

4 Describing character

Opposites

Many positive words describing character have clear opposites with a negative meaning.

<i>Positive</i>	<i>Negative</i>
warm and friendly	cold and unfriendly
kind	unkind
nice, pleasant	horrible, unpleasant
generous (= happy to give/share)	mean (= never gives to others)
optimistic (= thinks positively)	pessimistic (= thinks negatively)
cheerful (= happy and smiling)	miserable (= always seems unhappy)
relaxed and easy-going	tense (= nervous; worries a lot; not calm)
strong	weak
sensitive	insensitive (= does not think about others' feelings)
honest (= always tells the truth)	dishonest

Jane is very tense at the moment because of her exams, but she's usually quite relaxed and easy-going about most things.

I think the weather influences me a lot: when it's sunny I feel more cheerful and optimistic, but when it's cold and raining I get very miserable.

He seemed a bit unfriendly at first, but now I've got to know him I realise he's very warm and kind.

The shop assistant told me that the dress I tried on looked better on people younger than me. I thought that was very insensitive of her, but at least she was being honest, I suppose.

Character in action

People often talk about qualities of character that you may need in a work situation. Again, some of these words come in pairs of opposites: one positive and one negative.

<i>Positive</i>	<i>Negative</i>
hard-working	lazy (= never does any work)
punctual (=always on time)	not very punctual; always late
reliable	unreliable (= you cannot trust / depend on someone like this)
clever, bright (<i>intell</i>)	stupid, thick (<i>imint</i>)
flexible	inflexible (= a very fixed way of thinking; unable to change)
ambitious	unambitious (= no desire to be successful and get a better job)

Some pairs of opposites do not have a particularly positive or negative meaning: He is very shy when you first meet him because he finds it difficult to talk to people and make conversation; but when he knows people quite well he's much more self-confident. People often say the British are very reserved (= do not show their feelings), but when you get to know them they can be very emotional like anyone else.

Using nouns

Some important qualities are expressed through nouns.

One of her great qualities is that she uses her initiative. (= she can think for herself and take the necessary action; she does not need to wait for orders all the time)

That boy has got no common sense (= he does stupid things and doesn't think what he is doing). His sister, on the other hand, is very sensible. (= has lots of common sense)

Exercises

4.4.1 Organise these words into pairs of opposites and put them in the columns below.

mean	clever	nice	lazy	relaxed	hard-working
tense	cheerful	generous	unpleasant	stupid	miserable
<i>Positive</i>			<i>Negative</i>		
.....				
.....				
.....				
.....				

4.4.2 What prefix forms the opposite of each of these words? (You need three different prefixes.)

kind	flexible	friendly	honest
reliable	sensitive	ambitious	pleasant

4.4.3 How would you describe the person in each of these descriptions?

- 1 He never bought me a drink all the time we were together.
- 2 I have to tell her what to do every minute of the working day. She wouldn't even open a window without someone's permission.
- 3 He often promises to do things but half the time he forgets.
- 4 She's always here on time.
- 5 I don't think he's done any work since he's been here.
- 6 She finds it difficult to meet people and talk to strangers.
- 7 He could work in any of the departments, and it doesn't matter to him if he's on his own or part of a team.
- 8 One of the great things about her is that she is so aware of what other people think or feel.
- 9 Bob, on the other hand, is the complete opposite. He is always making people angry or upset because he just doesn't consider their feelings.
- 10 The other thing about Bob is that he really wants to get the supervisor's job and then become boss for the whole department.

4.4.4 What nouns can be formed from these adjectives? Use a dictionary to help you.

Example: kind *kindness*

punctual	reliable	lazy
confident	generous	ambitious
sensitive	strong	flexible
		stupid
		shy

4.4.5 Choose three words from the opposite page which describe you. Is there one quality you do not have but would like to have? What, in your opinion, is the worst quality described on the opposite page? If possible, compare your answers with a friend.