



# Semantic Gradient Activities

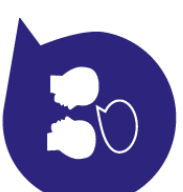
A semantic gradient is a vocabulary teaching tool that involves placing related words on a scale or gradient. The purpose of this activity is to help students discern shades of meaning among related words. Synonyms related to a specific concept can be organised by their intensity in meaning, moving from the left to the right of the scale. Antonym word pairs can sit on opposite ends of the scale.

This activity is appropriate for use with students who have a general understanding of vocabulary around a certain topic (e.g., concepts of size) but would benefit from support in better understanding Tier 1 or Tier 2 vocabulary. Using a semantic gradient can also support the students' knowledge of synonyms and antonyms and provide a reference point of existing vocabulary in order to develop new vocabulary.

A variety of word classes can be used to build a semantic gradient, including adjectives, adverbs, nouns and verbs.

## **instructions:**

1. Cut out the word cards from the selected set you would like to use and mix them up so that they are out of order.
  - It can be easier to introduce semantic gradients after pre-teaching the concepts of synonyms (i.e., words that mean the same) and antonyms (i.e., words that mean the opposite)
  - When beginning to organise words on the gradient, start with words that the student feels most confident with. Ask them to decide where the word could be placed. For example, if working with 'big' and 'small', start by placing these on opposite or fairly opposite sides, and then place other words around these.
  - It may be helpful to start with three or four words when introducing this activity and then build to more. Some students may benefit from having to organise fewer words, while others may need a bigger number of words. At a higher level, students can also generate their own words.
2. Together with the student, arrange the words from most to least intense, with the end result showing polar antonyms (opposites) on either end of the gradient, or synonyms with the most significant difference in intensity. The arrow included in this resource can be used to represent this gradient.
3. Discuss any points of difference in thinking about the order. Use dictionaries or background information to help with these discussions.
4. If selecting your own words relating to a specific concept rather than using those below, be sure to:
  - Select words that are gradable. This means words that can be compared and described in terms of intensity, including using terms such as 'very'. Avoid word pairs that are not gradable and are mutually exclusive, such as 'true/false', 'on/off', etc.
  - Select either two opposites (e.g., 'convenient' and 'inconvenient') or two synonyms that can describe similar things but to different intensity (e.g., 'inconvenient' and 'bothersome'), then identify synonyms.
  - Use cards to write words on so they can later be moved or adjusted across the semantic gradient if needed. Sticky notes can also be used for this purpose.



Word Cards

arctic	freezing	cold	chilly	cool	lukewarm	mild	warm	hot	boiling	scorching
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microscopic	miniscule	tiny	petite	little	small	average
big	large	huge	enormous	humongous	gigantic	gargantuan

hate	despise	dislike	tolerate	like	enjoy	love	adore
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whisper	mutter	say	talk	announce	exclaim	yell	scream
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never	rarely	seldom	sporadically	uncommonly	often	frequently	usually	consistently	always
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silt	gravel	pebble	stone	rock	boulder
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