



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
Centre for Data, Culture & Society



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Introduction to Text Analysis With Python

16 & 25 Feb 2026

Instructor: Joy Lan

Adapted from materials made by Xandra Dave Cochran

Course Topic

- Analysing unstructured data with Python
- Natural Language Toolkit (NLTK)
- Regular Expressions

Sir

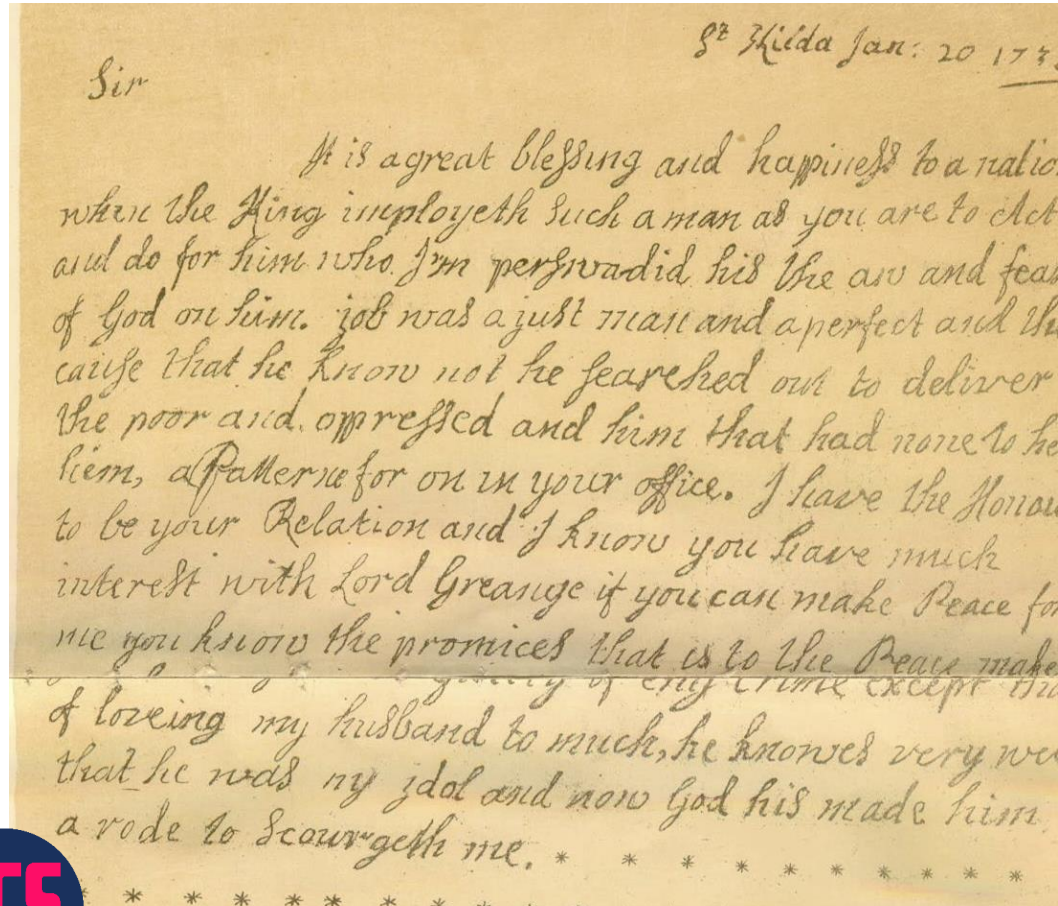
It is a great blessing and happiness to a nation
when the King employeth such a man as you are to do
and do for him who I'm perswaded his the awe and fear
of God on him. Job was a just man and a perfect and the
cause that he know not he feared out to deliver
the poor and oppressed and him that had none to help
him, a pattern for on in your office. I have the Honour
to be your Relation and I know you have much
interest with Lord Greange if you can make Peace for
me you know the promises that is to the Peace make
of losing my husband to much, he knowes very well
that he was my idol and now God his made him
a rode to scourgeth me. * * * * *



Course Structure

Anticipate about ~4 hours/week

- 2 hour course, 2-4 pm on Monday
- Independent learning, ~2 hours
- Office hours on request on Teams
- All materials will be uploaded to the course page on Github





Introduction

- Why are you interested in text analysis?
- Have you used Python before?
- Have you used Jupyter Notebooks or Google Colab before?
- Have you used Regular Expressions before?
- Have you used NLTK before?



