

A Twinkl Guide to Colourful Semantics



What Is Colourful Semantics?

- Colourful semantics is an intervention tool created by speech and language therapist, Alison Bryan.
- Colourful semantics uses colour-coding to help a young person learn the important elements of a sentence and how to join them in the correct order.
- Colourful semantics aims to develop and consolidate the understanding of 'wh-' questions, e.g. 'who?', 'what?', 'where?'.
- Colourful semantics uses specific colours and shapes that must be followed:
 - who? = orange
 - doing what? = yellow
 - what? = green
 - where? = blue
 - when? = brown
 - to whom? = pink
 - what like? = cloud shape
 - whose? = star shape

Best Practice

- Showing real examples and giving specific ideas during whole-school staff training builds practitioners' confidence. This has a positive impact on their likelihood of delivering the approach in lessons.
- Using pictures and photos that a student is interested in makes the intervention more relevant to the learner and increases motivation.
- Prepare the resources needed in advance. It becomes very tricky when the 'who' word or the 'what doing' word, which is needed for the activity, isn't there!
- When introducing a new colour to represent a new element (e.g. 'when' words), focus on them in isolation with the learner before adding them into the sentence strip.
- Be creative! Colourful semantics is versatile and can be used in a variety of ways to support the development of expressive language.

Information taken from The Communication Trust

What Does Colourful Semantics Look Like?

A selection of resources is used to support the learner:

1. A **picture** or **photograph** for the student to look at as visual inspiration.
2. A **sentence strip** containing the structure needed to describe the picture.



3. A selection of **colour-coded symbols, pictures** or **word cards** for the student to choose from in order to construct their descriptive sentence.




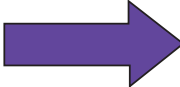

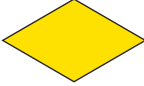

Using the cards, the young person can construct a sentence to describe the picture.



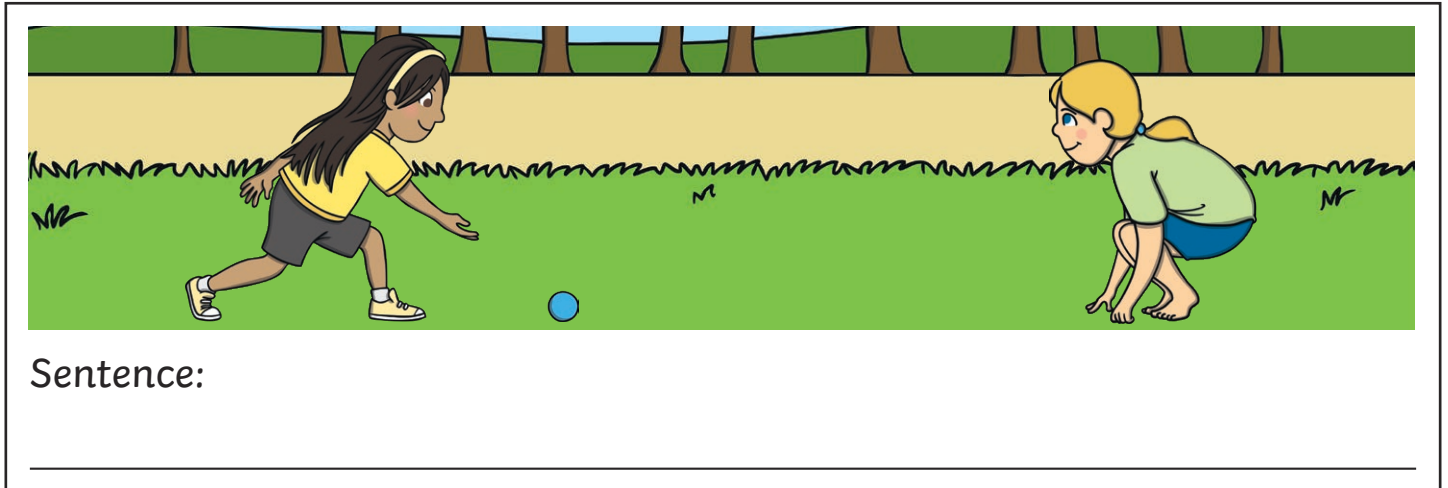
The Official Colours and Shapes to Be Used

- Orange words tell us **who**.
- Yellow words tell us what they are **doing**.
- Green words tell us **what**.
- Blue words tell us **where**.
- Pink words tell us **to who(m)**.
- Brown words tell us **when**.
- Black words tell us **how**.
- Purple words tell us **why** (and **join things up**).
- Cloud words tell us **what** it is **like**.
- Star words tell us **whose**.

