

# DESCRIBING A PERSON

When describing a person (描述某人) in English, we usually begin with what is most obvious (明显) and important, or different from other people. Below are listed a great many words and phrases (短语) often used to talk about people.

Sex/Gender (性别): In formal (正式) or medical situations, rather than saying someone is a man, woman, boy, girl, etc., we often say one is *male* (男性) or *female* (女性). Some people also consider themselves to be *trans-gender*, which means, basically, having either male or female physical characteristics but believing oneself to be (and wishing to be seen as) the opposite sex (异性).

Another important part of a person's identity (身份) is one's *sexual orientation*, that is, to whom one is attracted sexually (对谁有性吸引的感觉). Most people consider themselves, formally, *heterosexual* or informally *straight* (异性恋的). Others, about one in ten in the USA, are formally called *homosexual* or less formally, *gay* (同性恋的). Gay women are also commonly referred to as (平常叫) *lesbians* (同性恋女子). Still others are attracted to both sexes and are called *bisexual* (对男女两性都有性欲的).

Race and Ethnicity (民族): Noting what race someone is does not mean one is racist (种族主义的). For most people, race, ethnicity, and cultural backgrounds are still very important parts of who they are. That said, the terms for ethnicity, from a Western perspective, are still based largely on skin color (以皮肤的颜色为基础).

Extremely broad (非常广阔的) ethnic groups include: *white people* or *Caucasians* (白人), *black people* (黑人), *Asians* (亚洲人), *middle-eastern people* (中东人, 阿拉伯人), and *native or aboriginal people* (本地人) such as Native American Indians (本地美国人/印第安人) or Australian aborigines (澳大利亚的土著居民). Each of these races has its own non-standard terms and racial slurs (人种的诽谤), but as this is a general survey of terms not including those meant to offend (故意地冒犯), they are not included here.

A person's religion (宗教) is often an important trait (显著的特点) closely tied to ethnicity, though rarely as visibly (能注意到的) obvious as one's skin color. Major world religions (and their followers 信徒) include *Christianity/Christians* (基督教), *Islam/Muslims* (伊斯兰教/穆斯林人), *Hinduism/Hindus* (印度教), *Judaism/Jews* (犹太教/人), *Buddhism/Buddhists* (佛教), and many others with fewer followers. People without a religion may be *irreligious* or *nonreligious* (无宗教的), *agnostic* (不可知论的), or *atheist* (无神论的).

Stature (个子) and Build (体格): When describing one's whole body, we often refer to one's height (身高) and weight (体重). Other than saying simply tall or short, we can say one is: *lanky* (tall and thin) (瘦长的), *stocky* (short and fat) (矮胖的), a *giant* (巨人), a *dwarf* (侏儒), a *midget* (shorter than a dwarf).

Other than saying one is thin (瘦), a person can be called: *skinny* (极瘦), *bony* (皮包骨的), *emaciated* (瘦弱的), *malnourished* (营养不良的), or *gaunt* (瘦削的).

Other than saying one is fat (胖), a person can be called: *chubby* (稍胖的), *chunky* (敦实的), *plump* (丰满的), *obese* (过渡肥胖的), *stout* (胖), or *pudgy* (胖乎乎).

Naturally, there are many idioms (成语) to describe these kind of people, but they are both difficult to translate and remember!

Facial Features (脸上的特点): A person's face is usually the first thing we notice (注意到) and remember about a person, so there are many ways to describe how one's face looks.

A person's skin may have distinguishing (区别, 辨别的) marks (特征, 胎记), such as *acne/zits/pimples* (粉刺), *moles* (黑痣), *freckles* (斑点), *warts* (瘰子), or other *birthmarks* (胎记). Past injuries (过去的伤) may show *scars* (伤疤) or *stitches* (外科的缝线). Skin may be *wrinkled* (皱纹的), *pale* (苍白的), *smooth* (光滑的), *tan* (晒黑的), or *flaky* (易分裂成薄片的).

Facial hair for men, and sometimes women, comes in many styles. Some have *stubble* (胡茬子), *beards* (胡子), *moustaches* (髭), *goatees* (山羊胡子), and *sideburns* (鬓角). *Eyebrows* (眉毛) and *eyelashes* (睫毛) may be long or short, *bushy* (浓密的), *fake* (假的), or in a ``*unibrow*`` (两个眉毛连在一起的).

Hairstyles (发型): Nothing makes a memorable character like an unusual hairstyle, and there are a ton of ways to describe hair!

Common hairstyles include the *crew cut* (平头), *afro* (非洲发型), *Mohawk* (a strip of long, spiked 尖刺的 hair down the middle of the head, with sides short or shaven), or a *mullet* (short in front, long in back of head). Long hair may be worn in a *bun* (颈后发髻), *braids* (发辫), a *pony tail* (马尾发型), *dreadlocks* (拉斯塔法里式发绺), or *pigtails* (小辫子, 经常分两个).

Hair itself can be *straight* (直的), *curly* (鬃发), *oily* (油性的), *feathered* (似羽毛的), *poofy* (expanding outwards like a ball), Western hair colors are naturally black, brown (褐色, 棕色), white, grey (灰色), red (not usually red like a tomato but more reddish-brown), or *blonde* (金黄色) but may also be *dyed* (用染料的) most any color.

To describe a lack (缺乏) of hair, a person can have a *shaved* (剃的) head (or be a “*skinhead*” 留平头的青少年), be *bald* (秃头), *balding* (变秃的), wear a *wig* (假发), *toupee* (男人带的假发), or have a *comb-over*, using longer hair on the sides of the head to cover baldness on top.