Set up the environment

Jupyter Notebooks / Jupyterlabs

- With Google Colab <https://colab.research.google.com>
 - Go to File > Open Notebook > Github> paste the Github link to the notebook
- Locally
 - Install jupyter notebook with pip/pip3 or conda
 - Download and open the notebook file
 - You'll also need to install the libraries (nltk, etc.) locally



Python Refresher (Opt.)

- Name these data types:
 - "Hello!"
 - [1, 2, 3]
 - {"A":1, "B":2}
- Functions:
 - print()
 - while:
 - for i in list:
 - def function_name()



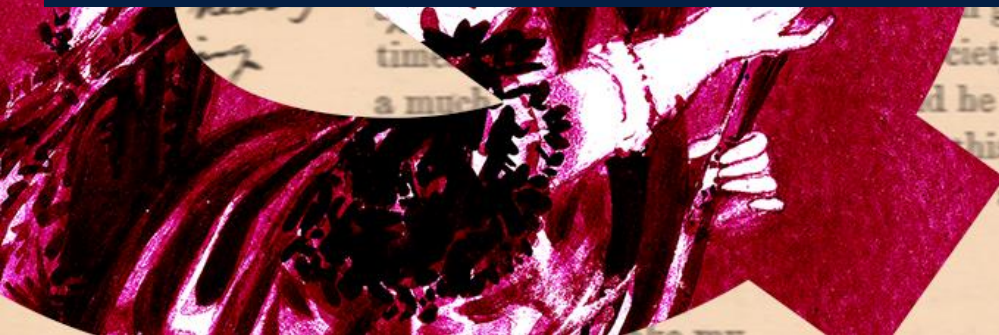
Download and Import nltk packages

- Import `nltk`
- Use `nltk.download()` for downloading the packages, once they are downloaded, you can call these packages using "import"
- We will use nltk 'gutenberg' and 'book' as example corpus (textual data)





Getting to Know a Text



waiting here for me. The master of the sloop
till further orders they met in Scotos he
logary his wife A Georges Sons Ronald with
and saw me on Sep 30 we came to the Isle Huskre Macleod. he
Macleod's house in the town of Iona and he'd bring

great miserie in the Husker but I am ten
society sent a minister here I have given him
and he writ it down, you may [be] sure I have
this come to you if you hear I'm alive do me
all hast but if you hear I'm dead do what

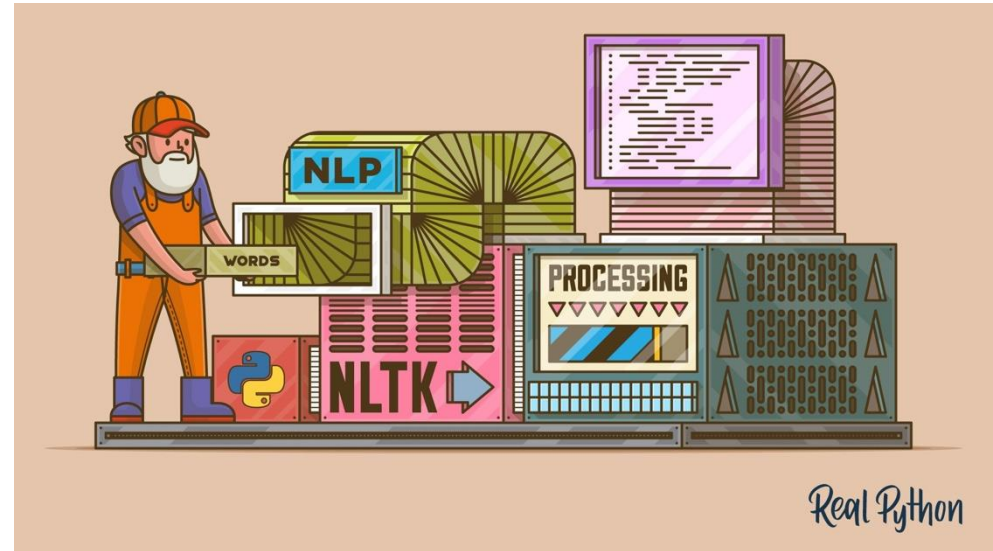
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Data Source

