

How to describe a person | Using descriptive words

Source: <http://writeshop.com/how-to-describe-a-person-descriptive-words/>

In *The Prince and the Pauper*, Mark Twain **paints a word picture of King Henry VIII** using descriptive language:

Before him, at a little distance, reclined a very large and very fat man, with a wide, pulpy face, and a stern expression. His large head was very grey; and his whiskers, which he wore only around his face, like a frame, were grey also. His clothing was of rich stuff, but old, and slightly frayed in places. One of his swollen legs had a pillow under it, and was wrapped in bandages. This stern-countenanced invalid was the dread Henry VIII.

And in [The Bronze Bow](#) [aff. link], Elizabeth George Speare **describes a young Roman soldier**:

When he straightened again, the Roman was pulling off his helmet, revealing crisp fair hair. He wiped the back of his hand across his wet forehead where the metal had left an uncomfortable-looking crease. With a shock, Daniel saw that he was very young... The beardless cheeks and chin scarcely needed a razor. His skin was white, mottled and peeling from exposure to the sun, so that he could not have seen service long under the Galilean skies. The eyes that stared back at Daniel were a clear bright blue. He looked as though he might be about to speak.

How to Describe a Person

TIP: Students shouldn't be expected include every descriptive element listed below. Rather, a few well-chosen details will go a long way toward bringing their subject to life.

Face Shape

- *Square*
- *Oval*
- *Round*
- *Triangular*
- *Heart-shaped*
- *Thin*
- *Wide*
- *Chiseled*

Skin and Complexion

Complexion is the natural appearance and color of the skin, especially of the face. For example, "Mary has a soft, creamy complexion."

- ***Wrinkled:*** covered with lines or loose folds of skin; often associated with age
- ***Freckled:*** sprinkled or covered with light brown spots
- ***Ruddy:*** skin that has a reddish tint; may have the appearance of sunburn
- ***Sallow:*** skin that has a yellowish tint; may be associated with illness
- ***Tanned:*** skin with a warm, golden-brown tint
- ***Rosy or fresh-faced:*** pink-cheeked, fair complexion that glows with a hint of pink



- **Other skin-related adjectives:** *pale, fair, spotless, silky, smooth, creamy, dewy, baby-soft, peaches-and-cream, glowing, paper-thin or translucent (as with a very old person), sunburned, peeling, rough, callused, weathered, weatherbeaten, craggy, leathery, mottled, dry, brown, dark*

Eyes

TIP: Pay attention to the eyes, as they often reveal much about a person.



- **Shape, size, and appearance:** *large, small, almond-shaped, round, squinty, crinkly, bulging, heavy-lidded, hooded, deep-set, close-set, hollow, tear-filled*
- **Eye color:** *black, brown, hazel, green, blue, violet, gray, amber*
- **Eye expressions:** *piercing, mesmerizing, sad, sorrowful, haunted, gentle, sympathetic, warm, compassionate, expressive, bright, twinkling, lively, dancing, laughing, shifty, sly, distrusting, sleepy*
- **Other:** *brown-eyed boy, bright-eyed sister, wide-eyed child, gold-flecked eyes*

Mouth and Lips

- **Lip shape and size:** *thin, full, pouting, rosebud (baby's lips, often), pursed (puckered up, as when concentrating)*
- **Mouth expressions:** *laugh, smile, beam, grin, frown, grimace, scowl, sneer, curl, pout*
- **Adjectives describing the mouth or mouth expressions:** *toothy, toothless, gap-toothed, kind, sweet, dimpled, relaxed, firm, serious, cruel, snarling*

