

# 4

# vocabulary builder

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## 4.1 Vocabulary builder

### 4.1.1 Narrative writing

#### Understand

In narrative writing, vocabulary is generally used for describing people, surroundings, and feelings, as well as actions. The lists of words below will help you to expand your vocabulary, while the practice exercises at the end of the chapter will help you to learn how to use them effectively. You are encouraged to look up the meanings of new words encountered here in the dictionary as part of your learning process.

#### How to use vocabulary to describe setting

When you are using vocabulary to describe the setting in your narrative essay, you should not be merely spewing out all the words you can think of at one go. This makes for clumsy writing style, and will not help your grade for Paper 1.

You should space out your descriptive language continuously throughout your essay so that you create a sense of atmosphere for your reader. Of course, you should not leave most of your descriptive language for setting until the last couple of paragraphs – obviously, that will not help your grade, either.

Another thing to watch out for is using too much descriptive language – you don't want the description of your essay's setting to take up so much space that you have no time to move the essay's plot along. The example below shows the appropriate amount of descriptive language to use for the opening paragraph of a narrative essay about a haunted house. The descriptive words and phrases have been underlined for you in the example.

#### Example

The house loomed ominously under the pale moonlight. Sally and I looked at each other nervously as we walked up to the weather-beaten door. It was moldy, and the erie creaking of the rusty hinges did not help to calm our nerves as we inched our way in nervously. The musty scent in the house was stifling, and we coughed a little as we tried to peer into the dim living room. As the grimy door slammed shut behind us, I began to regret my ridiculous urge to explore the abandoned house.



## Vocabulary reference: Setting

Place	Descriptive Words/ Phrases
House (Old)	dusty, dingy, dank, moldy, stuffy, dilapidated, creaking, grimy, musty, damp, dim, run-down, weather-beaten
Forest	fresh, emerald-green, pine-scented, lush, idyllic, dappled (sunlight)
School	crowded, cacophonous, chaotic, dull, faded, cavernous (large), cramped (small), claustrophobic
Beach	balmy (for breeze), tangy scent, churning/ choppy/ gentle/ calm (waves), turquoise, aquamarine, blistering (heat)

## How to use vocabulary to describe character traits and descriptions of people

This sort of vocabulary will come in handy in the narrative essay for Paper 1, particularly for creating vivid descriptions of the characters in your essay.

The key thing to remember when using this sort of vocabulary is that you are not writing a novel – you are writing a relatively short essay. You do not have time or space to devote entire paragraphs to describing the characters in your essay, so you should pick out the most vivid, important and interesting traits about your characters and make sure you express them in your essay.

When you are describing characters, please make sure that your vocabulary used is consistent. You should not make your characters boring, of course, but if you are describing a character as a ‘jolly, rotund man with twinkling eyes’ (positive), it would be silly if you later described them as ‘vicious and twisted’ (negative). Characters should have depth, but if you are using completely opposite descriptions for the same character, you should have a very good (plot-related) reason for doing so, or risking losing marks for coherence and language.

Another thing to remember is that descriptive language for characters can only get you so far – to save space in your essay, try to let the character’s traits apparent through their actions as well. This is one of the most effective forms of telling your reader about the characters, as it allows you to advance your plot at the same time. If you stick to these two general guidelines, you should be able to score a good grade for language as well as content. The example below shows how you can use both descriptive language as well as actions to paint a memorable picture of a character in your narrative essay. The descriptive language has been underlined, while the action has been *italicized*.

### Example

Mr. Lim was a gaunt, unkempt old man with leathery skin and a *constant frown*. He had lived next door to our family for several years, but I never talked to him unless it was absolutely necessary. Once, I *saw him beat a kitten that had soiled his precious potted plants*, and the look of vicious glee on his face was truly terrifying. I avoided him like the plague from then on, and would squeak a timid one-word reply if he ever deigned to *talk to me in his gravelly, gruff voice*.



## Vocabulary reference: Character traits/ descriptions

Please note that the words in the columns labeled 'Positive' and 'Negative' are not opposites. Words that are opposites (Antonyms) are covered in the next chapter.

