

How to Describe People in English – Video

In this lesson, you can learn how to describe people in English. Think about someone you know well. It could be someone in your family (<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/talking-about-family>), a close friend, someone you work with, or someone else. How would you describe this person? What does this person look like? What kind of personality does this person have?

Describing people in English is useful in many situations, including speaking exams like the IELTS speaking test (<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/?s=ielts+speaking>) or the FCE speaking exam (<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/?s=fce+speaking>). In this lesson, you'll learn how to describe a person in detail using clear, natural English.

During this lesson, you're going to practice, so you need to think of someone you're going to describe. It can be anyone you know well. Got someone? Great! Let's begin.

1. Describing Appearance

First question when talking about describing people: what does he or she look like?

(<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/thoughtful-people.webp>)

What can you say when describing a person's appearance? You can talk about the person's height and build:

My brother is tall and well-built.

My friend Lia is medium height and slim.

Craig, who I work with, is short and overweight.

Do you know what well-built means? Someone who is well-built is broad and strong, with big muscles.

You can also add adverbs to make your sentences more precise:

My brother is quite tall and well-built.

My friend Lia is medium height and really slim.

Craig, who I work with, is short and a little overweight.

Then, maybe add something about the person's hair:

He has short, brown hair, but he's going bald fast.

She has long, dark blonde hair.

He has curly, fair hair.

What does *fair* mean here? It's the opposite of *dark*, and you can use it to describe someone's hair or skin.

Finally, what else can you say about the person's appearance? Imagine you're describing the person to me, and you want me to be able to recognise this person from your description. What could you say?

There are many possibilities, of course, but here are a few suggestions:

He looks a bit like a younger version of Vin Diesel.

She's really beautiful, with very striking features.

He has a long scar on his right elbow.

Do you know what *striking features* means? In this context, *features* refers to someone's face. *Striking* means that you can't help noticing something. So if someone has *striking features*, it means he or she has a very unusual and attractive face.

What about *scar*? Scars are left over when you get a deep cut or have an operation.

Okay, so now you should be able to make three sentences about the person you're describing, like this:

My brother is quite tall and well-built. He has short, brown hair, but he's going bald fast. He looks a bit like a younger version of Vin Diesel.

Your turn: pause the video and make three sentences about the person you're describing. Remember: height/build, then hair, then general appearance.

Could you do this? If so, great job—we've only done one part, and you've already got the start of a good description (<https://www.englishforums.com/English/DescribingPeople/cgwjm/post.htm>).

But of course, there's more we can add to describe people in English.

2. Describing Positive Characteristics

Another question: what's this person like?

(<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/grin.webp>)

Do you know what this question means? It means I want you to tell me about the person's personality.

Let's start with positive words you can use to talk about someone's character. Think about the person you're describing. What good things can you say about him or her?

You could describe someone as *kind*, but it's better to be more specific if you can. Better words to use are *considerate*—meaning someone who always thinks about other people and their needs—or *warm*—meaning someone who shows positive feelings to others and makes other people feel good.

Or, maybe this person is good at making other people laugh. You could say they are *funny* or that they have a good sense of humour. More generally, you can describe someone as *fun* or *entertaining* if people enjoy spending time with them.

What else? Well, for a friend, it's very important that a person is *reliable*—that you can depend on them to keep their promises and be there for you when you need them. Similarly, you could describe people as *honest* or *straightforward*. If someone is straightforward, they're honest, easy to understand and easy to spend time with.

Straightforward people say what they think, but not in a rude way, and they don't keep secrets or gossip about other people.

Let's look at three more. Most of us like spending time with people who are *cheerful*—people who smile a lot and are usually in a good mood. Cheerful people are often *positive* and *optimistic*—they expect good things to happen.

So now you have twelve positive adjectives (<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/adjective-order-in-english-video-lesson>) you can use to describe someone's personality:

<i>kind</i>	<i>funny</i>	<i>reliable</i>	<i>cheerful</i>
<i>considerate</i>	<i>fun</i>	<i>honest</i>	<i>positive</i>
<i>warm</i>	<i>entertaining</i>	<i>straightforward</i>	<i>optimistic</i>

Can you use any of these adjectives to talk about the person you're describing?

When you use these adjectives, always try to add an example or a reason. For example, don't just say:

My brother is really funny.

My friend Lia is a very cheerful person.

Add some details or examples to make your answer more interesting, like this:

My brother's really funny. He likes making weird jokes, generally at the most inappropriate moment.

My friend Lia is a very cheerful person. Even early in the morning, she's always smiling and in a good mood. I don't know how she does it!

If possible, you could even add a story to really illustrate the person's character.

Craig, who I work with, is such an honest guy. I remember one time he found a wallet with £500 in a pub. It would have been easy to keep the money—there was nothing in the wallet to say whose it was, but he said it wouldn't be right to keep it, and he insisted on taking it to the police station right that minute.

Adding stories like this can really bring a description to life.

You've also seen some good ways to use these adjectives:

My brother is really _____ .

My friend Lia is a very _____ person.

Craig is such an _____ guy.

Of course, you can change these and use them in your answer.

What about you? Pause the video, and try to use some of these adjectives about the person you're describing. Don't forget to add details and examples to your description, or you can even add a story if possible!

Next, let's look at:

3. Describing Negative Characteristics

No one's perfect, right? We all have our flaws, so let's look at how to describe the bad side of someone's personality.

(<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/gross-out-1.webp>)

Many of the words you saw for describing people in part two have direct opposites which you can use. For example:

kind -> unkind

considerate -> inconsiderate

honest -> dishonest

reliable -> unreliable

Of course, there are other words you can use, too.

