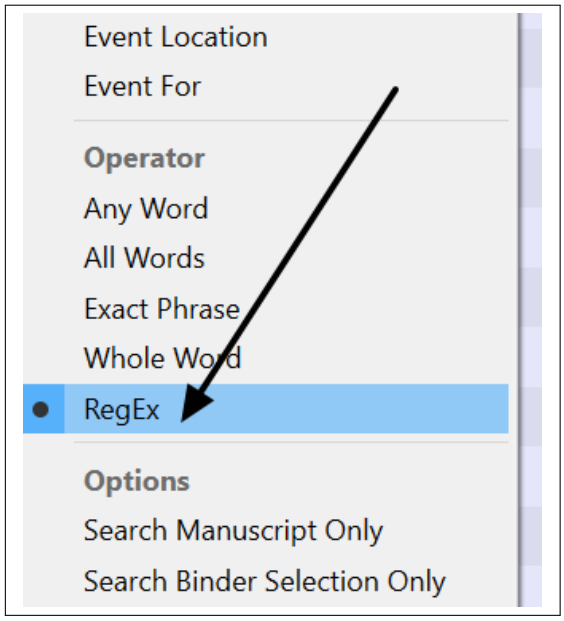

Figure 7: Lower Part of Options List

Now you should see the results of the search, similar to Figure 8. These are the filtered Binder files, each of which contains at least one highlighted word.

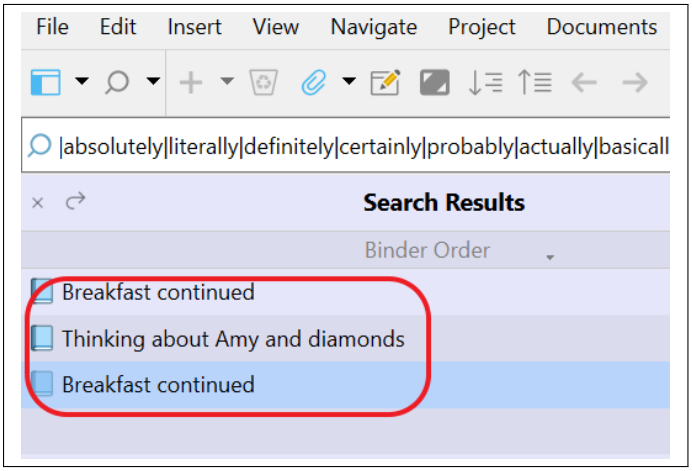

Figure 8: Search Results

Clicking on any of these files will show the found words highlighted in the file's text. See Figure 9 as an example.

In the same file, to move from one found word to the next, press the F3 key. To move to the previous found word in that file, press Shift F3. If neither key press works, you are looking at the only found word in that file. When the last/first found word is reached in that file, a further key press continues the search to the first/last found word in that file. It does not continue to the next file.

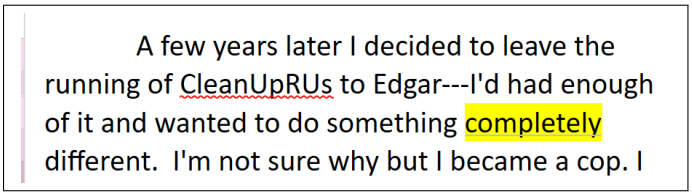

Figure 9: Example of Highlighted Search Result

Before rushing off to edit your document, decide whether you want to repeat this search later with the same search string. If so, save the search as a Collection described in the next section. Otherwise, start editing.

4 Saving Searches in a Collection

Go back to the second magnifying glass and, at the very bottom is the "Save Search As Collection". See Figure 10.

(Aside: The two items, "Search Included Documents" and "Search Excluded Documents" were already checked, and I left them alone. For future reference, notice the "Case Sensitive" option immediately below these items.)

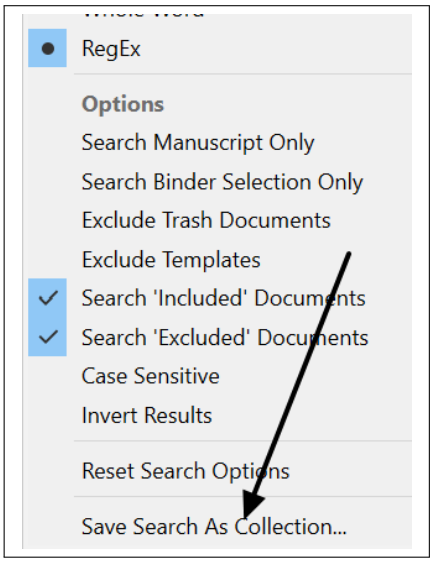

Figure 10: Save Search as a Collection

After clicking on "Save Search As Collection" you should see Figure 11.