Positive	Negative
slender, willowy, slim	puny, scrawny, gaunt, skinny
robust, powerful, strapping	portly, obese, pot bellied, stout
acrobatic, adroit, attentive	apathetic, asleep, atrophied
bubbly, bright-eyed, bustling	blank, bored, blasé
deft, diligent, dynamic	docile, dormant, dull, dazed
effervescent, exuberant	emotionless, empty, exhausted
fervent, footloose, fresh	fatigued, flat
high-spirited	haggard, hoary
industrious, irrepressible	idle, impassive, inanimate, indolent
limber, lively, lithe	languid, lazy, leaden, listless, lethargic
perky, productive	phlegmatic, passive
rambunctious, raring to go	sagging, sapped, sedentary, slothful
spirited, speedy, spry, swift	sluggish, stagnant, spiritless, spent
vibrant	vacant
wide-eyed	weary, worn-out
zestful, zesty	unresponsive, unmotivated
alluring, attractive, appealing	accident-prone, askew, awkward
affluent, aristocratic	derelict, destitute, disfigured, disgusting
captivating, charming, charismatic	dumpy, dowdy
chic, classy	filthy, gnarly
dapper, dazzling, debonair	gaudy, graceless
fashionable	ghastly, gruesome, grotesque
glamorous	hideous, horrid, horrific
handsome	heavy-footed
healthy	inelegant, incongruous
immaculate, impeccable	impoverished
irresistible	lowly, lowborn
lavish, lush, luxurious	messy, oily
photogenic, picturesque, polished	odious, overdressed
refined, regal, royal	penniless, plain, poor
sophisticated, sleek, suave, stylish	shabby, sleazy, slimy, slovenly, sloppy

tantalizing, trendy	ugly, unappealing, uncouth, unkempt
well-off, wealthy, well-heeled	unwashed, unsightly, unsavory, undesirable, unsanitary
calm, composed, cool-headed	aggressive, agitated
dispassionate, dry-eyed	belligerent, brutish, brash
easygoing	defiant
gentle	emotional, explosive
imperturbable	ferocious, fuming, fiery
lenient, levelheaded	hostile, hot-tempered, hotheaded
neutral, nonchalant	impetuous, incensed, irate
objective	livid
patient, peaceful	mad, manic
restrained, reticent	overwrought
sedate, serene, subdued	peevish, piqued
tranquil	quarrelsome, rash
unruffled, untroubled, unemotional	stormy, temperamental, unstable
confident	ambivalent, apprehensive
decisive, direct	compliant, doubtful, dependent
firm, focused, formidable	equivocal
grandiose	fatalistic, fawning
impervious, independent, invincible	halfhearted, hesitant, halting
persistent, persuasive, poised	inconstant, indecisive, insecure
resolute	malleable, meek
secure, self-assured, strong-willed	noncommittal
tenacious	self-denying, slavish, submissive
unbending, unfaltering, unflinching	subservient, suppliant, susceptible
unstoppable, unrelenting	wavering, wishy-washy
willful	yielding
elusive, enigmatic	bashful, cloistered
modest, mysterious	distant, detached
self-effacing	guarded, secretive, shy
unassuming, unfathomable	unapproachable, unsociable
ambitious, assertive	blustering, brazen
bold	exhibitionistic
expansive, exuberant	loudmouthed, noisy
outgoing	overbearing, pushy

Positive	Negative
talkative, theatrical	shrill, strident
childlike, credulous	abrasive, demanding, arrogant
faithful	calculating, caustic, critical
generous, giving, guileless	fussy
obliging, open	gluttonous, greedy
tolerant, trusting	judgmental
uncritical, unquestioning	opinionated, scornful, superior
conscientious	amoral
ethical, honest	baleful
humane, honourable	corrupt, crafty, crooked
impartial, incorruptible	deceitful, despicable, duplicitous
selfless, sincere	fake, false, furtive
upright, upstanding	malevolent, odious
virtuous	slippery, sly, shady
wholesome	venomous, vile, wily
chivalrous, caring, charitable	abusive, avaricious
dutiful, fraternal	bullying, bothersome
good-hearted, helpful	capricious, crafty
magnanimous, neighbourly	infamous
obliging, pleasant, positive	maladjusted, meddlesome
supportive, sympathetic	notorious
unselfish, unflinching	obnoxious, offensive
well-intentioned, well-meaning	petulant, pernicious, prickly
bookish, bright, brilliant	absent-minded, baffled
fluent, glib	confounded, confused
ingenious, innovative, inventive	dense, dim, dimwitted, empty-headed
learned, literate	fallible, feeble-minded, foggy
perceptive	ignorant, illiterate, inarticulate
quick-witted, sharp-witted	myopic
savvy, shrewd, sharp	oblivious, obtuse
uncanny, unerring	simpleminded, slow-witted, subnormal
well-spoken, well-read, worldly	uninformed, unread, unlearned