Hair

- **Hair color:** black, brunette, brown, chestnut-brown, blond, honey-blond, golden-blond, ash-blond, fair, cornsilk, auburn, red, strawberry-blond, gray, silver, white, salt-and-pepper
- **Texture or appearance:** wispy, fuzzy, wavy, curly, kinky, frizzy, wild, untamed, unmanageable, straight, spiky, stiff, buzzed, shaved, parted, neatly-combed, tamed, cascading, long, short, cropped, dull, shiny
- **Hair styles:** braids, ponytail, pigtails, bun, messy bun, twist, bob, ringlets, flip, cornrows, extensions, bangs, buzz, layered, feathered, chopped, gelled, spiked, slicked down
- **Lots of hair:** thick, full, lustrous, bushy, coarse, wiry, stiff
- **Little hair:** thin, scraggly, fine, baby-fine, downy, wispy, limp, flat, balding, bald, bald spot, receding (gradual loss of hair at the front of the head)
- **Treated hair:** permed, dyed, bleached, highlighted, weaved, streaked, colored



Facial Hair

- **Hair:** beard, goatee, mustache, soul patch, sideburns
- **Beard growth:** stubble, fuzz, peach fuzz, bristles, five o'clock shadow (describes new beard growth that's shadowy in appearance. It's usually more noticeable late in the day on the jaw, chin, or cheek area, but some men purposely grow five o'clock shadows.)
- **Adjectives:** bearded, bushy, stubbly, bristly, scratchy, unshaven, shaggy, whiskered, beardless, clean-shaven, smooth, trimmed, neatly-trimmed, pencil-thin

Body

TIP: Choose strong verbs and adjectives.

- **Build:** *small, slim, slight, thin, lean, willowy, skinny, angular, bony, fine-boned, chunky, chubby, large, portly, plump, round, stout, pudgy, full-figured, ample, broad-shouldered, burly, solid, muscular*
- **Posture:** *stand, sit, slouch, flop, lean, recline, rest, stretch, sprawl, curl up, roost, squirm, arch, slump, stoop, bend, hunch, scoot, walk, run, race, jog*

Clothing

- **Fabric:** *denim, twill, wool, cashmere, cotton, linen, seersucker, gingham, lace, chiffon, tulle, velvet, velveteen, fleece, flannel, tweed, polyester, jersey, corduroy, spandex, leather*
- **Bottoms:** *jeans, skinny jeans, cargo pants, flat-front pants, pleated pants, slacks, trousers, overalls, sweatpants, crop pants, capris, skirt, shorts, board shorts*
- **Tops:** *sport shirt, dress shirt, polo shirt, button-down shirt, tank top, blouse, tunic, long-sleeve, short-sleeve, sleeveless, collared, T-shirt, V-neck, scoop-neck, turtleneck, sweatshirt, hoodie, pullover, sweater, cardigan, sweater set*
- **Other clothing:** *dress, gown, frock, uniform, coveralls, costume, pajamas, bathrobe, robe, vest, jacket, blazer, coat, apron*
- **Footwear:** *socks, stockings, shoes, slippers, sandals, flip-flops, loafers, heels, pumps, boots, ankle boots, riding boots, slouch boots, athletic shoes, sneakers, tennis shoes, gym shoes, runners*



- **Accessories:** *mittens, gloves, hat, cap, head wrap, bandana, scarf, muffler, necklace, choker, bracelet, ring, earrings, cuffs, cufflinks, purse, clutch, bag, tote, sunglasses, eyeglasses, glasses*
- **Adjectives (*appearance*):** *stylish, natty, smart, chic, classy, elegant, polished, draped, flowing, sheer, casual, relaxed, carefree, starched, crisp, sharp, dressy, lacy, shiny, shimmering, sparkling, glittery, sloppy, torn, ripped, tattered, disheveled, slovenly, tacky, unkempt, faded, scratchy, worn, frayed, nubby, rough, smooth, pliable, warm, soft, quilted, knit*
- **Adjectives (*patterns*):** *striped, solid, plaid, checked, floral print, geometric print*

Sentence Starters Describing Clothes

- *Smartly dressed in (name of garment), the woman ...*
- *Casually attired in (name of garment), Chloe ...*
- *Simply clad in (name of garment), Mark ...*
- *Uncle Max sported a (name of garment) ...*
- *Wearing a (name of garment), the detective ...*

There are so many ways to describe people! What other words would you include?