

FINDING THE RIGHT WORDS

Instructions: Synonyms and antonyms (online version)



This activity aims to help you consider precision and subtlety of meaning.



What do I do?

Look at the words on the next page. Either print and chop them, or copy them onto pieces of paper. Arrange the words on the table. Group together words with similar meanings (synonyms) and consider how alike they are, and if they have subtle differences. You can use a dictionary/online dictionary to help with this.

Now, try pairing some of the words to explore antonyms (opposites) and consider whether they are exactly opposite or almost opposite.

Generate other synonyms/antonyms for the words and add them in. Consider the differences between them. Could you use them interchangeably or are there subtle differences you need to be aware of, in order to make sure your meaning is clear?

Extra activity: word chain. Start with one of the words and choose a synonym for it (on a card or your own). Now, choose a synonym for your second word. Try to make a chain of words which 'edge away' from the first word, so the meaning gets changed slightly every time. Here's an example showing the meanings changing. The example starts with a different word but you can start with one of the cards and then use your own to continue the chain. You can use a thesaurus to generate the words.

tidy - - neat - - orderly - - trim - - cut - - scratch

Now look at the first and the last word in the chain and see how different their meanings are. This can highlight the importance of choosing a synonym with the right meaning.



How does this apply?

- Be aware of the exact meanings of the words you use. Sometimes we can miss the subtle meanings of a word and say something we didn't quite mean. Using a thesaurus can be useful, but can make it easy to use words we aren't completely sure about.
- Synonyms can help you be precise in the ideas you want to communicate and add variety to your writing.

N.B. The term 'antonym' has differing definitions. For simplicity, it has been used here to mean general opposite rather than exact binary opposite.

energetic	adaptable	confident	enthusiastic
uncertain	keen	responsive	work well with others
impatient	committed	eager	dedicated
flexible	passionate	work well by myself	calm
resilient	self-reliant	devoted	cautious
proactive	driven	dependent	apathetic
individual	self- assured	motivated	independent