

Semantic Gradient

Semantic Gradient- an array of related words placed on a continuum.

The beginning and ending points of the continuum are gradable opposites- such as hot and cold. The words between the antonyms illustrate a semantic shift from one word to the other.

The purpose of this activity is to help you discern shades of meaning among words that are related. For example, “angry and “furious” are both considered antonyms of happy. However, looking closely at their definitions will help you understand that they are not truly synonyms.

Example of a semantic gradient:

frigid frosty chilly brisk cool balmy tepid hot boiling fiery

Steps for Creating a Semantic Gradient

1) Select a pair of **gradable opposites**.

Ex. hot / cold

Choose your initial words wisely. Semantic Gradients cannot be created when using “complementary pairs” of antonyms such as on/off or married/single.

2) Generate at least **five synonyms for each antonym**.

Ex. hot: boiling, balmy, fiery, tepid, warm, hot

cold: cool, brisk, chilly, frosty, frigid

3) **Arrange each set of synonyms from most to least extreme.**

Ex. fiery boiling hot warm tepid balmy
frigid frosty cold chilly brisk cool

4) **Arrange all words (both sets of synonyms) from most to least extreme, with the least extreme words in the middle, and the most extreme words on each end.**

Ex. frigid frosty cold chilly brisk cool - balmy tepid warm hot boiling fiery

5) **Discuss your choices with a peer.** Use reference sources to help settle any disputes. **Make adjustments** to your arrangement based on your discussion.

Semantic Gradient Activity #1

Students are given the topic and all words on index cards or sticky notes *with the left and right degrees already determined*. Students then have to place *the rest of the words in order*. (Steps 1 and 2 on the chart are already completed. Step 3 is set up.)

Semantic Gradient Activity #2

Students are given the topic and all of the words on index cards or sticky notes without the extreme degrees determined. Students place *all of the words in order*. (Steps 1 and 2 on the chart are already completed.)

Semantic Gradient Activity #3

Students are given the topic and work in groups to generate a list of words related to the topic and then place the words in order on the line. (Step 1 on the chart is already completed.)

Semantic Gradient Activity #4

Students are given the freedom to choose their own topic and work in groups to generate a list of words related to the topic and then place the words in order on the line. (None of the steps on the chart are already completed.)

This basic chart can be used for Semantic Gradient Activities #1-#3.

Topic/Theme	Words Related To Topic In Varying Degrees (not in any particular order)
Anger	furious, red-faced, upset, bothered, unhappy, irate, livid
Tired	exhausted, sleepy, weary, worn-out, drowsy, pooped out
To Like	adore, love, admire, look up to, fond of, enamored
Huge	big, large, massive, hefty, colossal
Happy	joyous, giddy, pleased, elated, happy, unhappy, glum, sad, disappointed
Size	tiny, average, small, massive, bulky, hefty, humongous, gigantic, miniscule, microscopic
To Gab	chatter, whisper, talk, shout, scream, pronounce, state
Temperature	cool, steamy, scorching, balmy, freezing, lukewarm, hot, boiling, chilled, warm, icy, bone-chilling, sweltering
Movement	dawdle, stroll, strut, jog, race, sprint
Emotion	bawl, sob, sniffle, chuckle, giggle, laugh, roar
Rocks	pebble, clay, sand, silt, boulder, gravel
Strength	weak, wimpy, frail, strong, buff, scrawny, burly, feeble, powerful
Intelligence	intelligent, dumb, dim-witted, average, gifted, bright, genius
Boredom	boring, dull, humdrum, amusing, interesting, dreary, captivating, fascinating
Crying	wailing, howling, sniveling, sobbing, tearing up, weeping, grieving, bawling