

Colourful Semantics

Colourful semantics is a teaching approach that aims to children to develop sentence structure.

- What is colourful Semantics - <https://youtu.be/DL8yM6gf2ro>
- Another useful video - <https://youtu.be/mQtmY3oqf48>
- 3D bricks - <https://youtu.be/vbah7q0ryKl>

What is Colourful Semantics?

Colourful semantics is a psycholinguistic approach that is often used to develop children's speech and writing abilities. The technique was developed by Alison Bryan and was first published in a case study [1997] with the child Alison was working with.

Colourful Semantics has been described as “a theory that explains how people understand language”.

The basic idea behind colourful semantic analysis is simple: we can learn about what someone means when they use words or sentences simply by looking for patterns in their speech.

We do this because there are regularities in our own linguistic behaviour which allow us to predict what will happen next.

For example, if I say something like ‘I am going home now’ you know that it probably means that I want to go somewhere else later on

Colourful semantics is an approach to teaching grammar that aims to help children develop skills when it comes to sentence structure.

Colourful semantics are often used to support children with speech and language difficulties, including those who have difficulties with word order, vocabulary difficulties or expressive and receptive language difficulties. It can also be helpful for children who have English as an additional language (EAL).

As a teaching approach, colourful semantics can be particularly useful for children who struggle in any of the following areas:

- Putting sentences together in a meaningful order.
- Confusing the order of words in sentences.
- Missing out verbs and other key details in sentences.
- Having a habit of having to restart a sentence to get it in the right order when speaking out loud.
- Always using the same sentence structures.



How do Colourful Semantics Work?

Colourful Semantics teaches children about the different parts of a sentence by giving each one a colour (or sometimes and a shape) associated with a question prompt:

Who? - Orange
What doing? - Yellow
What? Green
Where? Blue
When? Brown
To whom? Pink
What like? Cloud shape
Whose? Spiky cloud shape
How? Black line
Why? Purple arrow
Joining words - Purple rectangle

When introducing colourful semantics to a child, a limited number of these should be used initially.



Using colours for question structures has two clear benefits:

1. Colours are fantastic visual aids which are useful when encouraging children to make connections. It is also easy to integrate colours into learning across the curriculum. For example, you could show a child an orange prompt card while reading with them and ask who has been mentioned, and they will begin to associate orange with 'who.'
2. As they become confident in the colours they will be able to start constructing their own sentences by following the pattern.

Getting Started with Colourful Semantics:

The starting point for colourful semantics can change and will vary depending on a child's speech and language skills before the approach begins. Some of the variables are:

- If a child is not yet forming any sentences. If they are only speaking with singular words, then you may want to start by just focusing on orange prompts and looking at 'who.'
- If a child can talk in small phrases like "he eating," then you can start by looking at 'who' and 'what doing' together and build the other questions in as their confidence grows.



What are the benefits of Colourful Semantics? Why use Colourful Semantics?

Using colourful semantics as an approach to teaching grammar gives students access to a rich set of tools for thinking about language.

Colourful Semantics can have lots of benefits for children, the benefits include:

- Helping children to expand their vocabulary.
- Helping children to learn how to answer questions.
- Develop a child's use of nouns, verbs, prepositions and adjectives.
- Improving their story-telling skills, as it helps them to form a narrative.
- Ultimately will help children with the sentence writing and language comprehension skills.
- How different types of word order affect meaning.

Colourful semantics helps children understand the structure of sentences.

It can be used to colour code and identify grammatical structures. This approach acts as a code helping children to process the otherwise invisible details in sentences.

Our block building process can be used to help children play with structure and develop complete sentences. Because pupils are using a playful tool, the building blocks, the structure can be manipulated multiple times until the child creates the correct sentence.

Research has shown that this encourages children to try out new ideas and not be so worried about 'being wrong'. The incremental nature of using building blocks means that children can develop a three part sentence or four part sentence and gradually increase the complexity.

Once children are comfortable with this new toolkit it can then be used to develop autonomous play and form the basis of an assessment of sentence comprehension.



Who can benefit from colourful semantics?

Colourful semantics may be useful for anyone who has difficulties with structuring sentences.

This could include children with developmental language disorder (DLD) (sometimes known as specific language impairment), children with Down's Syndrome or children with Autism, or any other special educational need.

It is also frequently used in schools for children who do not have any SEND, as it supports all children in the development of their speaking and listening skills, and early reading and writing development.

It can be an effective way of supporting children with English as an additional language to become more familiar with English sentence structure. Using colourful semantics is a great way to make your teaching inclusive as it supports the needs of a wide range of pupils.