

34 Describing people – character

Intellectual ability

Ability: intelligent bright clever smart 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

Looking on either the bright or the black side of things: optimistic pessimistic

Outward-looking or inward-looking (i.e. to the world around one or to one's own inner world): extroverted introverted

Calm or not calm with regard to attitude to life: relaxed tense

Practical, not dreamy in approach to life: sensible down-to-earth

Feeling things very intensely: sensitive

Attitudes 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

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	→	miserly mean tight-fisted
self-assured	→	self-important arrogant full of oneself (colloquial)
assertive	→	aggressive bossy (colloquial)
original	→	peculiar weird eccentric odd
frank/direct/open	→	blunt abrupt brusque curt
broad-minded	→	unprincipled permissive
inquiring	→	inquisitive nosy (colloquial)
generous	→	extravagant
innocent	→	naive
ambitious	→	pushy (colloquial)

(See also Units 12, 73 and 78.)

Exercises

34.1 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 |

34.2 Do you think that the speaker likes or dislikes the people s/he is talking about?

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

34.3 Reword the sentences above to give the opposite impression. *Example: Di's very stingy.*

34.4 Magazines often publish questionnaires which are supposed to analyse your character for you. Look at the words below and then match them to the question which aims to decide whether a person is like that.

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 | |



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

34.5 What questions like those in 34.4 could you ask to try to find out whether a person is the following:

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

34.6 Can you complete each of these word forks?

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

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

34.7 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.*