Examples of data sources for natural language:

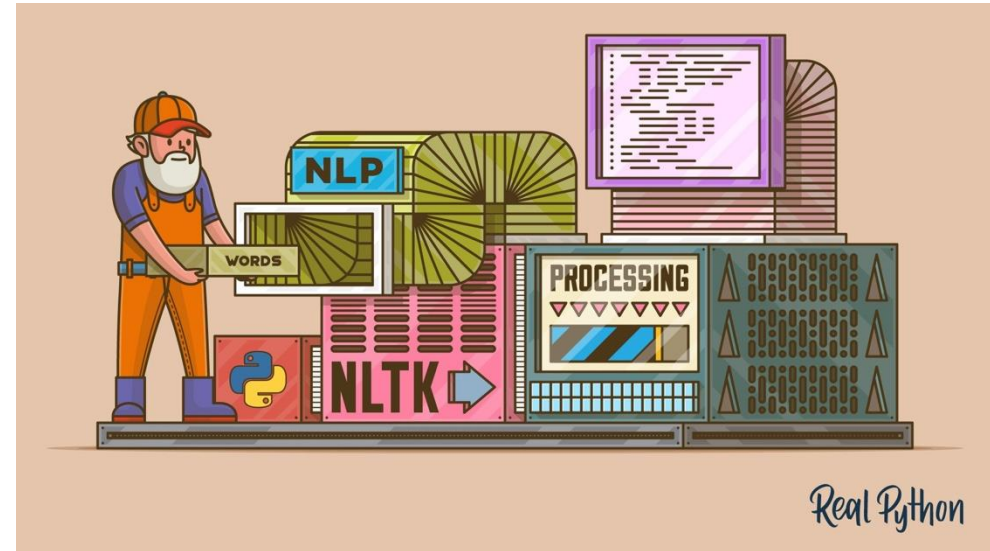
- Books
- Newspapers
- Magazines
- Websites
- Transcriptions of audio (i.e. interview, movie dialogue)
- Social media (memes)

Always read the licensing/copyright information and terms of use!



Demo 1

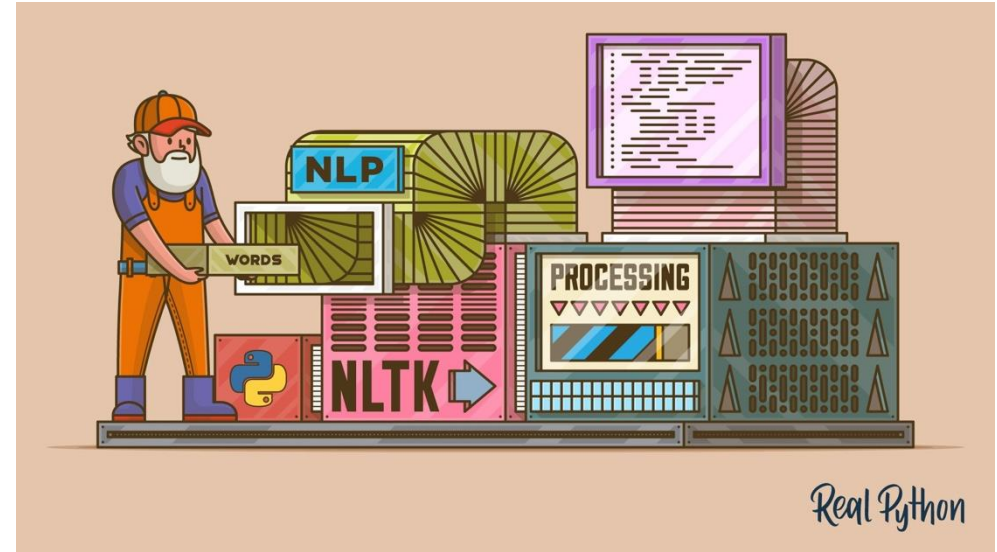
- Use built-in functions to print out and summarise text1, and text2



NLP Natural Language Processing

What kinds of questions can you ask when you can use a programming language to study hundreds, thousands, or even millions of pages of digital text?