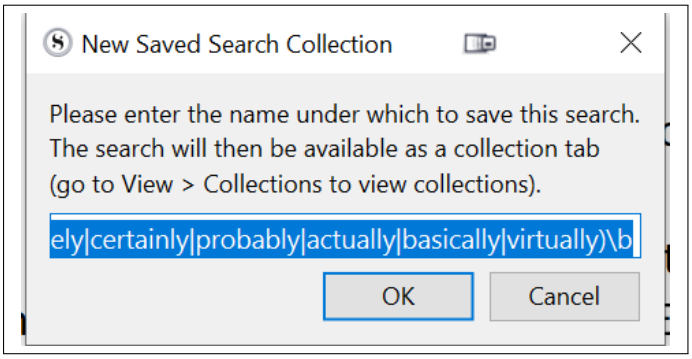

Figure 11: New Saved Search Collection

You can name the search collection by overwriting the highlighted item. I chose to name mine "Adverbs," as seen in Figure 12.

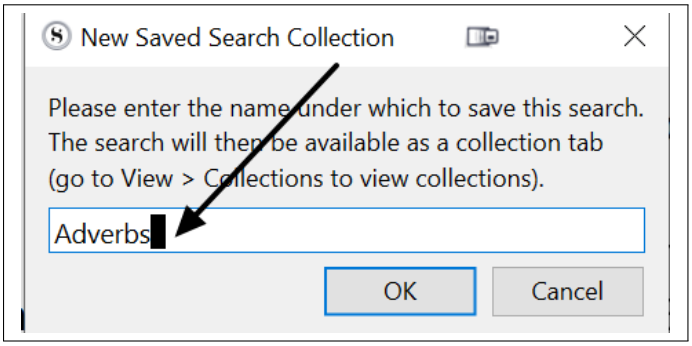

Figure 12: "Adverbs" Collection

If you haven't done so already, now is the time to edit the highlighted words in your manuscript.

After editing a file, the list of files containing found words can be refreshed by placing the cursor on the Search Box containing your RegEx search string, see Figure 4 on Page 4, and pressing Enter.

5 Showing, Opening, and Hiding a Collection

Showing and Opening a Collection

To show all Collections, select "View" from the Toolbar, and then click on "Collections". See Figure 13.

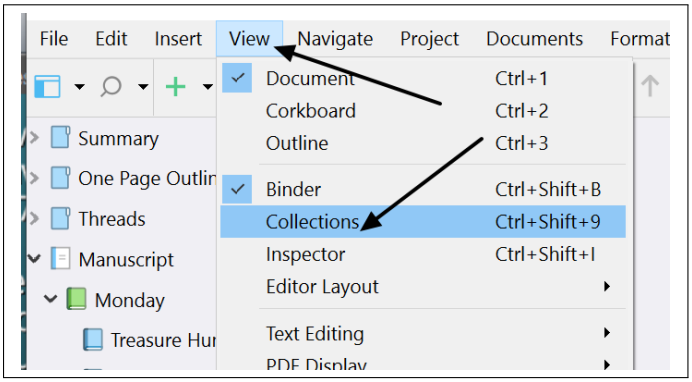

Figure 13: Showing Collections

This brings up Figure 14. Select the desired collection (in this case "Adverbs") by clicking on it. This automatically updates the previous search results.

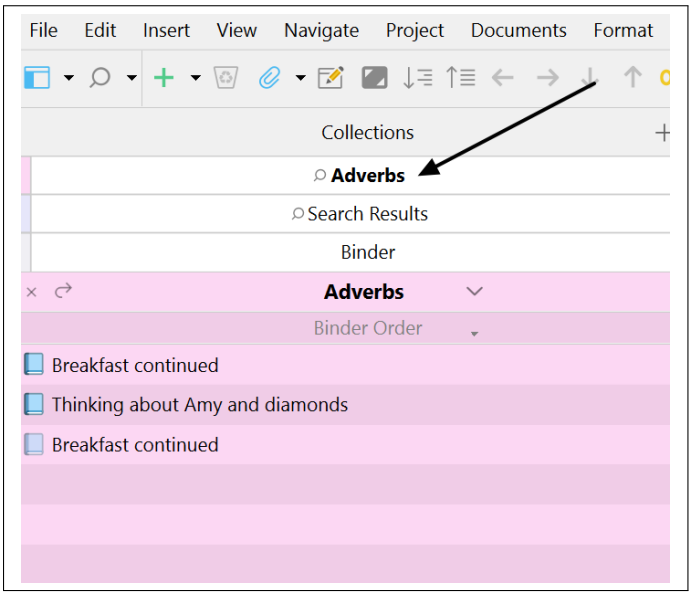

Figure 14: Opening a Collection

Hiding Collections

To reverse Showing Collections, repeat the process shown in Figure 13.

