

Describing People's Appearance – Visual Vocabulary Video

In this visual vocabulary lesson, you can learn useful vocabulary for describing people's appearance in English. You'll see a variety of words and phrases, with images, which you can use when describing people (<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/describe-people-english>) you know in clear, accurate English.

1. Describing Bodies

(<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/sport-boxing-hobby-man-woman-hit-punch-train.webp>)

Let's start describing people's appearance by describing appearance of different bodies.

He's well-built, with broad shoulders.

He's very muscular.

'Well-built' means big, but big because of muscle, not fat.

The opposite of well-built is 'skinny'.

You can say 'He's very muscular' or 'He's very muscly'. They have the same meaning.

There are other ways to say the same thing; for example, 'He looks strong.'

She's in good shape.

She has an athletic physique.

'She's in good shape' has the same meaning as 'She's fit.' 'Fit' describes someone who exercises regularly and is strong.

Con conversationally, in British English, 'fit' means 'attractive'. It can be used for men and women.

The word 'physique' means the shape and condition of your body. 'Physique' is most often used with positive adjectives to describe someone who is strong, or who has an attractive body. For example, the collocations (<https://7esl.com/collocations/>) 'muscular physique' and 'strong physique' are common.

He's skinny.

He has a slight build.

What's the opposite of 'fat'? Actually, there are several words.

'Thin' is the basic word. 'Slim' is similar; it means 'thin and attractive'. 'Skinny' is a more negative word. It suggests that someone is too thin. If you say that someone is skinny, it means you think they should eat more.

Your 'build' is the shape of your body: whether you're broad or thin, whether you're muscular or not, and so on.

You can use many different adjectives with 'build'. Common ones are 'medium build', 'slim build', 'proportionate build' and 'stocky build'. 'Stocky' means big or wide, usually with muscle rather than fat.

He's overweight.

He has a gut.

'Overweight' is a more indirect word than 'fat', although neither is polite if you are talking directly to someone.

A gut means a big stomach. You might use it to describe someone who has a lot of extra weight on their stomach. You could also say 'He has a big belly', which has the same meaning.

2. Describing Faces

(<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/body-face-woman-blonde-smile-dimples-scaled.webp>)

- He has chiselled features, with high cheekbones.

He has very well-defined facial features.

This is a chisel.

It's a tool which is used to carve stone, for example to make a sculpture or statue.

'Chiselled features' means that someone's facial features are very attractive and clearly-defined, like a statue. It's generally used for men's faces.

'Well-defined' is similar, but it can be used for men or women. If your facial features are well-defined, then your cheekbones, jaw, chin and so on all have a clear shape. This has a positive meaning, although it doesn't necessarily mean 'attractive'.

He has crow's feet.

He has faint wrinkles in his forehead.

As you get older, you'll get lines or wrinkles in your face.

Crow's feet are the patterns of wrinkles you get in the corner of your eyes.

Wrinkles can be 'faint' – light and difficult to see – or 'deep'.

She has dimples when she smiles.

She has freckles on her nose and cheeks.

'Dimples' here means small holes in your cheeks which appear when you smile. Not everyone has them.

Although it's not common, you can use the word 'dimple' to refer to similar holes in other places. For example, some people have a dimple on their chin.

Freckles are common among people with very light skin. Going out in the sun can make your skin more freckled.

She has a round face, with a high forehead.

She has a double chin.

You can use many adjectives to describe the shape of someone's face, such as: round, thin, symmetrical (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/symmetrical>), long, or square.

If someone is overweight, they might have a double chin.

Next in describing people's appearance, we'll talk about how to describe people's hair.

3. Describing Hair

(<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/business-informal-phone-call-talk-man.webp>)

He has a goatee.

He's going grey.

'Goatee' is a common word; it's a beard which covers your chin and upper lip only.

You can also have a full beard, which covers your whole face and neck.

There are many words for different styles of beard (<https://www.beards.org/styles.php>), but most of them are not commonly used, except by beard experts.

If you say 'he's going grey', 'going' means 'becoming'.

You can use 'go' in this way for changes in someone's hair; for example 'go grey' or 'go bald'.

You can also use it if someone's face changes colour. For example 'She went bright red' or 'He went pale when he heard the news'.

He has curly black hair.

She has thick shoulder-length curly hair.

'Curly' describes hair with tight curls.

What's the opposite?

The opposite is 'straight hair'. In the middle, you can have 'wavy hair'.

For length, you can say hair is long, short, medium length, or shoulder length.

For very long hair, you might say something like 'Her hair reached down to her waist'.

He's bald, with a thick beard.

She has long blonde hair.

'Bald' only refers to people who have lost their hair, usually because of aging. If someone shaves their hair off, you can say 'He has a shaved head'.

Hair can be thick or thin; you can use these adjectives for hair on your head, or for facial hair: beards and moustaches.

In describing people's appearance, when talking about hair, be careful with adjective order (<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/adjective-order-in-english>). Adjectives like 'long', 'short', 'thick' or 'thin' go before the colour.

So, you can have 'long brown hair', 'thick dark hair', 'short fair hair', and so on.

He has fair hair.

His hair is shaved short at the back and sides, and swept to one side on top.

'Fair hair' is similar to 'blond hair', but it has a wider meaning. 'Fair' just means 'light', so it could include light brown hair or dark blond hair.

'Sweep' generally means to clean your floor with a broom. However, you can also use it for hair, especially when you push your hair in one direction.

You can sweep your hair to one side, sweep your hair into a ponytail, or sweep your hair back.

That's all for this lesson. Hopefully you learned some useful phrases to describe appearance of people in English.

Keep practicing with these Oxford Online English lessons: Free English Vocabulary Lessons (<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/free-english-vocabulary-lessons>).

Thanks for watching!