Further Information:

	Question/Name	Colour/Shape
adjective/concept	what like?	
adverb (time)	when?	brown
adverb (manner)	how?	black
cause and effect	why?	
conjunction	joining up word	
auxiliary verb	little doing word	
possessive pronouns	whose?	

An example:



Sentence:

Sahira

is rolling

the ball

in the park.

to Harriet.

The explanation:

Question word	Colour coding	Example
who?	orange	Sahira is rolling the ball.
what doing?	yellow	Sahira is rolling the ball.
what?	green	Sahira is rolling the ball.
where?	blue	Sahira is rolling the ball in the park.
to who(m)?	pink	Sahira is rolling the ball to Harriet.

Who?

People (e.g. man, woman, girl, boy, baby)

Occupations (e.g. speech therapist, teacher, doctor, dentist)

Character names (e.g. Humpty Dumpty, Goldilocks, Little Red Riding Hood)

Do we use who for animals?

We only use who for animals when they are characters, as we have a natural tendency to animate/humanise these animals when describing them.

Some examples:

If it is a picture of an animal carrying out a human activity, it would be a **who** word. For example, in the silly sentence below:



The dinosaur

is eating

a burger.

If it is a picture of a real animal, it would be a **what**. For example, in this sentence:



The cow

is

in the field.



Doing What?

Stand alone verbs (e.g. run, sit, read)

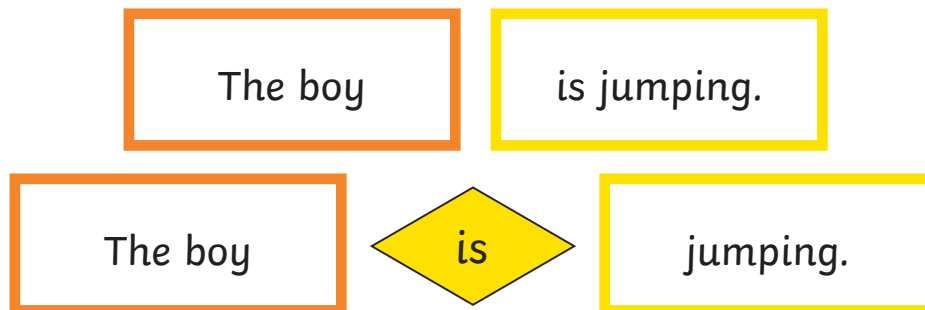
Verbs associated with an object (e.g. wash (hair), brush (hair))

Different tenses (i.e. past, present, future)

Copula verbs (e.g. is, was, has, had)

Copula verbs can be introduced depending on the student's level of ability and are shown in yellow diamond shapes.

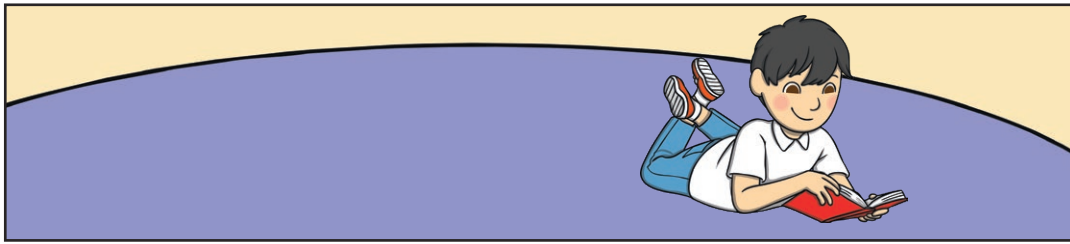
An example:



What?

Objects and animals

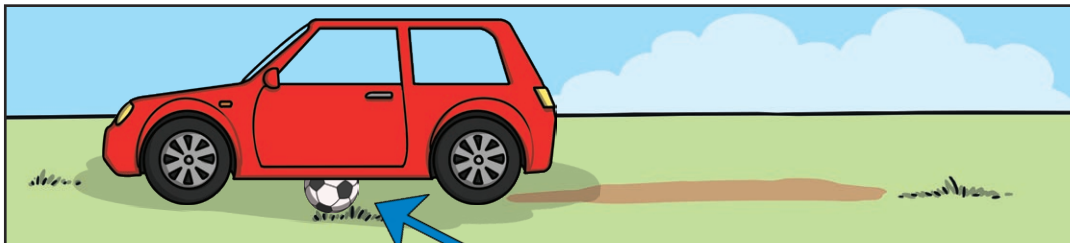
Some examples:



The boy

is reading

a book.



