

Vocabulary for Effective Narrative and Descriptive Writing

This is a compilation of words and phrases that can be used in narrative and descriptive writing.

Please **STUDY** this as thoroughly as you can. Familiarise yourselves with **HOW** the words and phrases are used. It is **IMPORTANT** to **NOTE** the **context** in which these words are used.

Look out for them when you read your story books. And most importantly **make every effort to USE** the words and phrases in your own writing.

Learning is not attained by chance.

It must be sought for with ardour and attended to with diligence -Abigail Adams

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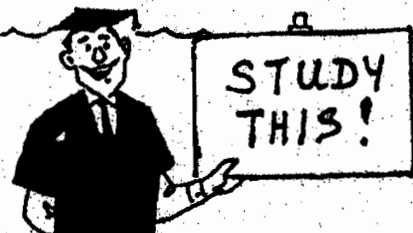
Hard work - Good work habits help develop an internal toughness and a self-confident attitude that will sustain you through every adversity and temporary discouragement.

~ Paul J. Fleyer ~


Fear in Varying Degrees

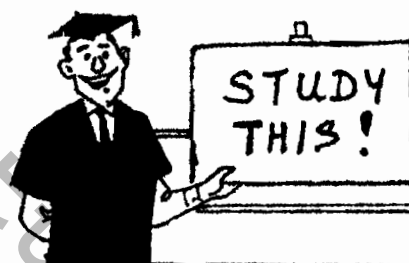
1. **apprehensive:** worried/filled with anxiety or fear
e.g. Mei Li was apprehensive about meeting her mother-in-law even after much assurance from her husband.
2. **alarmed:** sudden fear and anxiety, especially when caused by the possibility of danger
e.g. The government is alarmed by the sudden increase in violent crime.
3. **fearful:** to be afraid
e.g. We were fearful of her anger.
4. **panic-stricken:** filled with sudden anxiety or fear
e.g. The audience were panic-stricken when the fire-alarm went off.
5. **terror-stricken/terrified:** very much frightened/afraid
e.g. He was terrified of snakes.
6. **horrified:** filled with great shock or horror
e.g. He was horrified to hear that she had been murdered.
7. **aghast:** suddenly filled with great surprise/fear/shock
e.g. He was aghast when he was told that his son had been kidnapped.


8. **petrified:** extreme fear or shock so that one is unable to think or move
e.g. He sat there petrified as the ghost glided across the room.
9. **frantic:** filled with desperation because you are frightened or worried
e.g. When he saw the corpse rising from its coffin, he became frantic with terror.



How Do You React When Afraid?

Body	Look	Eyes
<p>You feel chilled become numbed shiver tremble shudder quake or shake are unable to move cower shrink back perspire</p> <p>Your heart thumps/beats/pounds</p>	<p>You look pale white ashen</p> <p>You look as if</p> 	<p>You stare gaze in</p> <p>Your eyes widen</p>



Voice	Speech
<p>Your voice trembles quivers quavers shakes</p> 	<p>You stammer stutter mutter pray pant shriek/scream</p>

EXAMPLES

How Do You React When Afraid?

1. **chilled:** Chilled with fear, he.....; She felt a sudden chill as...
His menacing eyes chilled her.
2. **numbed:** numbed with terror; numbed with fear
Tom was numbed with terror as the creature approached him.
3. **shiver:** He was shivering with terror as.....; Shivering with fear, he....
A sudden scream sent shivers up my spine.
4. **tremble:** He was trembling as.....; Trembling, he....
He trembled with fear as he approached the principal.
5. **shudder:** shuddered violently; shuddered with fear
I shuddered at the sight of the dead body.
6. **quake/shake:** quaking with fear; shaking with fear
He was quaking at the thought of jumping off the plane.
7. **unable to move:** When he saw the cobra, he was too terror-stricken to move.
8. **cower:** cowering in a corner, cowered in fear
The children cowered a corner as the bully approached them.
9. **shrink back:** shrink back in horror;
Fearing a beating the dog shrank into a corner.
10. **perspire:** perspire profusely; perspiration drips/ rolls down
The man was perspiring profusely as he tried to defuse the bomb.
11. **heart thumps
beats/pounds** thumps/beats/pounds violently/wildly/loudly
He could hear his heart thumping loudly as he walked up the

