

Describing people: character

Intellectual ability

Ability: intelligent bright clever sharp shrewd able gifted talented
brainy (colloquial)
Lacking ability: stupid foolish half-witted simple silly brainless daft dumb
dim (the last four are predominantly colloquial words)
Clever, in a negative way, using brains to trick or deceive: cunning crafty sly

Attitudes towards life

Amal is pessimistic while Nita is optimistic – he always expects the worst to happen while she looks on the bright side.
It is strange that one of the twins is so extroverted while the other is so introverted – Ben loves being the focus of attention while Bill would far rather be alone with his thoughts.
I feel very tense (or wound-up / stressed-out**) after a very busy day at work but, after a hot bath and a nice cup of tea, I'll soon feel relaxed.
Jane is very sensible – she'd never do anything stupid. In other words, she's very practical and down-to-earth.
Rupert is very sensitive – he gets very upset (or worked-up, more colloquial), if he feels people are criticising him.

Attitude towards other people

Enjoying others' company: sociable gregarious*
Disagreeing with others: quarrelsome argumentative
Taking pleasure in others' pain: cruel sadistic
Relaxed in attitude to self and others: easy-going even-tempered laid-back**
Not polite to others: impolite rude ill-mannered discourteous*
Telling the truth to others: honest trustworthy reliable sincere
Unhappy if others have what one does not have oneself: jealous envious

One person's meat is another person's poison

Some characteristics can be either positive or negative depending on your point of view. The words in the right-hand column mean roughly the same as the words in the left-hand column except that they have negative rather than positive connotations.

determined	→	obstinate	stubborn	pig-headed
thrifty/economical	→	stingy	mean	tight-fisted
self-assured/confident	→	self-important	arrogant	full of oneself**
unconventional/original	→	eccentric	odd	peculiar
frank/direct/open	→	blunt	abrupt	brusque
broad-minded	→	unprincipled	permissive	
inquiring*	→	inquisitive	nosy**	
generous	→	extravagant		
innocent	→	naive		
ambitious	→	pushy**		
assertive	→	aggressive	bossy**	

* These words are much more common in written than in spoken English.
** These words are much more common in spoken than in written English.
(See also Units 11, 12, and 82).

Exercises

38.1 Match these words with their opposites.

- | | |
|---------------|--------------|
| 1 clever | introverted |
| 2 extroverted | tight-fisted |
| 3 rude | courteous |
| 4 cruel | gregarious |
| 5 generous | kind-hearted |
| 6 unsociable | half-witted |

38.2 Do you think that the speaker likes or dislikes the people in these sentences?

- | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 Di's very thrifty. | 5 Dick's quite bossy. |
| 2 Molly's usually frank. | 6 I find Dave self-important. |
| 3 Liz is quite broad-minded. | 7 Don't you think Jim's nosy? |
| 4 Sam can be aggressive. | 8 Jill is very original. |

38.3 Reword the sentences in 38.2 to give the opposite impression (negative rather than positive or vice versa).

EXAMPLE Di's *very thrifty*.

38.4 Magazines often publish questionnaires which are supposed to analyse aspects of your character. Look at the words below and then match them to the corresponding question.

EXAMPLE If you arrange to meet at 7 p.m., do you arrive at 7 p.m.?
reliable



pessimistic	argumentative	sensitive	sociable
extravagant	assertive	inquisitive	

- Do you prefer to be in the company of other people?
- Look at the picture. Do you think 'my glass is half empty'?
- Do you find it easy to tell your boss if you feel he or she has treated you badly?
- Do you always look out of the window if you hear a car draw up?
- Do you often buy your friends presents for no particular reason?
- Do you frequently disagree with what other people say?
- Do you lie awake at night if someone has said something unkind to you?

38.5 What questions like those in 38.4 could you ask to find out if a person is the following:

- | | | | |
|-----------|---------------|-----------------|----------------|
| 1 thrifty | 3 sensible | 5 even-tempered | 7 obstinate |
| 2 blunt | 4 intelligent | 6 original | 8 stressed-out |

38.6 Can you complete each of these word forks?

- | | | | | |
|-------------|---------|----------|---------|-------------|
| 1 self..... | 2 | tempered | 3 |minded |
| | | | | |

Write a sentence to illustrate the meanings of each of your words.

38.7 Choose five or six adjectives from the opposite page which you think best describe either your own or a friend's character. How do you or your friend demonstrate these characteristics?

EXAMPLE *Sociable* – I am sociable because I love being with other people.