## How to use vocabulary to describe emotions

Vocabulary describing emotions is probably the most overlooked element of narrative essay vocabulary among students, some of whom seem to be under the impression that 'happy' and 'very sad' are sufficient to describe character's emotions in their narrative essays. A lack of description (or superficial description, such as 'happy' and 'sad') of emotions is a good way to ruin an otherwise perfect narrative essay. Using more advanced vocabulary to describe emotions will definitely improve your overall grade for your narrative essay.

However, having taken note of this, you should also refrain from throwing in vocabulary for emotions just for the sake of doing so. It is obvious that you are not using the vocabulary effectively, and it may hurt your language grade instead of improving it. You should use this type of vocabulary in your essay when your characters are reacting to events and situations in your essay. The example below shows you how you can use vocabulary to describe emotions in your narrative essay. The words describing emotions have been underlined for you.

### Example

The moment he had finished talking, I was bereft. I tried not to look dejected, but I simply couldn't help it. How else was I supposed to react to the news that our father wanted to leave us and set up an organic farm in Venezuela? My mother looked more shell-shocked than aggrieved, however. I suspect she was still numb from the news of his bizarre decision. At the very least, he had the grace to look sheepish as we stared at him in complete disbelief.



## Vocabulary reference: Emotions

Happiness	Sadness
airy	afflicted
blissful	aggrieved
blithe	anguished
carefree	bereaved, bereft
cavalier	blue
cheery	brooding
contented	chagrined
delighted	crestfallen
ebullient	dejected
ecstatic	despondent
elated	doleful
energetic	forlorn
enthusiastic	gloomy
euphoric	glum
exhilarated	grief-stricken

giddy	heartbroken
gleeful	inconsolable
impish	joyless
jovial	languishing
jubilant	melancholy
lighthearted	moody, mournful
overjoyed	regretful
thrilled	rueful
vibrant	sober
playful	somber
radiant	subdued
rapturous	wistful
spirited	weepy
starry-eyed	woeful

## How to use vocabulary to describe actions

Vocabulary describing emotions is another overlooked element of narrative essay vocabulary among students. Many candidates are content to use the standard verbs for common actions like speech ('said') and movement ('walked'). This is one of the elements of language usage that sets distinction essays apart from the others, because it is so rarely used by students.

Instead of sticking to the standard words for speech and movement, stop and think about how your characters are speaking (or moving). Are they angry? Calm? Boastful? Shy? Do they walk with a shuffle, or are they in a hurry? Are they energetic, or do they move slowly and sluggishly? Their personalities and moods will affect how they speak and behave, and using a broad vocabulary for speech and movement will help you to paint a more vivid picture of the characters in your essay. The example below shows you how you can use vocabulary for speech and motion in your narrative essay. The words describing speech have been underlined, while those describing motion have been *italicized*.

### Example

Jared groaned as Pete *swaggered* into the classroom. "Look at what my dad gave me for my birthday!" he bragged, brandishing a shiny, brand-new Sony Playstation Portable as he *leered* arrogantly at his classmates. Jake *slumped* further in his seat, muttering irritably to himself under his breath. Pete was such an aggravating, boastful person that even his own friends tried to avoid him at times. Jake wasn't even his friend, and he'd heard enough of Pete's obnoxious blustering to last him a lifetime.





## Vocabulary reference: Actions

Speech	Motion
bluster	amble
chortle	arise
confess	bounce
curse	bound
exclaim	charge
fume	clamber
gibe	crawl
greet	cringe
groan	dodge
grumble	duck
jeer	flinch
lament	halt
laugh	hobble
moan	limp
quip	lurch
rant	overtake
reassure	plod
scoff	plummet
scorn	plunge
snap	recoil
snarl	saunter
tease	stagger
whimper	trudge

## 4.1.2 General

### Understand

These vocabulary lists contain words that are basic in meaning but are not always widely known, such as occupations.