The ball

rolled

under the car.

Remember, it is OK to start a sentence using a **what** word.



The panda

is eating

bamboo shoots.

In this example, both the panda and the bamboo are **what** words as it is a real panda, not a character.

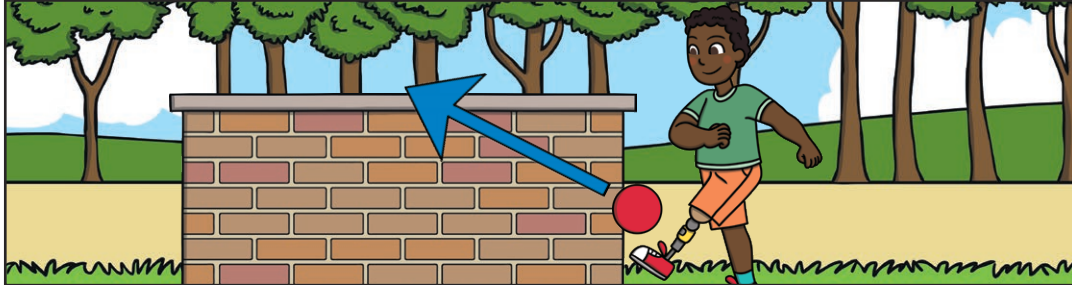


Where?

Prepositional phrases (e.g. under the table)

Prepositions (e.g. on, in, over)

An example:



John

kicked

the football

over the wall.

Note:

Notice how 'the wall' is no longer a **what** word as the function in the sentence has changed. You would ask the student, 'Where did John kick the ball?' **Over the wall.**

If working on prepositions with the student, you can introduce **little blue words**.

An example:



The teddy

is

under

the table.



To who(m)?

Indirect objects

Prepositions (e.g. on, in, over)

An example:

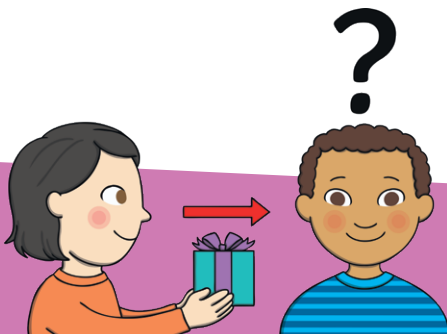


The child

is giving

flowers

to his mum.



When?

Time concepts and words (e.g. today, tomorrow, yesterday, at the weekend, on Friday, once upon a time, a long time ago)

These words can be used at the beginning or at the end of a sentence.

An example:

Sentence:

On Wednesday George the giraffe was eating leaves in the zoo.




What like?


Adjectives (e.g. old, tall, pretty, blue)

Feelings and emotions (e.g. angry, excited, hungry)

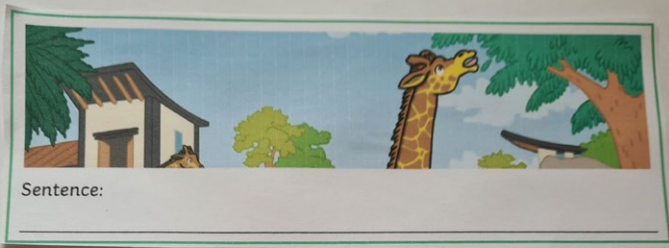
These words are shown in cloud shapes because they can float around the sentence like real clouds.

An example:

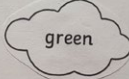
The  dirty car parked on the road.

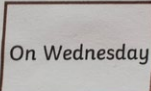
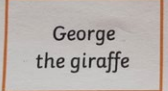
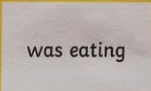
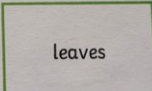
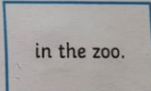
The car parked on the  dirty road.

The student can 'float' their cloud words above the word in the sentence that they want to describe.



