Describing people: appearance

She’s got **straight hair** and she’s **thin-faced** (or she’s got a **thin face**).

She’s got **long, wavy** hair and she’s **round-faced** (or she’s got a **round face**).

She’s got **curly hair** and is **dark-skinned** (or she’s got **dark skin**).

He’s got a **crew-cut.** [taglio (di capelli) a spazzola]

He’s **bald** and has freckles.

He’s got a **beard** and **moustache** and has a **chubby** face.

He’s got **receding** hair and a few **wrinkles**.

He used to have **black** hair but now it’s gone **grey**, almost **white**.

What sort of person would you find attractive? **Blonde, fair, dark** or **ginger-haired / red-haired**?

**Fair** and **dark** can be used for hair, complexion or skin.
Height and build

- a rather **plump** or **stout** (robusto) man

- a **slim** woman [positive]
  - a **skinny** person [rather negative]

- an **obese** couple [negative, very fat]

**Fat** may sound impolite. Instead we often say a **bit overweight**. If someone is broad and solid, we can say they are **stocky** (tarchiato; tozzo). A person with good muscles can be **well-built** robusto, ben piantato or **muscular**. If someone is terribly thin and refuses to eat, they may be **anorexic**.

General appearance

She’s a very **smart** and **elegant** woman, always **well-dressed**; her husband is quite the opposite, very **scruffy** and **untidy-looking** / **messy-looking**.

He’s very **good-looking**, but his friend’s rather **unattractive**.

Do you think **beautiful** women are always attracted to **handsome** men? I don’t. I think **personality** matters most.

**First impressions** are always important. [your first reaction to someone]

Tip: The suffix -**ish** is useful for describing people. She’s **tallish**. He has **brownish** hair. He must be **thirtyish**.

There are many ways to talk about physical appearance.

Age

My grandfather is quite **old**, he is an **old-age pensioner**. His daughter, my aunt, is **middle-aged**, she’s 55. She has three sons. One is a **young adult** aged 24, and the other two are both **teenagers**. They are 16 and 17. My sister also has two children – one **toddler** who is a two-year old, and a **baby** who is 6 months old.
Build
People are built in all shapes and sizes. There are those who are fat and overweight. Some people are extremely overweight and are obese. Other people are naturally slim, but others have absolutely no fat on them and are thin, or skinny.
Personally, I am stocky and small, but well-built. My father is tall and lean. My sister is short, but wiry. I mean she is quite thin but muscular. Both my brothers are athletic and well-proportioned. My mother looks like a 1940's film star. She is curvaceous, with an hour-glass figure. My grandfather is fit for his age and takes plenty of exercise. He doesn't want all his muscles to get flabby.

Colouring
My sister is an English rose – she has fair hair and fair skin. She doesn't tan easily and has to be careful in the sun. My mother is blonde, also with a fair complexion. I am a redhead, I mean I've got ginger hair. Like many other people with a pale complexion, I get freckles from the sun – small brown dots on my face and arms. In contrast, my father has dark-brown hair and he is quite dark-skinned. His mother (my grandmother) is from Spain. Southern Europeans are sometimes described as Mediterranean.

Face
Faces, like build, vary a lot. Some people have oval faces – their foreheads are much wider than their chins. Other people have heart-shaped, square or round faces. Features also vary. My grandfather has bushy eyebrows (he has lots of hair!), a hooked nose and high cheekbones. His eyes are large and set quite far apart. My mother has a broad nose, which she hates, as she prefers narrow noses. But she is lucky to have even regular teeth. My sister corrected her crooked teeth by wearing a brace which straightened them. She has rosy cheeks, small ears and a snub nose, which goes up at the end.

I have long, curly hair, though my sister is the opposite, with short, straight hair. She also has a short fringe cut horizontally across her forehead. Her hair is fine and doesn't weigh very much, but mine is thick and heavy. My mother's hair is wavy – in between straight and curly. My father is losing his hair – in fact he is going bald, which makes him very sad. My brother looks like he is going to lose his hair too – it is receding.

EX 1 Answer these remarks with the opposite description.
EXAMPLE A: I thought you said he was the short, chubby one.
   B: No, no, no, not at all, he’s the tall, thin-faced one.
1 A: Was that his brother, the dark-skinned, wavy-haired one?
   B: No, completely the opposite, his brother’s …
2 A: She’s always quite well-dressed, so I’ve heard.
   B: What! Who told you that? Every time I see her, she’s
3 A: So Charlene’s that rather plump, fair-haired woman, is she?
   B: No, you’re looking at the wrong one. Charlene’s …
4 A: So, tell us about the new boss; good looking?
   B: No, I’m afraid not; rather …
5 A: I don’t know why, but I expected the tour-guide to be middle-aged or elderly.
   B: No, apparently she’s only …

EX 2 Write one sentence to describe each of these people, giving information about their hair and face, their height and build and general appearance.
1 you yourself  2 your best friend  3 a neighbour
4 your ideal of a handsome man / a beautiful woman
Now, in the same way, describe somebody very famous, give some extra clues about them, e.g. He’s/She’s a pop star/politician. Can someone else guess who you are describing?
EX 3 From these jumbled words, find combinations for describing people, as in the example. Not all of the words are on the left-hand page. Some of the combinations are hyphenated. Use a dictionary if necessary. You can use the words more than once.

EXAMPLE good-looking
looking middle stocky long over round haired well faced good mixed complexion aged red build dressed weight race legged tanned

EX 4 WANTED! MISSING! Complete the gaps in these police posters.

WANTED FOR MURDER
Ian Prowse
White, height 6ft,
........ -faced,
....... hair,
....... skin

Wanted for Armed Robbery
Sandra King
White, height 5ft 4,
........ hair,
........ build,
........ -faced

Missing
Louise Fox
age 7,
Asian appearance
............hair.

Wanted dead or alive
Jack ‘Dagger’ Flagstone
6ft, ............, with ............and ............;
............build.

Follow-up:
Make a collection of descriptions of people from newspapers and magazines. Court/crime reports, celebrity and gossip pages of magazines are good places to start.