#### When to use vocabulary describing occupations

It is unlikely that you will be using these words heavily in your narrative essay, but a general knowledge of common occupations is necessary to improve your overall vocabulary. These words may pop up anywhere; in your comprehension passage, in your situational essay, or even in your narrative essay – if you are writing about events in a hospital, are you going to use the phrase ‘person who cuts people up in the operating theatre’? Hopefully not! The correct word would be ‘surgeon’. Similarly, if the word ‘anthropologist’ appears in the vocabulary section of Paper 2, you will have lost a mark if you do not know what this occupation is. Thus, you should familiarize yourself with any of the following occupations that are new to you.

#### Vocabulary reference: Occupations

Occupation	Meaning
accountant	one who keeps a record of money spent
acrobat	one who does daring stunts
agriculturist	one who is skilled in growing crops
anesthetist	one who gives anesthetic to patients before an operation
anthropologist	one who studies the nature of humans
archaeologist	one who studies the remains of ancient times
architect	one who draws the plans for buildings
artist	one who practices fine arts, such as painting and drawing
artiste	one who sings, acts, or dances professionally
assassin	one who commits murder for monetary or political gain
astronaut	one who is engaged in space travel
astronomer	one who studies the stars
author	one who writes books
baker	one who bakes and sells bread and/or confectionery
banker	one who owns, manages, or shares in the control of a bank
barber	one who cuts hair for men
bartender	one who mixes and serves drinks at a bar or hotel
bell-boy	one who works at a hotel, helping guests to carry luggage to their rooms

biologist	one who studies the science of living things
botanist	one who is an expert in the studies of the science of plants
butcher	one who kills animals and/ or butts them up and sells them for food
cameraman	one who operates a video camera for film or television
cardiologist	one who is an expert in studies of the human heart and the diseases connected to it
caretaker	one who takes care of a house or building
carpenter	one who makes wooden objects, such as furniture
cashier	one who collects money in a shop/ hotel/ bank, etc.
chauffer	one who drives someone else's car
chef	a head cook in a restaurant or hotel
choreographer	one who plans and arranges dances for performances
civil servant	one who is employed by the government, but not in the military/ naval forces
cobbler	one who mends footwear
composer	one who writes music
copywriter	one who writes the words for use in advertisements
coroner	one who inquires into the causes of accidental or suspicious deaths
correspondent	one who writes articles
critic	one who is skilled in judging the quality of a film/ book/ music record, etc.
curator	one who is in charge of a museum or gallery
dermatologist	one who is an expert in the treatment of skin diseases
detective	one who finds information that will lead to the capture of criminals
dietitian	one who is an expert in planning and prescribing food
diplomat	one who is skilled at negotiating with representatives from other countries
drover	one who drives livestock to the market
editor	one who prepares a book, magazine or newspaper for printing
electrician	one who makes, installs or repairs electrical appliances
engineer	one who designs machines, bridges, etc
florist	one who grows or sells flowers
gamekeeper	one who breeds and protects wild animals and birds
jailer/ warden	one who is in charge of a prison and prisoners
gardener	one who grows and takes care of plants in a garden

grocer	one who sells manufactured food and household products
herbalist	one who studies, collects, sells, or administers herbal medicine
interior designer	one who is skilled in the decoration and furnishing of the inside of a building or house
inventor	one who creates something new
jeweler	one who sells or makes jewelry
jockey	one who rides horses in races
journalist	one who writes articles for a newspaper
judge	one who hears and decides cases in a court of law
lawyer	one who gives advice about matters of law or acts for others in a court of law
lecturer	one who teaches in a higher institute of learning
lifeguard	one who rescues swimmers from drowning
manufacturer	one who produces things in a factory on a large scale
mayor	one who heads a town or city
mechanic	one who repairs machinery
neurologist	one who is skilled in the study of the nervous system, including its diseases and treatments
ornithologist	one who is an expert on the study of birds
orthodontist	a dental surgeon who specializes in correcting dental abnormalities
orthopedic	one who prevents/ corrects deformities of the bones
pediatrician	one who specializes in treating children's diseases
pharmacist	one who is licensed to mix and sell drugs and controlled substances for medicinal purposes
philatelist	one who studies and collects stamps
physicist	one who studies matter and energy
psychiatrist	one who treats mental diseases
psychologist	one who studies human thinking and behaviour
publisher	one who prints and sells books
speech therapist	one who treats and corrects speech defects
stockbroker	one who buys and sells shares on the behalf of his clients
veterinarian	one who specializes in treating the diseases of animals
zoologist	one who is an expert in the study of animal life