“Distant reading”



Why use NLTK

What kinds of questions can you ask when you can use a programming language to study hundreds, thousands, or even millions of pages of digital text?

“Distant reading”

NLTK Isn't everything

What kinds of questions can you ask when you can physically hold and look at a printed text, be it an original publication or later edition of the text?

“Close reading”

Book history



Text Represented by ?

In human language, text is represented by a collections of words, or sentences.

In NLTK, similarly, text is represented by tokens, unique word.

Each token is link to a numerical representation, such as a number.

Example:

the dog is eating, and the cat is eating. (9 words)

➔ Tokens:

0:the, 1:dog, 2:is, 3:eating, 4:",", 5:and, 6:cat, 7:". "
(8 tokens)



Tokenisation

- Tokenisation involves breaking down a piece of text into smaller units called tokens.
- Tokens can be individual words, sentences, or even characters, depending on the level of granularity desired.
- Tokenisation helps in standardizing and organizing text data, making it easier to analyse and process.
- Word-based tokenisation breaks down text into individual words, treating each word as a separate token.



Getting to Know a Text

We can use Python built-in functions such as

`len(text)`

`set(text)`



Reference: <https://www.nltk.org/book/ch01.html>

Biblia Sacra by N/A - University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom - CC BY.
https://www.europeana.eu/item/9200261/BibliographicResource_3000058482943

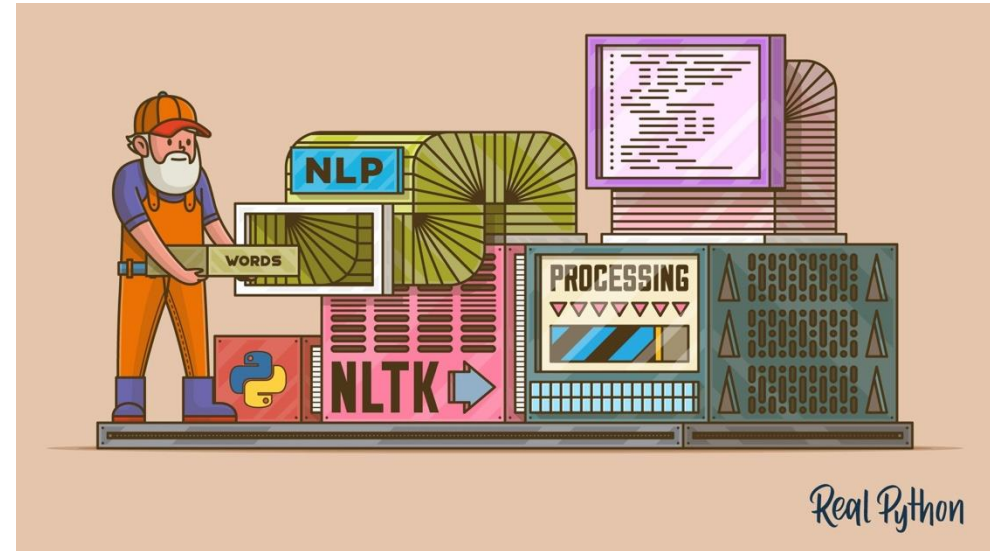
www.cdcs.ed.ac.uk

Demo 2

Calculate the following measures of text1 and text 2

- length of vocabulary
- lexical diversity

(the number of tokens/the length of text)



Getting to Know a Given Word in a Text

NLTK Text methods include:

```
Text.concordance("word", lines=20)
```

```
Text.similar("word")
```