6 Returning to the Binder

To return to the Binder, and leave the search, select the "x" icon to the left of the "Adverbs" line. See Figure 15. This automatically removes the highlighting from the previously-found words.

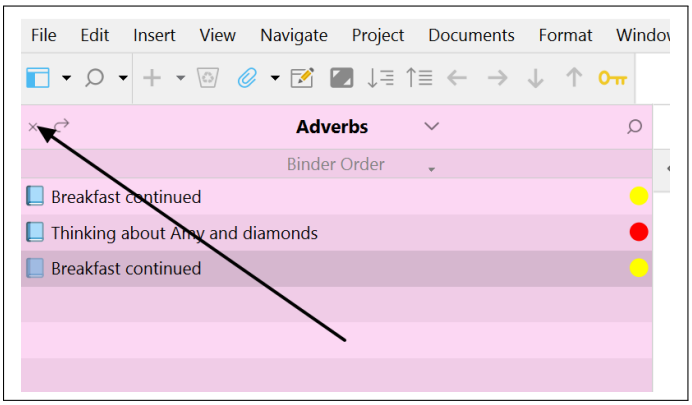

Figure 15: Going Back To The Binder

7 Starting a New Search

When in the Binder, select the down triangle icon followed by Project Search as previously described in Figures 1 and 2 on Page 3. Notice that the previous selections, *Text (RegEx)*, have been remembered.

See Figure 16. If *Text (RegEx)* is absent, then repeat the instructions shown in Figures 5 to 7 starting on Page 5.

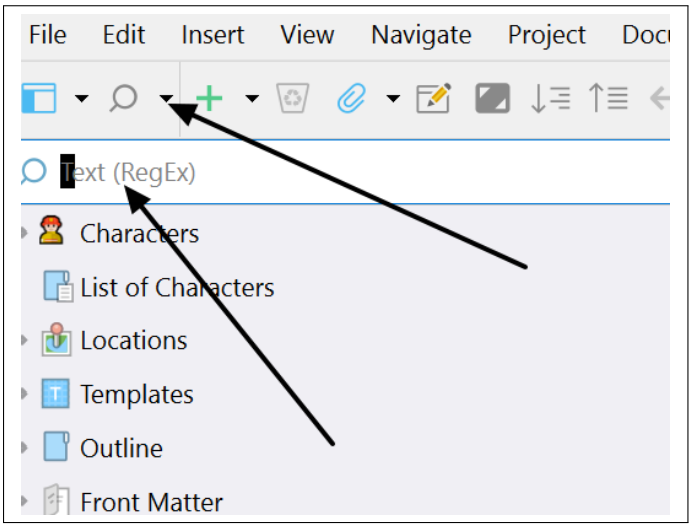

Figure 16: Starting a New Search

The new search will use a different search string, and I have chosen the list of common filter words suggested by Graham (`https://diymfa.com/writing/an-easy-technique-to-make-your-writing-sparkle/`):

```
\b(Believed|Can|Could|Decided|Experienced|Felt|Heard|Knew|Looked|Noticed|Realized
|Saw|Seemed|Sounded|Thought|Watched|Wondered)\b
```

This string differs from Graham's by adding the '\b's at each end, which demands this search look for 'whole words only'. Without these, the 'can' in the search string (second word from the left), would find words containing 'can', such as 'candle', 'scan', and 'scant', which are usually not wanted.

Repeat the entire process we used to create the Adverbs Collection, to create the Graham Collection, which can be seen in Figure 17. Notice the background color of Graham differs from that of Adverbs. These can be changed to suit your tastes, but your homework is to find out how to do that!