12. **pale/white:**
ashen
you look pale/white/ashen; your face turns pale/white/ashen
When he heard the bad news, his face turned ashen.
13. **look as if:**
looked as if he had seen a ghost; looked as if he was about to faint
When Tom emerged from the cave, his face was white and he looked as if he had seen a ghost.
14. **stare/gaze:**
gaze in horror; stare in horror; stare, horrified, as...
gaze, horrified, as...
The woman gazed in horror at the gigantic ape as it broke through its cage.
15. **eyes widen:**
Eyes wide with fear, he...; His eyes widened with fear as he gazed at...
His eyes widened with fear and he began to tremble.
16. **your voice**
trembles/
quivers/
quavers/shakes
voice was trembling; voice was shaking; voice was quivering;
voice was quavering;
His voice was trembling as he began his speech.
17. **stammer/**
stutter:
stammer/stutter nervously
The child stuttered nervously when the teacher questioned him.
18. **mutter:**
mutter a prayer
John muttered a prayer for safety as he dashed into the flames to save the child.
19. **pray:**
pray desperately
He prayed desperately for help to come.
20. **pant:**
"Help! Help! Someone's drowning in the river!" he panted.
21. **shriek/scream:**
She shrieked/screamed when the mouse ran over her feet.

Expressing Surprise

1. **startled** : to be given an unexpected, slight shock; made to jump
"Boo!" he yelled. I was startled.
2. **wonder** : feeling of astonishment mixed with admiration or disbelief
The children watched the gymnasts in silent wonder.
3. **amaze** : fill with great surprise
astonish : I was amazed/astonished that he could do 100 sums in 10 minutes.
4. **stun** : to shock or surprise very greatly
He was stunned by the jury's verdict of guilty.
5. **astound** : to fill with shocked surprise because of something unexpected
The doctor was astounded by the cancer patient's sudden recovery.
6. **gape** : to look hard in surprise with the mouth open
The men gaped at the belly dancer.
7. **dumbfound** : to surprise to the point of being unable to speak
We were dumbfounded to see the blind man's eyes open.
8. **stupefy** : to surprise greatly
We were stupefied by her ignorance.
9. **aghast** : suddenly filled with surprise/shock or fear
She was aghast when told of her husband's huge debt.
10. **flabbergast** : to fill with shock/wonder so that one is unable to think clearly
"Well!" I exclaimed, flabbergasted at Dr Ng's deceit.



STUDY THIS!

How Do You React When Surprised?

Body	Look	Eyes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● You jump (how?) ● You stare (how?) ● you faint ● you are unable to speak (speechless) ● your mouth falls open ● you gasp/catch your breath ● nearly die of shock 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● dumbstruck ● dazed ● thunder-struck ● incredulous 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● open wide in ● almost pop out of your head ● you blink (how?) ● rub your eyes in ● can't believe your eyes



STUDY THIS!

Examples

How Do You React When Surprised?

1. **you jump:** you nearly jump out of your skin; something makes you jump;
When I heard a loud knock on my door at midnight, I nearly jumped out of my skin.
2. **you stare:** You stare in amazement; stare in wonder; stare looking incredulous;
He stared at me aghast, when I told him that his pet dog, Rover, had been run over by a car.
3. **you faint:** I almost fainted when I heard that my mother had been involved in an accident.
4. **you are unable to speak:** He stared at me, speechless...; he stared at me dumbfounded...; He stared at me, lost for words...;
5. **your mouth falls open:** her mouth fell open in surprise; you stare, open-mouthed at something...;
She was speechless with astonishment when she saw the Principal, Mr. Tan, wearing a dress!
6. **you gasp/catch your breath:** gasped in amazement; caught his breath in surprise;
He caught his breath when he saw the beautiful model, Claudia Schiffer in person.
7. **nearly die of shock:** I nearly died of shock when I heard that I had passed my 'O' Levels with flying colours.
8. **dumbstruck:** He looked dumbstruck when she rejected his proposal of marriage.
9. **dazed:** He stared at me, a dazed expression on his face, when I told him that his house had just burned down.

Extremely surprised or shocked.

- 10. thunderstruck:** The man was thunderstruck when he returned home and found that his wife had disappeared with his life savings.
- 11. incredulous:** stare at someone, incredulous; you sound incredulous;
"What! You killed that tiger with your bare hands?" he asked, looking incredulous.
~ surprised
- 12. eyes open wide:** your eyes widen in astonishment; eyes wide with surprise;
Her eyes widened in astonishment when she saw a thousand dollar bill lying on the ground.
- 13. eyes almost pop out of your head:** My grandmother's eyes nearly popped out of her head when she saw the teenager with purple-green hair.
- 14. you blink:** When she saw Michael Jackson in the street, (she blinked several times, unable to believe her eyes.)
- 15. you rub your eyes:** rub your eyes in disbelief; rub your eyes in amazement
He rubbed his eyes, unable to believe what he was seeing.
- 16. can't believe your eyes:** No one could believe their eyes when they saw Superman landing at Takashimaya.

