

# QUICK TIPS: Describing characters



**Building character complexity and breaking the clichés and stereotypes. Refer “Adjective List”.**

1. Take a character and describe the person in detail. Explore their thoughts and feelings; describe their personal mannerisms (idiosyncrasies) and motives, their weaknesses, their fears and phobias:

- ◆ choose a range of adjectives and verbs to be as accurate, fresh, original and insightful as possible.
- ◆ describe their appearance; distinguishing traits; their smile; their gaze; their habits; the way they dress and move.
- ◆ Take one detail and keep asking “why” until you have fleshed it out a bit more.
- ◆ How do they spend their leisure time?

2. Explore contrasting emotions and feelings. See “adjectives”.

- ◆ to her friends she was shy (taciturn), but at times she was talkative (garrulous).”;
- ◆ to herself she was relentlessly harsh and judgemental; to others she was generous, gracious and kind.
- ◆ when he was on the bike he was dogged and determined; but with his studies he was fickle and irresolute.

2. Include an element of surprise: describe something that is

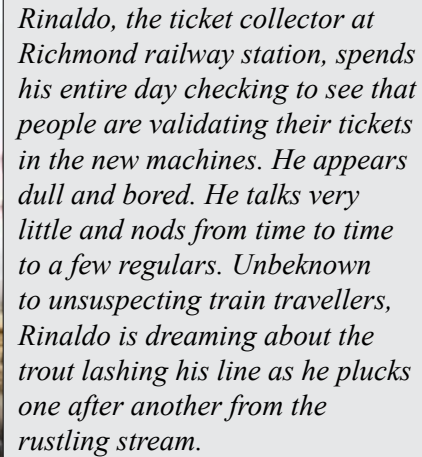
*“We were a shy but boisterous working class family .. The four brothers are thanking the two much older but perpetually youthful parents. Nothing has changed, except the angelic faces have become as engraved as banknotes and the old familiar voices have a withered rasp, but they still laugh till they weep at the cruelty of life.” (Barry Dickins)*

**USE adjectives, adverbs and figures of speech to more accurately describe the character's thoughts and feelings.**

1. How are they feeling?
2. What are they thinking?
3. What are their views and values?
4. How do they relate with others?
5. What problems do they encounter?
6. How do they deal with their problems?
7. How and why do they change?
8. Think about character contrasts: is there a contrast or contradiction? (i.e. do they act “out of character”?) Do they act in surprising ways? Are there any unpredictable traits?

unexpected or not typical.

- ◆ the mean person shows an act of kindness.
- ◆ appearance reflects or contrasts with personality eg. showy (ostentatious) clothes reflect a dramatic personality
- ◆ contradict or go against the stereotype.



*Rinaldo, the ticket collector at Richmond railway station, spends his entire day checking to see that people are validating their tickets in the new machines. He appears dull and bored. He talks very little and nods from time to time to a few regulars. Unbeknown to unsuspecting train travellers, Rinaldo is dreaming about the trout lashing his line as he plucks one after another from the rustling stream.*

4. Include some detail. Listen in on a conversation: on a bus, at a part, in the street, or at McDonald's. Write down what you can remember; try to capture their tone of voice. Include some dialogue.

- ◆ What are the characters talking about?
- ◆ what are they like?
- ◆ What is their relationship?
- ◆ Where are they going?

5. Show a character's growth: start from a position of weakness or introduce a problem. This allows you to show growth and (personal) development.

- ◆ You did something embarrassing or stupid, or someone is offending you.
- ◆ You did not follow advice.
- ◆ Show how you developed/change and what you learnt.
- ◆ Include a flashback or past experience/memory to show development, change or a contrast.

6. Conflict and dilemmas: place the character (or yourself) in a difficult situation. You have to make some difficult choices.

- ◆ What do you choose and why?
- ◆ How does it reveal growth or development?

### **Complement the character**

References to place: these should reflect aspects of the character.

Describe your room at home and your brother's. Ensure they are both different. Show how the room is a reflection of personality.

References to a particular or favourite object, song, poem, saying, etc. as a reflection of character.

### **Different perspectives**

Think about character comparisons and contrasts.

Take a memorable event that happened recently in your family. Describe the event from different perspectives. Give the views of your parents and siblings.

Why might be the reason for these differences?