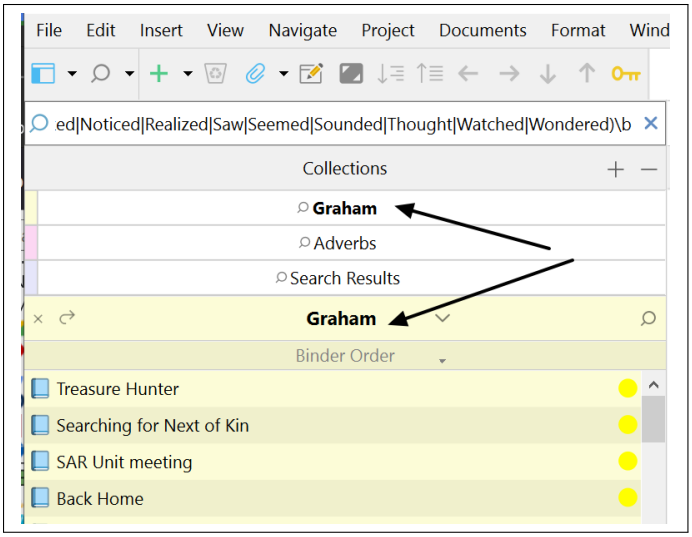

Figure 17: The Graham Collection

8 Deleting Collections

In order to delete a Collection, in this case the Graham Collection, make sure Graham is the selected collection, and click the minus sign to the right of the word "Collections." See Figure 18.

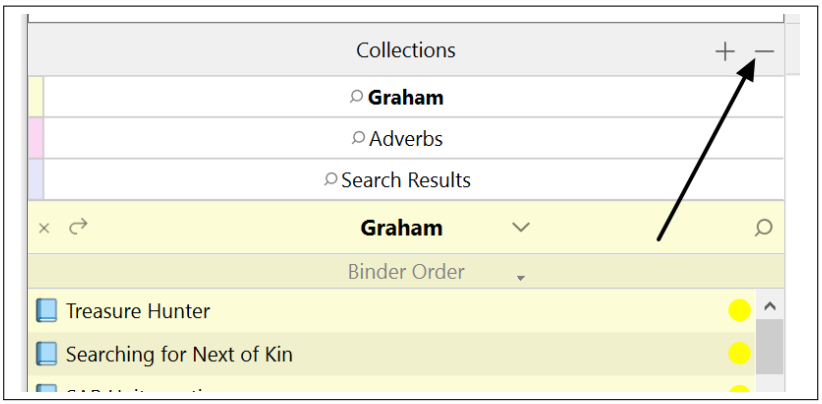

Figure 18: Deleting the Graham Collection

This brings up Figure 19.

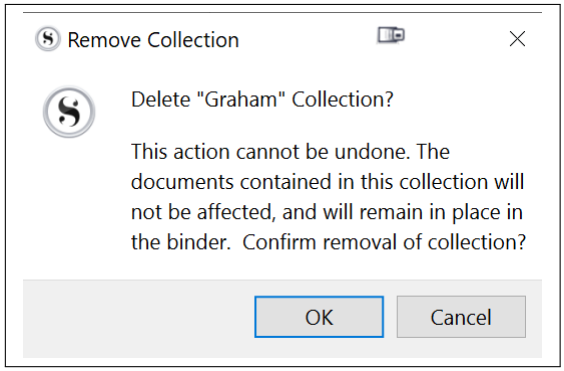

Figure 19: Deleting the Graham Collection

Click "OK", and the Graham Collection is gone. See Figure 20.

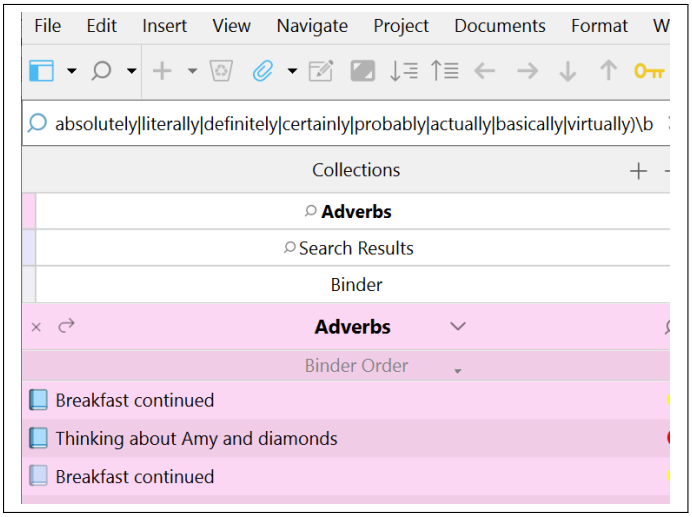

Figure 20: No More Graham Collection

9 Popular Search Strings

What follows is a list of useful search strings[3] created from different sources. Each one contains a link which you should follow to understand the use of the results—remove, replace, rethink, ...