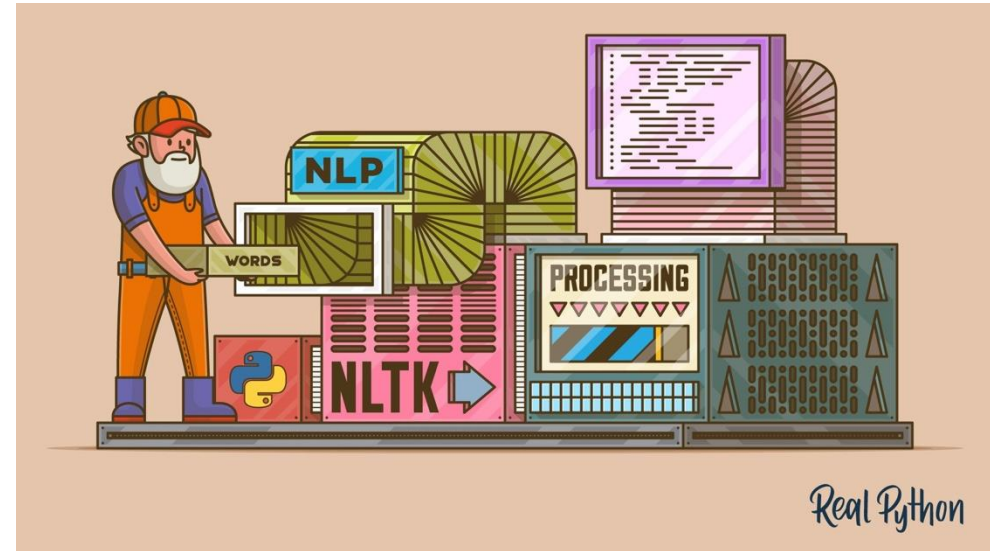
```
Text.common_contexts(["list", "of", "words"])
```

```
Text.dispersion_plot(["list", "of", "words"])
```



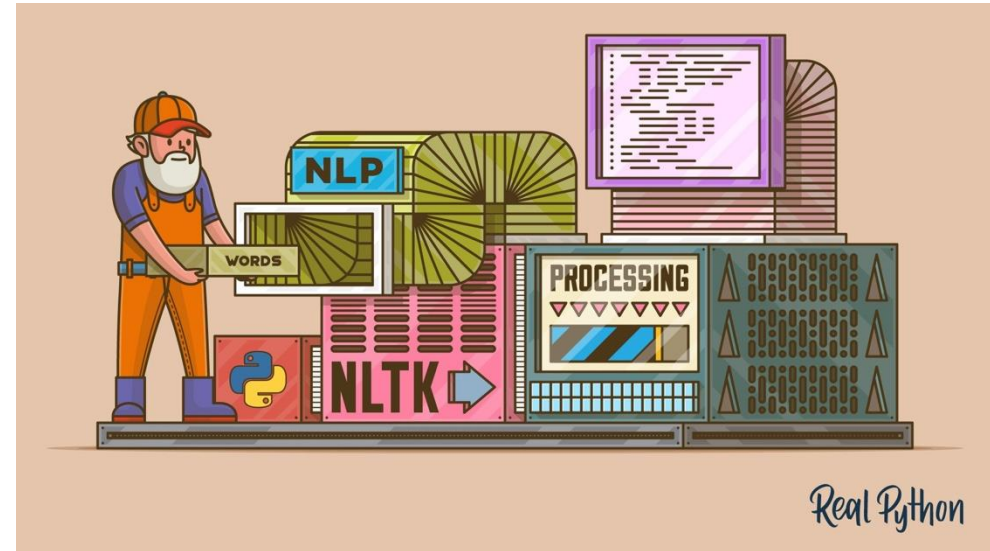
Demo 3-4

- Get the context of a given word
- Get similar words of a given word
- Get the common context of a list of words
- Plot the appearance of a given word across the document



Demo 5

- Using context of words and similar words to gain insight to the the relation between given words. (ex. good, opinion)
- Bigram and N-gram