# Adjectives: describing people

<b>angry:</b> indignant, infuriated, raging, resentful, wrathful, fuming, annoyed, exasperated, irritated, vexed	<b>ashamed:</b> sheepish, shamefaced, remorseful, hang-dog; contrite	<b>absent-minded:</b> careless; scatter-brained, heedless, indiscreet, reckless, unmindful	<b>active:</b> busy, agile, alert, animated, assiduous, brisk, diligent, energetic,
<b>bold:</b> effrontery, audacious; bare-faced audacity, impudent, shameless, (shameless impudence); guilty, unabashed	<b>busy:</b> enterprising, frisky, hard-working, industrious, lively, nimble, spirited, vivacious	<b>bad:</b> evil, horrible, vile, sinister, wicked, pernicious, disastrous,	<b>brave:</b> audacious, courageous, daring, dauntless, fearless, gallant, intrepid, valiant, plucky
<b>curious:</b> inquisitive, snoop, nosy	<b>calm:</b> gentle, mild, pacific, peaceful, still, tame, tranquil, unruffled, untroubled	<b>changeable:</b> capricious: whimsical, mercurial, unpredictable, flighty; fickle	<b>careful:</b> alert, attentive, discreet, mindful, prudent, watchful, wary
<b>determined:</b> dogged, steadfast, unflinching, resolute, firm, unwavering, tenacious, unyielding, persevering	<b>dirty:</b> sooty, blotted, contaminated, defiled, dusty, filthy, polluted, grimy, foul, stained, tarnished, unclean, unwashed	<b>discourteous:</b> abusive, churlish, ill-mannered, impudent, insolent, uncivil	<b>distasteful:</b> bitter, nasty, nauseating, sour, unappetising, unpalatable, unsavoury
<b>earnest; honest</b> serious or sincere; candid, frank, honest, genuine	<b>foolish:</b> stupid; absurd, addle-headed, feeble-minded, idiotic, nonsensical, ridiculous, senseless,	<b>erratic;</b> flight; volatile; transient, fleeting, frivolous, changeable	<b>dull; boring:</b> tedious, dreary, dull, monotonous, wearisome, unexciting
<b>happy:</b> cheerful, joyous, contented, rapturous, blissful	<b>humble</b> bashful, diffident, lowly, meek, modest, servile, shy, submissive, obtrusive	<b>horrified:</b> terrified, frightened, appalled, disgusted, repelled	<b>kind:</b> considerate, generous ; kind-hearted, helpful, friendly, compassionate, thoughtful, sympathetic, soft-hearted
<b>lonely:</b> dejected; sad, depressed, melancholic, alone, isolated, rejected cautious	<b>long:</b> endless, interminable, lengthy, outstretched	<b>lazy:</b> idle, listless, sluggish, drowsy, inactive, indolent, languid, motionless, slack, sleepy, slothful,	<b>lively:</b> exuberant, spirited, energetic, bustling, sprightly, agile, animated, indefatigable,

## USING ADVERBS AND ADJECTIVES TO DEPICT BETTER CHARACTERS

Using adverbs to modify verbs, describe the interaction between the characters. Include some dialogue and describe the manner of speaking.

<b>messy:</b> chaotic, untidy, cluttered, muddled, jumbled, disorderly	<b>naughty:</b> wayward, rebellious; recalcitrant; obstinate; troublesome; mischievous; self-willed	<b>polite:</b> courteous; urbane; genial, gracious, obliging, civil, well-bred, well-mannered	<b>painful:</b> agonizing, excruciating, hurtful, unbearable, insufferable, uncomfortable
<b>rude,</b> discourteous, resilient; showing fortitude and strength; irresolute	<b>naughty:</b> cheeky, bold, brazen, insolent (rude), mischievous, impudent	<b>silent;</b> shy, taciturn, tight-lipped, reserved, uncommunicative, short-spoken, reticent	<b>obstinate:</b> arrogant; imperious; commanding; authoritative; haughty;
<b>sad:</b> broken-hearted, cheerless, despondent, forlorn, heavy-hearted, unhappy, mournful, disconsolate	<b>supercilious</b> haughty, arrogant, disdainful	<b>secretive:</b> surreptitious; stealthy; cunning; guileful; wily; crafty; nimble; wry; weaselly; underhand; insidious; crafty; artful	<b>silly,</b> foolish; stupid, unintelligent, unreasonable, unwise
<b>scared:</b> fearful, timid; anxious, nervous; fretful, afraid, apprehensive, frightened, angst-ridden	<b>stubborn</b> obstinate, headstrong, inflexible, intransigent, immovable, dogged, uncompromising, pig-headed, refractory, strong-minded, indomitable	<b>shy:</b> skittish, diffident, reserved, self-conscious, timid, timorous; reticent (not speaking freely)	<b>surprised:</b> aghast, amazed, astonished, astounded, dumbfounded, thunderstruck
<b>troublesome</b> vexatious (cause someone worry); irritating; bothersome, pesky (annoying); importunate (bother someone with persistent requests); mortifying; resentful	<b>tired:</b> dog-tired, drowsy, fatigued, listless, sleepy, exhausted	<b>violent:</b> vehement, boisterous, ferocious, raging, riotous, rough, savage, turbulent, vicious, wild, fierce,	<b>virtuous:</b> good, just, moral, noble, pure, righteous, saintly, pretty; homely
<b>unkind:</b> cold-hearted, cruel, mean	<b>talkative;</b> garrulous, loquacious, chatter, prattle, jabber, gossip	<b>wicked:</b> disgraceful, evil, depraved, immoral, scandalous, vicious, shameless, sinister	<b>outlandish,</b> freakishly or grotesquely strange