Clothing (衣服) and Accessories (附件): What clothes one wears is an important part of how one looks. Common articles of (outdoor) clothing include hats (帽子), earmuffs (耳罩), (over)coats (大衣), jackets (夹克), gloves (手套), mittens (连指手套), scarves (围巾), shoes (鞋子), and boots (靴). General indoor clothing includes long-sleeve shirts (长袖衬衫), T-shirts (短袖衬衫), pants/trousers (裤子), (blue)jeans (牛仔裤), shorts (短裤), skirts (裙子), dresses (连衣裙), and socks (短袜). Underwear (内衣) includes boxer shorts/boxers (男用宽松的内裤衩), briefs (贴身的短内裤), bra(ssiere)s (奶罩), panties (妇女穿的紧身短裤), stockings (长统袜), pantyhose (妇女穿的长统袜), long underwear (长内裤). Clothes we wear before, during or after sleep include nightgowns (长睡衣), robes (长袍), and pajamas (睡衣). Formal occasions call for (正式的活动要求) suits (套依), in China perhaps a Mao Suit (中山装), ties (领带), slacks (宽松的裤子), and a belt (带子). One can also be *naked* or *nude*, wearing no clothes (裸体的).

Unlike Chinese, the verb is the same, “to wear”, for all clothing and accessories such as glasses (眼镜), watches (手表), headphones (耳机), etc. I.e.: She is wearing a t-shirt. He wears glasses. You should wear a hat outside. I don’t usually wear a watch. The girl wearing headphones is listening to music. Bags and other things not actually worn on the body, such as purses (女用手提包), wallets (钱包/皮夹子), briefcases (公事皮包), and backpacks (书包), are said to be “carried”. I.e.: Women often carry purses or handbags, while briefcases are carried by businessmen, and a student often carries books in his/her backpack.

Personality (性格, 人格): Knowing someone better lets one go beyond physical characteristics to describe one’s “inner self” (人的精神或灵魂). This is more complicated than appearances (外表), and often times we only get an *impression* (不清晰或不确切的想法, 感觉, 看法)--or even just a *first impression* (初步印象) which is often wrong--about the person.

Personalities are often defined in terms of opposites (用反义词来说明的). Basically, one can be *outgoing* (外向的), *open* (直爽的), *social* (合群的) or *shy* (害羞的), *reserved* (内向的), *antisocial* (不合群的) with respect to other people (对别人) in general.

For tempers (脾气), one can be *easy-going* (随便的), *relaxed* or *lax* (轻松的), *level-headed* (头脑清醒的), or *irritable* (急躁的), *peevish* (易怒的), *rash* (轻率的), or *reactionary* (对一件发生的事反应很厉害或过分).

Courtesy (礼貌) is still a very important measure of a person for many and for all in certain situations. One may be *polite* or *courteous* (礼貌的), *refined* (有教养的), and *proper* (可敬的) or *rude* (不礼貌的), *crude* (粗鲁的), *coarse* (粗俗的) and *vulgar* (粗陋的). Having too many *manners* (规矩) in non-formal (非正式的) situations may also make one seem *prudish* (极端或过分拘谨的) or *uppity* (盛气凌人的).

For senses of humor (幽默感), one can be a *joker* (爱开玩笑的人), *jolly* (愉快的), *funny* (幽默的), or *serious* (严肃的), a *sourpuss* (脾气坏的人).

For activity, one can be a *busy-body* (多事的人), a *workaholic* (工作迷), *active* (惯于做事的), *diligent* (努力), a *control freak* (不会放松的, 所有事/人都要控制的), or *lazy* (懒), *indolent* (不活跃的), or a *layabout* (不务正业的人).

For outlooks (观念) on life and other things, one can be *optimistic* and *positive* (乐观的), *idealistic* (理想主义的), *opportunistic* (机会主义的), *realistic* (现实主义的), *pessimistic* and *negative* (悲观主义的), or *critical* (找出毛病的). In the USA, this is often reflected humorously in one’s view of a half-glass of water.

Intelligent (有才智的) people may be *smart* or *clever* (聪明), *well-educated* (受到良好教育的), *bright* (伶俐的), *witty* (诙谐的), *brilliant* (极聪明的), or *geniuses* (天才人物).

Unintelligent people may be *stupid* or *dumb* (笨), *slow* (迟钝的), *under-educated* (缺乏教育), *foolish* (愚蠢的), *simple(minded)* (头脑简单的), *easily amused* (特别简单的事物给娱乐的), *mentally handicapped* or *retarded* (智力迟钝的).

Regarding views on politics (政治), society (社会), the economy (经济) and many other things, one may be *radical* (持激进观点的), *liberal* or *leftist* (开放的, 左翼思想的), *centrist* (中间的), *conservative* or *rightist* (保守的, 右翼思想的), or *reactionary* (反对进步或改革的).

How one spends (or doesn’t spend) money is a common way to describe a person. Someone who spends a lot of money freely may be *generous* (慷慨的), a *spendthrift* (挥金如土的人), and someone who only spends as much as absolutely necessary may be *miserly* (似守财奴的), *tight* (小气的), *greedy* (贪婪的), or *selfish* (自私的).

Many people are average, “average Joe’s”, or regular folks (一般的人) and don’t necessarily need to be described in any of the above ways.