Adverbs

Read the article by Jason Hamilton.

```
\b(totally|completely|absolutely|literally|definitely|certainly|probably|actually
|basically|virtually)\b
```

Common Filter Words

Read the article by JJ Graham.

```
\b(Believed|Can|Could|Decided|Experienced|Felt|Heard|Knew|Looked|Noticed|Realized
|Saw|Seemed|Sounded|Thought|Watched|Wondered)\b
```

Senses

Read the article by AJC Publishing.

```
\b(saw|look|see|hear|heard|listen|taste|smell|felt|feel
|realised|realized|knew|remembered|decided|noted)\b
```

Told not Shown

Read the article by Louise Harnby.

```
\b(noticed|seemed|spotted|saw|realized|felt|thought|wondered|believed|knew|decided)\b
```

Watery Words

Read the book by Rayne Hall. See Chapter 11.

```
\b(really|very|totally|completely|absolutely|somewhat|somehow|in a way
|literally|virtually|rather|quite|then|just|that|definitely
|certainly|afterwards|therefore|actually|basically)\b
```

10 Search Strings Without a List of Words

On occasion, we might want to search for words that start or end with specific characters, without starting with a list of words

[3] Each string should be on one line—no line breaks.

Searching for Words Starting With Specific Characters

We might suspect that we are overusing the word 'nod' in its various forms, so wish to search for all words starting with the characters 'nod'. This search string does that.

```
\bnod\w*
```

The symbol

```
\w*
```

placed at the end of a search string, means "accept any characters after" the characters 'nod', including no characters.

This string will find 'nod', 'nods', 'nodding', and 'nodded', which is what we want, but would also find 'node', if it is in the text.

Searching for Words Ending With Specific Characters

Many, but not all, adverbs end in 'ly'. This search string will find all words ending in 'ly'.

```
\w*ly\b
```

The symbol

```
\w*
```

placed at the beginning of a search string, means "accept any characters before" the characters 'ly'.

This string will find all adverbs ending in 'ly' but will also find non-adverbs such as 'bully' and 'ally', if in the text.

11 Searching for Phrases

As far as this document is concerned a phrase is a string connecting words together with spaces, such as 'begin to', 'starts to', 'I am', ...

Starting Words

In Chapter 1 of the book *The Word-Loss Diet* by Rayne Hall, she discusses phrases that might be cut, based on nine versions of 'begin' and 'start'. The following search string does that.

```
\b(begin to|begins to|beginning to|began to|begun to|start to|starts to|
starting to|started to)\b
```

However, this will not find phrases like 'begin to' with two blank spaces between 'begin' and 'to'. The following search string compensates for that possibility, where the blank space has been replaced by '\s+'.

```
\b(begin\s+to|begins\s+to|beginning\s+to|began\s+to|begun\s+to|start\s+to|starts\s+to|
starting\s+to|started\s+o)\b
```

The symbol

```
\s+
```

means "accept any number of whitespaces" in its place, but there must be but at least one whitespace. Whitespaces are characters that represent horizontal or vertical spaces, such as blank spaces, tabs, newlines, ...

Contractions

There are various phrases, containing spaces, that might be contracted, such as 'I am' to 'I'm'. The article *Contractions in Writing* by Joe Bunting, contains a list of the fifty most common phrases that could be contracted.

This search string will find the first nine of Bunting's phrases, namely, I am, I will, You are, You will, He is, She is, It is, We are, We will.

```
\b(I\s+am|I\s+will|You\s+are|You\s+will|He\s+is|She\s+is|It\s+is|We\s+are|We\s+will)\b
```

The following search string (on one line) will find all fifty of Bunting's phrases.

```
\b(I\s+am|I\s+will|You\s+are|You\s+will|He\s+is|She\s+is|It\s+is|We\s+are|We\s+will|
They\s+are|They\s+will|That\s+is|Who\s+is|What\s+is|When\s+is|Where\s+is|Why\s+is|
How\s+is|Here\s+is|There\s+is|Are\s+not|Can\s+not|Could\s+not|Should\s+not|Would\s+not|
Has\s+not|Have\s+not|Do\s+not|Was\s+not|Were\s+not|He\s+had|She\s+had|It\s+would|
We\s+would|They\s+would|Who\s+would|What\s+did|When\s+did|Where\s+did|Why\s+did|
How\s+did|Let\s+us|That\s+would|I\s+would|You\s+would|I\s+have|You\s+have|We\s+have|
They\s+have|Who\s+have)\b
```

12 Explanation of Regular Expressions Used in this Document

RegEx	Location in Search String	Effect
( )		Contains a character sequence
|		OR operator
\b	Start	Allows no characters before
\b	End	Allows no characters after
\w*	Start	Allows any characters, including none, before
\w*	End	Allows any characters, including none, after
\s+		Allows any whitespace, at least one

The difference between '+' and '*' is the minimum number of matches. '+' must match at least one character. '*' may match zero characters.