Some people can be *selfish* or *self-centered*—they think about themselves too much, and don't think about the needs of others. These two words have a similar meaning.

Even more extreme, you can describe someone as *self-obsessed*. A *self-obsessed* person only thinks about themselves, and doesn't seem to realise that other people exist at all!

Not everyone can be funny, but you don't want to be seen as *humourless* or *dull*. *Dull* is similar to boring, while *humourless* means that someone has no sense of humour and is too serious.

If someone doesn't do what they say or doesn't keep their promises, you've already seen two words you can use: *dishonest* or *unreliable*. Similarly, you could describe someone as *insincere*—meaning that someone says things without meaning them.

For example, if someone is always friendly on the surface, but they don't really feel anything inside, you could describe that person as *insincere*. Their friendliness doesn't mean anything.

Finally, *cheerful* people are always in a good mood, but what's the opposite? You could describe someone as *moody* or *grumpy*. Moody people's moods change very easily, and they are often in a bad mood. Grumpy people never seem to be in a good mood and are always unhappy and negative.

So now, you have twelve negative adjectives to describe people in English to go with your twelve positive adjectives (<https://positivewordsresearch.com/list-positive-adjectives/>)!

<i>moody</i>	<i>selfish</i>	<i>unreliable</i>	<i>dull</i>
<i>grumpy</i>	<i>self-centered</i>	<i>dishonest</i>	<i>humourless</i>
<i>inconsiderate</i>	<i>self-obsessed</i>	<i>insincere</i>	<i>unkind</i>

As before, when you use these adjectives to describe someone, try to add details or examples.

For example:

My brother can be a little unreliable sometimes. He often 'forgets' to do things he promised he would.

Lia's great, but sometimes I feel she's a bit insincere. She says all these nice things, but I'm not sure she really means them.

My colleague Craig is so moody. He'll be fine one minute, then suddenly he starts acting like he hates everyone. It makes him quite difficult to be around.

You can see how we often use slightly more indirect language to talk about someone's negative characteristics:

My brother can be a little _____ sometimes.

Sometimes I feel that she's a bit _____.

Of course, if you really want to be direct, you can be:

My colleague is so _____.

Now, pause the video and try to use these words and phrases. Make 2-3 sentences, and don't forget to add examples and details!

4. Talking About Your Relationship

(<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/hang-out-friends.webp>)

Finally, let's add some details about how you know this person and your relationship. Look at three sentences:

We've known each other _____.

We met _____.

We get on _____, because _____.

Do you know what *get on* means here? By itself, it means to have a good relationship with someone.

You can add adverbs after 'get on' to give it different meanings. For example:

We get on very well.

We get on well sometimes.

Or you can make it negative:

We don't get on very well.

Okay, look at the sentences again:

We've known each other _____.

We met _____.

We get on _____, because _____.

How could you complete them?

You could say:

We've known each other for about ten years

(http://www.englishtenses.com/tenses/present_perfect).

We met at university.

We get on really well, because we have a similar sense of humour.

Of course, there are many possibilities:

We've known each other almost our whole lives.

We met when we were babies, before we could even walk!

We get on well most of the time, although we argue sometimes, too.

Depending on who you're talking about, it might not make sense to use all of these sentences. For example, if you're talking about your brother or another relative, it doesn't make sense to talk about how long you've known each other or where you met.

However, you can still talk about how well you get on and why. You could also add how often you see each other, or what you like to do together.

I don't see my brother often, though we talk a couple of times a month. When we meet up, we like watching films or playing cards.

Either way, try to make three sentences about the person you're describing, like this:

I've known my friend Lia for about five years. We met because we worked in the same place for a few months. We get on really well, because we have a lot in common: we like the same films, the same music, and so on.

I've known Craig since July. We actually met at a mutual friend's birthday party, and then we realised we work in the same place. We get on alright but we aren't close. We're just very different people and we don't seem to have much to talk about.

Now you try! Pause the video and make three sentences about your relationship with the person you're talking about. Use the words and phrases from this section.

Alright? Now, we have one more thing to do:

5. Making a Longer Answer

In this lesson, you've learned how to describe a person by:

1. Talking about their appearance.
2. Talking about the positive and negative sides of their personality.
3. Talking about your relationship and how you know each other.

Now, let's put everything we've done together into a longer answer.

Here's one:

My brother is quite tall and well-built. He has short, brown hair, but he's going bald fast. He looks a bit like a younger version of Vin Diesel. He's really funny. He likes making weird jokes, generally at the most inappropriate moment. However, he can be a little unreliable sometimes. He often 'forgets' to do things he promised he would. I don't see him often, though we talk a couple of times a month. When we meet up, we like watching films or playing cards.

This answer uses examples you've already seen. Let's do one more longer answer with original examples:

I'm going to tell you about a friend of mine, Sarah. She's quite short and very slim, with light brown hair. She's very pretty and she has a really nice smile. Sarah's cheerful and fun to be around, and she's also very straightforward: you know who she is right away and it's easy to feel comfortable around her. I've known her for about twelve years now, since university. We get on well because we have a similar attitude to life and we always have lots to talk about.

Okay, now it's your turn! Make a longer answer to describe someone you know. Use the examples and language from this lesson to help you.

If you want, you can post your answer describing people in English in the video comments and we'll give you feedback.

Get more vocabulary about people with this Oxford Online English lesson on describing appearance (<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/describing-appearance>).

Thanks for watching!