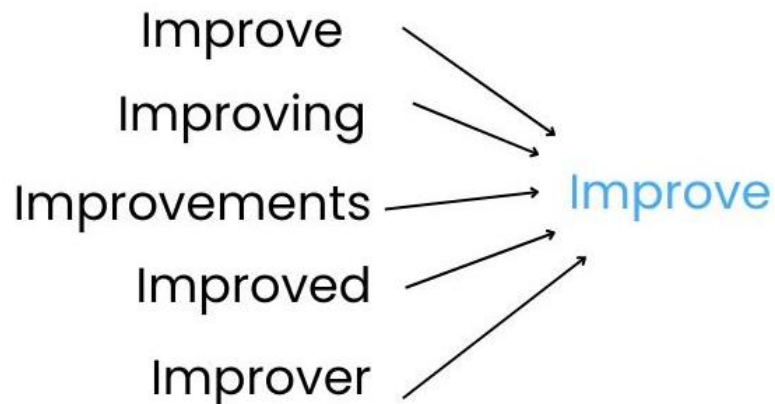
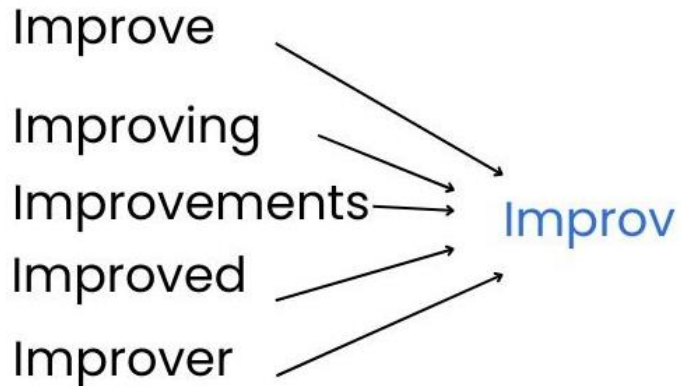
Customise Tokenization

Text Cleaning and Pre-processing

- Text cleaning and pre-processing:
 - remove unwanted characters (https:// , emojis, etc.)
 - Normalisation:
 - Lowercasing
 - Stemming and lemmatizing
 - Stopword removal: remove words that don't add meaning to the data
- Tokenization: split documents into words/punctuation, or sentences
- POS Tagging (Part-of-Speech Tagging): assigns grammatical labels to each token.
- Bigram, N-gram

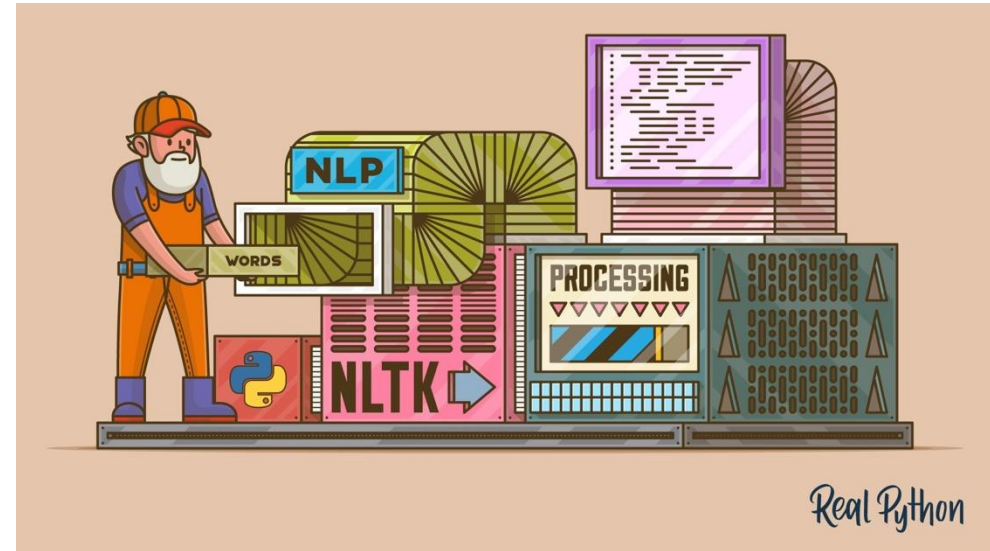


Stemming & Lemmatization



Demo 6

- Use word and sentence tokenizers
- Normalise text using `word.lower()`
- Stemming and Lemmatisation



