



Exercise: Building Your Emotional Vocabulary

Emotions are a part of our daily experience. On any given day, your emotions may shift countless times in response to the situations you find yourself in. You may feel **happy** when you feel the sun on your face as you walk to the office, and **annoyed** when you discover that someone forgot to restock the coffee filters. Some situations are more complicated and elicit a complex mix of feelings. For example, you might feel ambivalent about getting a promotion—on the one hand, you feel **proud** of your achievements, but on the other you feel **nervous** about the job and **disappointed** about the lack of a big raise. Our emotional experiences also vary in intensity depending on the importance of an event. For example, while being denied a morning coffee might cause you to feel slightly **frustrated**, being verbally assaulted by a client might cause you to feel **rage**.

Describing your emotional experiences can help you identify the sources of your feelings and determine how to make positive changes. Having a wide vocabulary of emotion words is a great start. Knowing a range of words that express varying levels of a particular feeling can also be useful in separating serious problems from not-so-serious problems. Because our thoughts impact the way we feel, the words we choose to label our experiences can impact the intensity of our feelings. For example, try saying to yourself, “I’m **terrified** about the meeting”. Now try, “I’m **worried** about the meeting”. Feel the difference? Having a large emotional vocabulary at your disposal helps prevent you from over-reacting to stressful events.

Three of the most common unpleasant human emotions are: **Fear**, **Anger** and **Sadness**. Here are some emotion words from mild to intense for these feelings:

	Fear	Anger	Sadness
Mild	Jittery, Nervous, Uneasy, Unsure, Uncomfortable, Worried	Peeved, Annoyed, Irritated, Cheesed, Miffed, Irked	Blue, Down, Blah, Unmotivated
Medium	Anxious, Scared, Frightened, Concerned	Angry, Insulted, Frustrated, Hurt	Sad, Disappointed, Depressed Dejected
Intense	Fearful, Horrified, Terrified, Panicked	Enraged, Furious, Livid, Seething	Despondent, Hopeless, Crushed, Devastated, Defeated



Take a few minutes to note as many types of workplace experiences as possible where you tend to feel some level of fear, anger or sadness. Label the feelings as accurately as possible using a variety of emotion words. An example of each appears in italics.

Fear	Anger	Sadness
<i>Apprehensive – I’m never sure what extra tasks I might be given when the regional manager is in town.</i>	<i>Irked – It bothers me when workers don’t respond within a day to important emails.</i>	<i>Miserable – Just when John and I started to gel in our teamwork, he was transferred and replaced by a supervisor I almost never agree with.</i>

Now, put an asterisk (*) next to the emotion states that tend to be most common for you. Think about ways in which you can differentiate the subtle variations you experience in your emotion states. Are there physical differences in your reactions? Do your thoughts affect the intensity of your emotion state? Do you respond in different ways?