Expression	Sample Results	Interpretation
(ant|low)	ant antler plant panting low lower blow slower	All words containing ant or low
\b(ant|low)\b	ant low	Only the words ant or low
\w*(ant|low)\b	ant plant low blow	All words ending in ant or low
\b(ant|low)\w*	ant antler low lower	All words starting in ant or low

13 Other Useful Search Strings

This section gives more examples of the use of RegEx in Scrivener without explaining how they work. They are taken from various resources on the web, including The L&L Blog, ChatGPT, Lancy McCall, Adrian McCarthy, The Showbear Family Circus, and Russell Phillips.

To Find Consecutively Repeated Words

Example: "the the".

```
\b(\w+)\s+\1\b
```

To Find 'a's That Should Be 'an's

Example: "a only child".

```
(?! a uniform)(?! a united)(?! a unique)(?! a universal) a [aeiou]\w+
```

Example: "a hour".

```
\ba\s(hour|heir|honor|herb|homage|honest)\w*
```

To Find Missing Oxford Commas

Example: "Tom, Dick and Harry".

```
\w+, \w+ and
```

To Find All Numbers Between 1 and 100

Example: "There were 23 people in the room."
Chicago Manual of Style advises spelling out whole numbers from zero through one hundred.

```
\b([1-9]?[0-9]|100)\b
```

I used ChatGPT to create this, from the input: "I want to search for numbers between 0 and 100. Please create a regex search that I can use in Scrivener."

To Find All Sentence That Have Spaces Before Commas

Example:"Then ,with ".

```
\w\s+,\w
```

To Find All Paragraphs That Start With Spaces

Example: " There were 23 people in the room."

```
^ +\w*
```

To Find Some Passive Sentences

Example: "My exposed legs were attacked by the wind."

```
(is|are|was|were|be|been|being)( |\n)[a-z]*(ing|ed|en)( |\n)by( |\n)
```

To Find Sentences that Start with a Lower Case Letter

Example: "My exposed legs were attacked by the wind. it was painful."

```
[a-z ][a-z][.!?]\s+((?-i)[a-z])
```

To Find Three Successive Sentences Starting with the Same Word

Example: "He can wait. He never checks the time before calling. He is a pain."

```
(?i)(?:^|[.!?]\s+)(\b\w+\b)[^.!?]*[.!?]\s+\1\b[^.!?]*[.!?]\s+\1\b
```

To Find All Words Containing 16 or More Characters

```
[a-z]{16,}
```

Change the 16 to change the number of characters.

To Find All Paragraphs Containing 11 or More Sentences

```
(?:[^\n.!?]*[.!?]){11,}
```

Change the 11 to change the number of sentences.

To Find All Sentences Containing 26 or More Words

```
(?:\b\w+\b[\s,]*){26,}
```

Change the 26 to change the number of words.

14 Case Sensitive Searches

If the search is to be case sensitive, then the "Case Sensitive" option in Figure 10 on Page 7 should be checked.

15 Create a Search String of Your Overused Words

We are often advised to find all words in our manuscript we overuse. One way to do this is to first run a frequency analysis of the words in our manuscript, and then add the often-used words to a Scrivener search string.

Scrivener can be used to find your word frequency. To do this, in the Binder highlight the files and folders you want to include from your manuscript. See Figure 21.

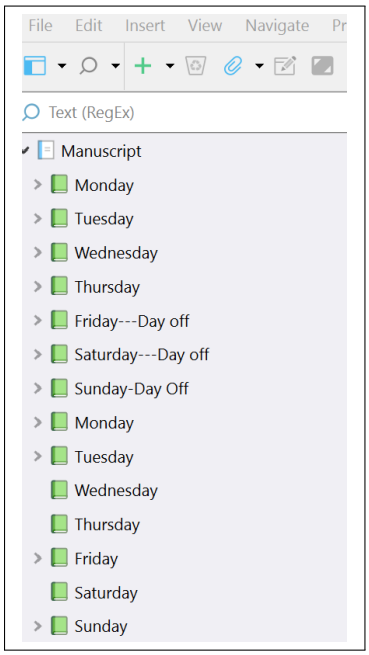

Figure 21: Folders Highlighted in Binder

Then, from the toolbar, select ‘Project’ followed by ‘Statistics.’ See Figure 22.

