

44 Describing character

A Opposites

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

Positive

warm and friendly

kind

nice, pleasant

generous (= happy to give/share)

optimistic (= thinks positively)

cheerful (= happy and smiling)

relaxed and easy-going

strong

sensitive

honest (= always tells the truth)

Negative

cold and unfriendly

unkind

horrible, unpleasant

mean (= never gives to others)

pessimistic (= thinks negatively)

miserable (= always seems unhappy)

tense (= nervous; worries a lot; not calm)

weak

insensitive (= does not think about others' feelings)

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.

B 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.

Positive

hard-working

punctual (=always on time)

reliable

clever, bright (*informal*)

flexible

ambitious

Negative

lazy (= never does any work)

not very punctual; always late

unreliable (= you cannot trust / depend on someone like this)

stupid, thick (*informal*)

inflexible (= a very fixed way of thinking; unable to change)

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.

C 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

44.1 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

Positive

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Negative

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

kind	flexible	friendly	honest
reliable	sensitive	ambitious	pleasant

44.3 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.

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

Example: kind *kindness*

punctual	optimistic	reliable	lazy
confident	generous	ambitious	stupid
sensitive	strong	flexible	shy

44.5 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.