

## TWO VALUED VS. MULTI-VALUED

### Teacher's notes

For a large portion of the population, the world exists in a black or white, either/or formulation. It either is or it isn't. Learning that shades of gray exist and that actually alternatives may exist to the view we accept, provides a great leap forward in understanding. To a degree, the two-valued orientation came to us from Aristotle. For that reason, as well as others, General Semantics refers to itself as non-Aristotelian, but not anti-Aristotelian.

Let us give an example:

You decide to go to Chicago by train. You go to the terminal and you either get on the train or you don't. We can call that a two-valued decision. Alternately, you can decide to go to Chicago, but you have a wide array of alternatives. (Walk, drive, bicycle, ride horseback, fly, travel by train or bus, etc.) That we call a multi-valued approach. Not all of these approaches may prove practical, but we should not get "in the box" of limiting ourselves to the most obvious answers. After we have explored our multi-valued options, and limit it to one option, we still have a two-valued decision to make—we either do it or we don't.

The following activities with Detective Sgt. Factual require the student to pay attention to what the story actually says. The (?) choice encourages them to realize that they do not have all the relevant information, and therefore cannot make a judgement on true or false, but must admit they do not know.

Unfortunately, in current teaching, we emphasize two valued thinking when we use "true or false" questions, and when we dwell on 'opposites' such as, short/tall, big/small, rich/poor, etc. This encourages children to orient themselves to the world in a two-valued manner, e.g., if I am not smart, I must be stupid; or not fast then slow; not beautiful then ugly; not slender then fat; etc. Incidentally, "not slender then fat" appears to be a factor in anorexia nervosa while other two valued orientations seriously disable or trouble other individuals.

As you teach, look for opportunities to point out the fact that we cannot know everything. There may be other ways to approach something. If a child draws a picture of a tree with purple leaves, so what? Should we call what he/she has done wrong? No, allow for imagination. And guess what. There are trees with purple leaves. (This 'purple leaves' example unfortunately actually happened to a child in a kindergarten class who was reprimanded for not being 'correct'.)

If you have not yet done so, please read the earlier page on "Kindergarten." Also you can go on line at [www.time-binding.org](http://www.time-binding.org). Once there, click "search" and type in "13 common". This short article may assist you in a better understanding of multi-value and non-allness.