

# 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 (*infml*)  
flexible  
ambitious

### Negative

lazy (= never does any work)  
not very punctual; always late  
unreliable (= you cannot trust / depend on someone like this)  
stupid, thick (*infml*)  
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*

*Negative*

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

**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.

## 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

### D 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	→	naïve
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 ..... -tempered      3 ..... -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.

**Translate into Ukrainian.**

## **Text 1. Character**

What traits in people's character do you appreciate most and which of them are most important to you? Does people's appearance have something to do with their character? There is no doubt that they are interconnected. When we speak about somebody's figure, hands, feet we mean his or her appearance. A face may be oval, round, square, broad, sensual or worried. Features may be regular or irregular, a figure – athletic, graceful, slim or clumsy and plump. A person may be tall, middle-sized or short and, in general, appearance is agreeable, winsome and gentle or plain-looking or ugly.

Speaking about somebody's character we can characterize a person as affable, amiable, good-natured, kind-hearted, sociable, generous, thoughtful, discreet, earnest or, on the contrary, hard-hearted, ill-natured, reserved, uncommunicative, indiscreet, insincere, insensible, rude, greedy, lashing, showy or tactless.

Now I'd like to describe my close friend. Frankly speaking, I have a lot of friends who are my former schoolmates and boys and girls from my neighbourhood. But my bosom friend is Ann. She is a pleasant-looking girl of about 18. Ann is not very tall, but she has a strong attractive body, she is pleasantly plump. She is always very elegant; she wears clothes of the latest fashion. Her features are very delicate and her charm is irresistible. Ann has fair curly hair and dark blue eyes. Her eyelashes are so long and thick, and they seem dark for this reason. Ann's face is oval and she has a turned up nose. To cut the long story short she is a pretty girl. But in my opinion, inner beauty is more important than physical one. Ann is a well-bread, jolly and kind-hearted person. She is very tactful, shy and sensitive, emotionally stable and witty, generous and sophisticated. She is a girl of active and cheerful disposition. Ann is a pleasant person to deal with, she never loses her temper. But to my mind, her main feature is that she is a girl of character. Her words are entirely in character of her actions. Ann is an intelligent, bright and quick-witted girl, she has a big soul and a strong will. One of her lovable traits is her readiness to help. She is a helpful person and always tries to do her best to help somebody when he has some problems. She always manages to be amusing and cheerful, energetic and enthusiastic.

## **Text 2.**

**Jack** is popular with his fellow-students and most of his teachers. He works hard in his classroom, but sometimes he can be noisy. He is not deliberately disruptive, but he does find it difficult to sit still for long periods. He is full of energy. He is late for his classes more often than most students but he is always willing to help teachers and students.

Jack is generally good-tempered, but he has been in two fights since he left school. He is quite happy at school and doesn't seem to have any strong opinions about how things could be changed. He gets on well with his parents although he frequently quarrels with his younger sisters.

**Jane** plays netball for the school team for her year, she is very popular with her fellow students. She takes the lead in arranging extra netball practices and group parties. She has a lively personality and a sense of humour. Her teachers like her but they complain about her unpunctuality and sometimes lateness of her homework.

There is one particular teacher she does not like; she has been accused of being insolent to this teacher, but Jane denied it strongly.

She has strong opinions about how the university should be run. Out of school she is dressed in very up-to-date clothes and collects all the latest records. She is a keen sportsman.

**Len** is a very intelligent boy. He is not very good at games, in fact he shows little interest in sport in general. He is no weakling however. He reads book after book, plays chess well and is very good at Physics. He is a friendly person but perhaps does not make friends as easily as some of the other students.

Whatever he gives his mind on, he does with great determination. His parents are very proud of him. He lives in a flat on a housing estate near the University. He is not very talkative, but when he does speak, the other students tend to listen to him.

**Maggie** thinks there are many things wrong with the University. She has ideas about changing the rules; for instance, she rebels against doing homework and believes that being punished by detention is wrong.

Some of her teachers think she is a troublemaker. Some of her groupmates think she is loud and bossy; others think she is a very lively person. Maggie's mother is a councilor so she is accustomed to hearing her parents talk about important matters. She is intelligent, full of energy and seems to have opinions about everything.