## When to use antonyms and synonyms

Antonyms are words that are opposites in meaning, while synonyms are words that have similar meanings. Both can be of tremendous help in Paper 2, when you are trying to figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words in the text or finding a replacement word for the vocabulary questions in Paper 2. For example, if you are not sure what 'incompetent' means, but you remember that it is the opposite of 'able', you would be able to deduce its meaning fairly quickly. Similarly, for synonyms, you will find it easier to answer the vocabulary questions in Paper 2 if you know a wide range of synonyms that can act as replacement words for the original word in the question.

## Vocabulary reference: Antonyms

Word	Antonym
able	incapable, incompetent
absurd	logical, rational, reasonable
abundance	scarcity, want
adaptable	clumsy, fixed, inflexible
adversity	prosperity
basic	trivial
belittle	credit, encourage
benevolence	egoism, malice
brusque	diplomatic, polite, tactful
calamity	blessing
chaos	order
coarse	refined, polished, fine
cruel	humane, kind
despotic	democratic, lawful
discord	harmony
diversify	unify
emigrant	immigrant
fictitious	real
fruitful	barren
ignorance	knowledge
lethal	harmless
pessimist	optimist
repulsive	charming, lovely
robust	delicate, feeble
sharp	blunt
sparingly	lavishly

superior	inferior
tragic	comic
veteran	novice
wealthy	poor
wisdom	folly

## Vocabulary reference: Synonyms

Word	Synonym
abandon	desert, evacuate, forsake, leave
accelerate	hasten, hurry, quicken, speed up
acknowledge	accept, admit, allow, confess, recognize
anger	fury, wrath
bold	brave, courageous, daring, heroic, valiant
broad	wide
chaos	disorder
colossal	huge
countenance	face
cunning	sly
deficiency	shortage
disaster	calamity
dusk	twilight
emotion	passion
environment	surroundings
folly	foolishness
grave	serious
gruff	surly
home	residence
industrious	busy
lament	grieve
loathe	hate
mistake	error
observe	watch
penalty	punishment
prominent	outstanding
quarrelsome	aggressive
reckless	careless, rash

rude	impolite
success	triumph, victory
weak	feeble, puny

## 4.1.3 Similes

### Understand

Similes are comparisons that allow you to insert more expressiveness into your narrative essay. Do take note that you should not be using similes in argumentative essays, as these phrases are descriptive language, which will cost you marks if it is found in your argumentative essay.

However, similes are a great way to make the descriptions in your narrative essay stand out, thus improving your Paper 1 grade. For example, the phrase 'quick as lightning' is more descriptive than 'very quick'. However, do be careful not to overuse similes, as it will be apparent to the marker that you are not demonstrating true mastery of your vocabulary, but merely throwing similes in to boost your grade. Try not to use more than three or four (at the most) similes in your narrative essay – with this component of vocabulary, a little goes a long way.

### Vocabulary reference: Similes

1. As agile as a cat/ monkey
2. As blind as a bat
3. As busy as a bee
4. As clumsy as a bear
5. As cunning as a fox/ monkey
6. As deaf as a beetle
7. As frisky as a lamb
8. As gentle as a dove/ fawn/ lamb
9. As hungry as a wolf
10. As mad as a March hare
11. As playful as a kitten/ puppy/ rabbit
12. As poor as a church mouse
13. As proud as a peacock
14. As stubborn as a mule
15. As wary as a fox
16. As credulous as a child
17. As devoted as a mother
18. As harmless as a baby
19. As mad as a hatter
20. As ageless as the sun
21. As artificial as clockwork
22. As bald as a billiard ball/ an egg
23. As black as coal/ ebony/ soot



24. As thick as thieves
25. As calm as death
26. As changeable as the moons
27. As cool as a cucumber
28. As cruel as winter/ death
29. As dismal as a hearse
30. As heavy as lead
31. As pretty as a picture
32. As quick as lightning
33. As right as rain
34. As safe as the bank
35. As silent as the grave
36. As white as a ghost/ a sheet/ snow

**Notes:**