Sentence:

 green

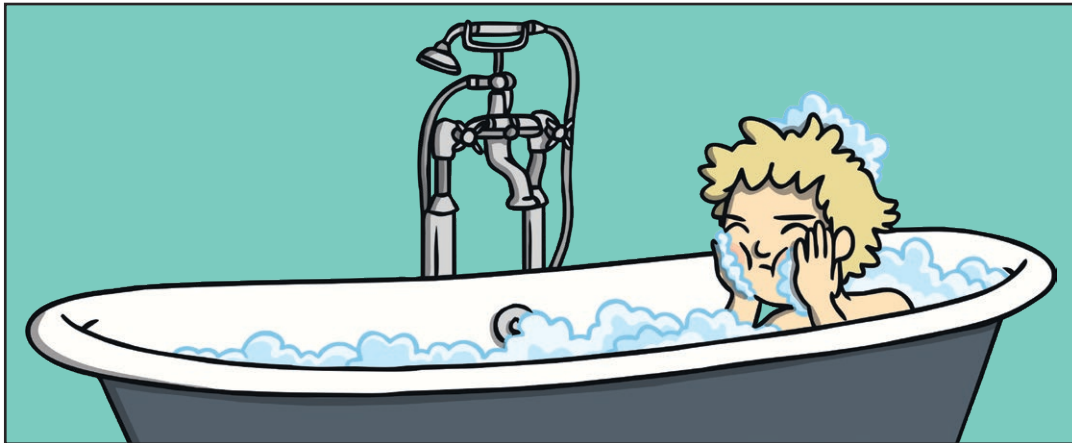
 On Wednesday  George the giraffe  was eating  leaves  in the zoo.



Whose?

Possessive pronouns (e.g. his, hers, our, my, your, their)

An example:



The boy

is washing

his

face.



What Can It Look Like in Practice?

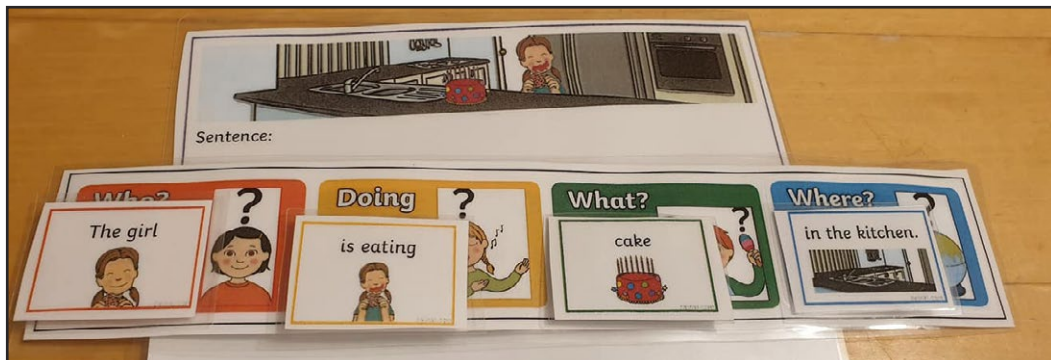
A sentence strip containing the structure needed to describe the picture.



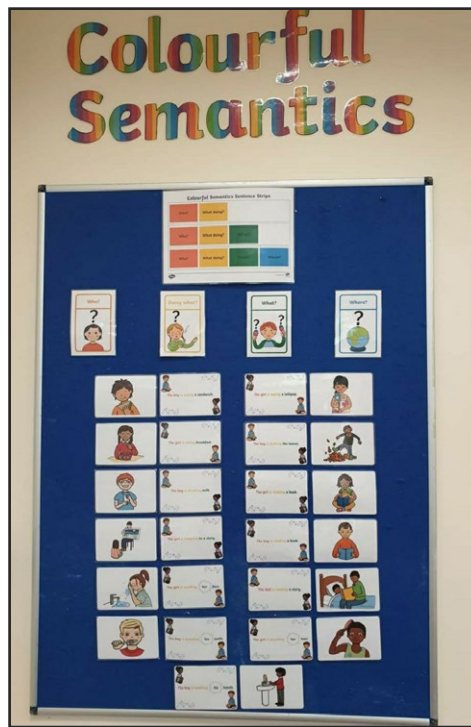
Visual aids for the classroom.



Using the symbols, a learner can construct a sentence to describe a picture.



A classroom display.



As part of story sequencing.



Useful Tips

You don't have to colour code everything - you are in control of what is coded. Use it to scaffold what your individual learners need.

Find the verb and ask the right question to get the answer you want. Then choose the colour/shape that goes with that question/word. For example, in the sentence:

The boy kicked the ball in the garden.

Find the verb → kicked (yellow)

Then ask yourself the following question words:

who kicked? → the boy (orange)

kicked what? → the ball (green)

where was it kicked? → in the garden (blue)

Find Twinkl's huge range of colourful semantics resources [here](#).

Bibliography

Thecommunicationtrust.org.uk. 2021. *The Communication Trust - What Works*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/projects/what-works/intervention.aspx?letter=C&ID=1>> [Accessed 12 April 2021].