*1. Decide a) who of these students you would like to make friends with b) who might be the best group representative. Give your arguments. What do you like/dislike about these people?*

*2. Find the English equivalents for the following from the text. Use the patterns to build your own examples:*

1. Пользоваться популярностью среди одногруппников .
2. Намеренно нарушать дисциплину .
3. Опаздывать на занятия .
4. Хорошо ладить с кем-либо .
5. Жаловаться на непунктуальность .
6. Обвинять в дерзости .
7. Страстно увлекаться спортом .
8. Постоянно нарушать дисциплину .
- 9.

### **Text 3.What's Your Blood Type?**

If you live in or visit Japan, you may be asked, "What's your blood type?" When the average person asks the question, he isn't referring to giving blood, illnesses, or medicine. There's a popular notion that a person's blood type influences his personality, character, and romantic compatibility. Although blood types and their effects on personality are far more popular than the usual idea of star signs in the West, it's not so very different. In fact, it's hugely popular. For example, four of the ten books to top the bestseller list in 2008 dealt with blood type and personality.

What can be said about personality types? Type A people are serious and creative, but also seek perfection. Type B people are spontaneous, but also selfish and irresponsible. Type O can be vain and rude. On the positive side, they are curious and generous. As for people who are type AB, they are arty, but tend to be moody as well.

Of course, the scientific community in Japan considers the idea ridiculous. Unfortunately, the general public seems to disagree. Matchmaking services look to blood types when introducing men and women, for example. Women's magazines stock their pages with articles, romantic advice, and predictions too. Some companies have assigned projects based on the blood of employees. And more than a few employers regularly ask interviewees about their blood type, because they intend to determine which applicants may or may not provide a good fit in the company or department.

It comes down to discrimination, and even comes with a term: "bura-hara." "Bura" stands for blood, and "hara" stands for harassment. It also doesn't seem likely to diminish in popularity any time soon.

**Discuss or debate the questions below. Remember to support your answers!**

1. Is it possible to be perfect? Why/not?
2. Are there any persons or personality types that you admire? Why/not?
3. Is your personality closer to your mom or your dad? Why do you think so?
4. Do you think personality tests really reveal someone's personality? Why/not?
5. What kind of person are you? Please explain.
6. What kind of person do you want to be? Please explain.
7. How easy is it for someone to change his personality or character? Why do you think so?
8. Talk about the following personality types. Are they good, bad, or something else? If possible, rank them from most to least desirable: 1) serious and quiet; 2) fun-loving and frivolous; 3) assertive and outspoken; 4) enthusiastic and idealistic; 5) analytical and ambitious.
9. Do you agree or disagree? Your zodiacal sign (Pisces, Virgo, Libra, etc.) influences who you are. Why/not?
10. Do you agree or disagree? The sign of your birth year (rat, snake, horse, etc.) influences who you are. Why/not?
11. Who was the worst person you have ever met? What was so terrible about his/her personality or character?
12. Who was the best person you have ever met? What was so wonderful about his/her personality or character?
13. Is nature more powerful than nurture? Why do you think so?
14. If you had grown up in another country, would your personality be different? If yes, how so? If no, why don't you think so?
15. If you had grown up in another generation (your parent's generation, for example), would your personality be different? If yes, how so? If no, why don't you think so?
16. What sort of person do you like? Why?
17. What sort of person do you hate? Why?
18. If you could change one aspect of your personality or character, what would you change? Why?
19. If you had to describe the people of your country, what three adjectives would you use? Why?
20. Birds of a feather flock together. What does this mean? Do you think it's true? Why/not?

**Translate into English.**

1. Вона каже, що її онуки такі щирі та кмітливі, хоча інколи бувають дуже галасливи та непосидючі.
2. Micic Сміт була скромною, тактовною, ввічливою, але після смерті чоловіка її характер змінився.
3. Моя племінниця одружилася з відомим дизайнером одягу, людиною з широким світоглядом, не схильною до конфліктів.
4. Він – правдива, щира людина, тому він ненавидить брехливих та підліх людей.
5. Я поважаю цю молоду родину і часто відвідую їх, не тільки тому що вони мої родичі, але й тому що вони веселі, компанійські та дуже чуйні люди і завжди готові підтримати тебе у важку хвилину.
6. Моя свекруха має погану вдачу, часто не в гуморі, завжди скаржиться.
7. Якщо ти збираєшся стати військовим, вчись бути мужнім, рішучим, незворушним.
8. Мої друзі – вірні, невибагливі та не схильні до конфліктів люди.