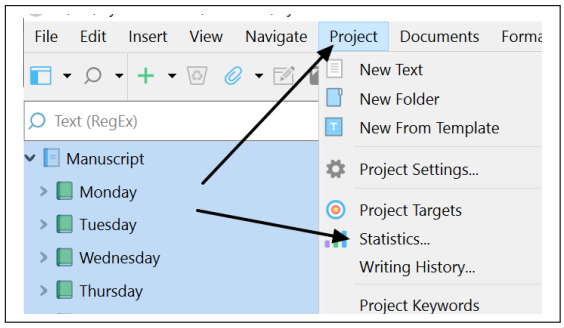

Figure 22: Accessing Statistics

After Figure 23 opens, click on the arrow to the left of “Word Frequency” .

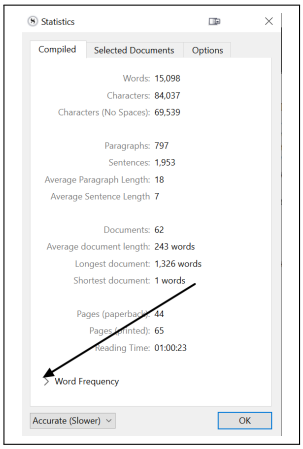

Figure 23: Accessing Word Frequency

This opens Figure 24

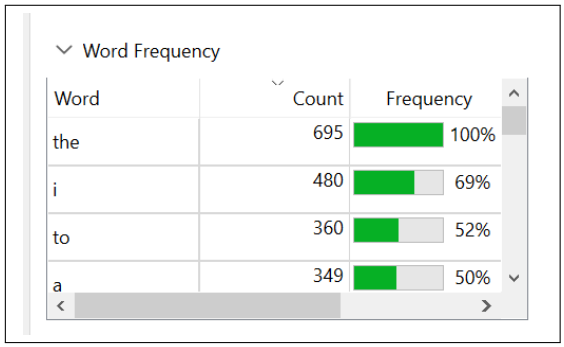

Figure 24: Word Frequency

So, the most frequent words are ‘the’, ‘i’, ‘to’, and ‘a’, which is neither surprising nor useful.

How can we remove these types of words, called Stop words, from our analysis? They can be filtered by selecting the “Options” tab at the top right in Figure 22 on Page 17. See Figure 25.

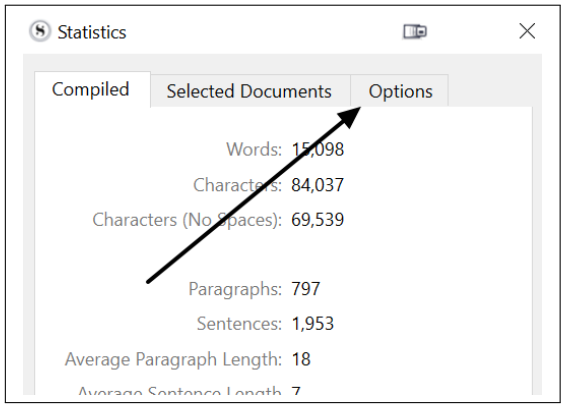

Figure 25: Select Options

From this window, we select "Set List of Words to Ignore",

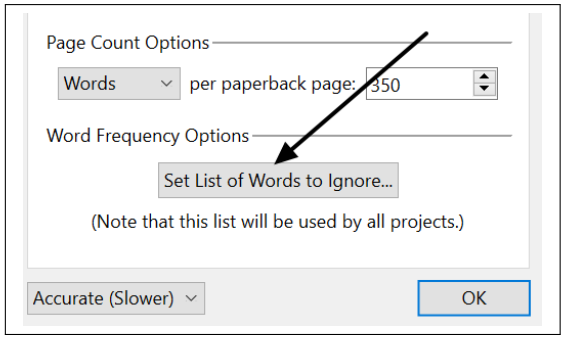

Figure 26: Select 'Set List of Words to Ignore'

which opens Figure 27.

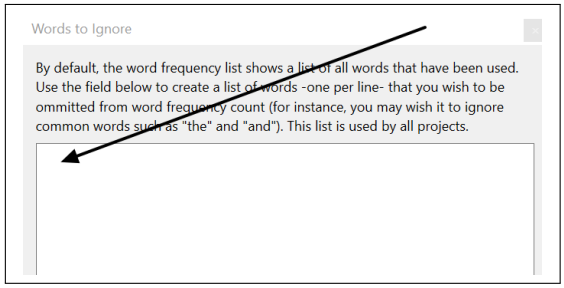

Figure 27: No Stop Words

This is where we enter Stop words, one per line. Rather than starting from scratch, lists of Stop words can be found online, such as `https://faculty.georgetown.edu/wilsong/IR/WD3.html` and `https://gist.github.com/sebleier/554280`.