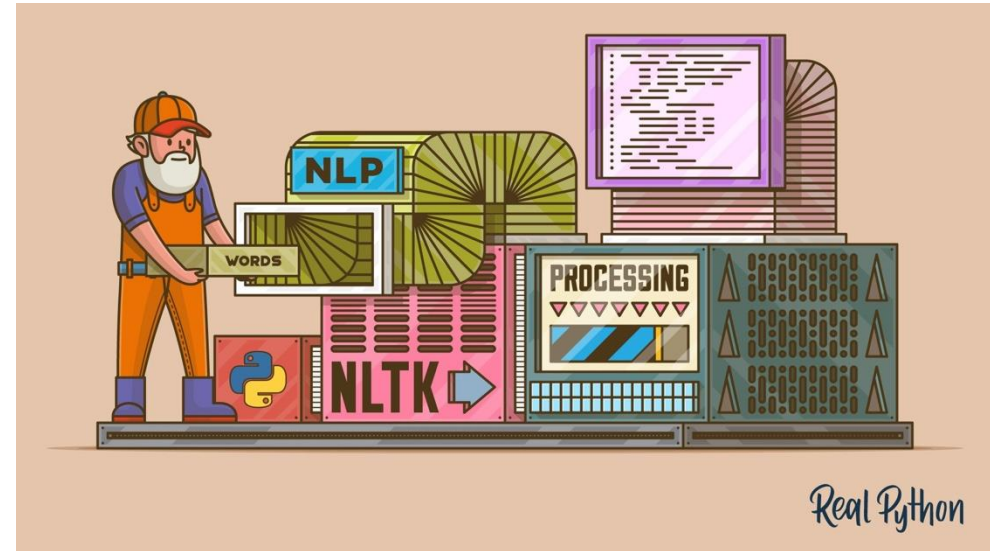
Stopwords

- Stopwords include words like “a,” “the,” “of,” “an” that don’t add meaning to the dataset.
- I am going to the shop. -> “I”, “going”, “shop”



Demo 7

- Apply stopword removal



Finding Text Sources

- Libraries - NLS Data Foundry (data.nls.uk)
- Project Gutenberg (gutenberg.org)
- Hathi Trust Digital Library (hathitrust.org)
- Websites - Internet Archive (archive.org)'s Wayback Machine, UK Web archive (webarchive.org.uk)
- Newspaper archives (universities often subscribe to them!)



Research with NLTK

- Who is named in a text?
- What places are named in a text?
 - Chunking and Named Entity Recognition
- How does the vocabulary of an author change over time?
 - Lexical Diversity



Research with NLTK

- What are the common themes throughout a corpus?
 - Topic Modeling
- What attitudes are expressed in a corpus?
 - Sentiment Analysis
- What words occur near each other throughout a corpus? How does the meaning of a word change over time?
 - Word Embeddings



Next Week

- Research with NLTK on a corpus
 - NLTK with pandas (for tabular data)
 - NLTK with Altair (for data visualization)
- Regular Expression practice
- Cleaning messy text
- Resources for more text analysis practice

8th Milda Jan: 20 17th

Sir

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and do for him who I'm perswaded his the awe and fear
of God on him. Job was a just man and a perfect and the
cause that he know not he searched out to deliver
the poor and oppressed and him that had none to he
him, a patterne for on in your office. I have the Honour
to be your Relation and I know you have much
interest with Lord Greange if you can make Peace for
me you know the promises that is to the Peace make
of loving my husband to much, he knowes very well
that he was my idol and now God his made him
a rode to scourgeth me. * * * * *

The background of the entire image is a collage. On the left, there is a circular inset showing a woman in a red dress with a large floral corsage. The rest of the background is a textured, aged paper with faint, handwritten text in cursive. The text is mostly illegible but appears to be from a historical document or letter. Overlaid on this background are two dark blue rectangular boxes containing white text.

Thanks Everyone!

Next class: Monday 25th, 2-4PM
Please message me on Teams for office hours!