Figure 28 shows part of a collection of Stop words entered into Scrivener.

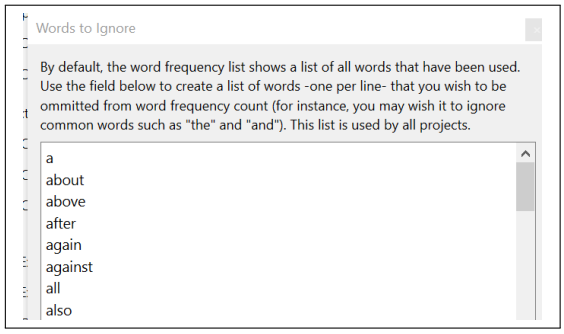

Figure 28: Stop Words

Now we repeat the word frequency analysis, starting from Figure 22 on Page!17 to find Figure 29—the first few words in our new word frequency.

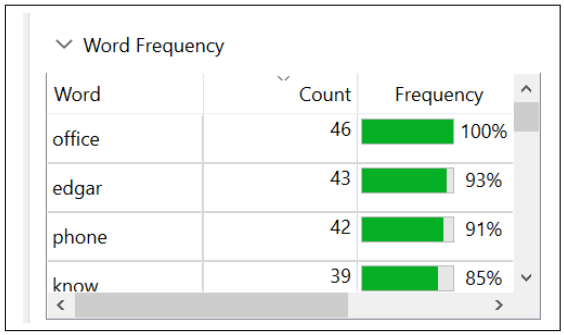

Figure 29: Word Frequency

Now the most frequent words are 'office', 'edgar', 'phone', and 'know'. The second word is the case-insensitive version of one of my characters, Edgar, so that is not of interest. However; 'office', 'phone', and 'know', show promise, especially 'know'. I decide to create a Scrivener search string from these three words.

```
\b(office|phone|know)\b
```

Using this will find the associated whole words, and give me the context in which I'm using these words, on which I can make relevant decisions.

16 Tips and Beware

A Great Resource

The book *The Word-Loss Diet* by Rayne Hall, is an excellent resource for suggestions if "your writing needs toning up or slimming down."

The book contains 13 chapters with ideas from which multiple Scrivener Search Strings can be constructed and used. Buy it—you won't regret it. I find it invaluable. In fact, two of the Popular Search Strings in the previous section, 'Starting Words' and 'Watery Words', are samples of the many useful suggestions in this book.

A Good Idea

In the article *Using Regular Expressions in Your Scrivener Editing Process* by Lancy McCall, the author suggests creating an "Editing Checks" folder in the Binder. Then, for each search string, appending

a file containing that string together with a brief description of its purpose and use. These files are placed within subfolders with similar purposes. The author also explains how to use this structure. The article is worth reading.

A Cautionary Tale

It is possible to use RegEx to search and replace. Be cautious if you do this. An ex-colleague (who will remain nameless) had finished writing his manuscript for a textbook and wanted to create an index in which each entry started with a capital letter. He paid a student to create the RegEx strings that would do this. Without checking, or keeping a backup copy of his latest manuscript, he ran the strings on the entire document. The end result was that every word in the document started with a capital letter.

Personalizing a RegEx Search String

Often a search string will find a word multiple times in your document that is not relevant to you. For example, to find adverbs it is not uncommon to search for all words ending in 'ly'. This may find multiple entries for 'only', which is not relevant to your search. You can tell RegEx to stop finding this word, by preceding you search string with '(?! only)', personalizing your search string.

Bug in Scrivener Find

I found bugs in Scrivener's Find when searching for two successive blank lines[4] or pilcrows (¶), both when using RegEx and when using plain text search. The problem is that they may not identify all blank lines (some/all are missed) and what they do find depends on the location of the cursor when Find is initiated. I have notified Scrivener and they have acknowledged the problem. "Our developer doesn't comment publicly on future plans, so I don't know when this will be corrected." "We do not publish a list of known bugs." Moral. **Don't trust the results if you search for newlines or pilcrows.**

There is also a "feature" when using Find and Replace, whereby the selected text in a file is deleted. See Find and replace double spaces bug.

17 Final Comments

Feedback

If you have any suggestions to improve this document, especially if you have found mistakes, please advise David Lovelock, dlvlck@gmail.com. Thank you.

[4]To make blank lines/pilcrows (¶) visible in the text, go to *Vew* ▷ *Text Editing* ▷ *Show Invisibles* or press *Alt Shift V*.