Expressing Sadness

1. **pensive** : thoughtful and quiet, perhaps sad.

pensive



Eg. He became so pensive that she did not like to break into his thoughts.

2. **sombre** : giving an impression of sadness or seriousness.

Eg. The doctor's face was sombre as he broke the bad news to us, "I'm afraid your father didn't make it"

3. **brooding** : to keep on thinking and thinking about something unpleasant.

Eg. He has been brooding over how furious he is with my father.

brooding



4. **miserable** : to be very unhappy.

Eg. Ronald felt depressed and miserable after losing his job.

5. **melancholy** : an intense feeling of sadness that lasts for a long time.

Eg. When he left, she sank into melancholy.



melancholy

6. **your heart aches** : you experience great sadness and emotional suffering.

Eg. It makes my heart ache to see pictures of starving children in Rwanda.

7. **a heavy heart** : you feel sadness and emotional pain.

Eg. With a heavy heart, I walked away from the man I loved.

8. **distressed** : upset because something unpleasant or alarming has happened.

Eg. He was really distressed when his wife left him.

9. **despairing** : you feel very unhappy and have no hope that things will improve.

Eg. Life in Africa as a medical worker was very difficult, and I was often quite despairing.



despairing

depress

10. **desolate** : sad, lonely and without hope.

Eg. When his entire family perished in the fire, he felt desolate.

11. **hopeless** : a feeling of desperation because there seems to be no possibility of comfort or success.

hopeless



Eg. A feeling of hopelessness gripped her when she realized what an enormous task she had undertaken.

12. **inconsolable** : very sad and cannot be comforted.

Eg. Irene was inconsolably distressed and nothing we said could comfort her.

inconsolable



STUDY THIS!

How do you React when Sad?

Body	Look	Eyes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● a lump comes to your throat/ there is a lump in your throat ● you swallow hard ● your lips quiver ● burst into tears ● break down and cry ● sob or weep (how?) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● mournful ● forlorn ● gloomy ● depressed ● grief-stricken ● as if 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● fill with tears ● brim with tears ● are red from crying ● stare (how?)
Voice	Speech	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● trembles ● quivers ● is shaky 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● you sigh ● you sniff ● you moan ● you wail ● you howl 	



Examples

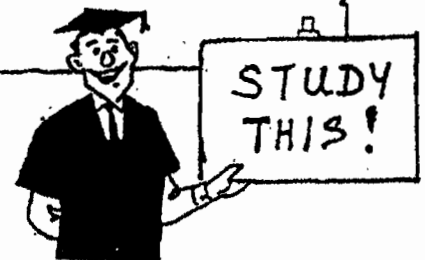
How Do You React When Sad?

1. a lump comes to your throat: there is a lump in your throat; a lump comes to your throat;
A lump came to Sally's throat as she watched her husband leave for the army.
2. you swallow hard: Tony's eyes brimmed with tears but he swallowed hard and refused to cry.
3. your lips quiver: lips began to quiver...; lips quiver uncontrollably; lips quiver as....;
Her voice grew shaky and her lips began to quiver as she narrated the horrors of the war.
4. burst into tears: When Jane heard that she had failed the examination, she burst into tears and ran out of the room.
5. break down and cry: The woman broke down and cried bitterly as she confessed to the murder of her child.
6. sob/weep: sobbed pitifully; sobbed uncontrollably; body was wracked with sobs; wept in anguish; wept uncontrollably
The old woman wept loudly when she found her savings stolen.
7. mournful: looked mournful; had a mournful expression on his face
Everyone at the funeral looked sad and mournful.
8. forlorn: looked forlorn; had a forlorn look on her face;
Sally looked forlorn as she waved good-bye to her family.
9. gloomy: stared gloomily at...; appeared gloomy;
The children stared gloomily at the floor when told that their fishing trip would be cancelled.
10. depressed: The manager came out of the office looking rather depressed.
11. grief-stricken: The residents were grief-stricken to find their loved ones buried beneath the rubble.
Broken stones or concrete.

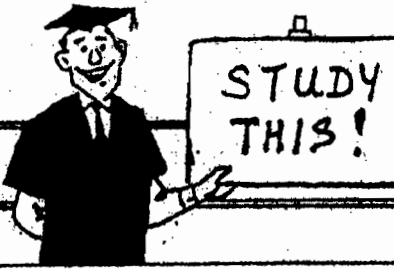
12. looked as if: looked as if she was about to break down
She looked as if she had been crying for hours when she emerged from the room.
13. your eyes fill with tears: Her eyes filled with tears when the judge announced the verdict of "guilty."
14. your eyes brim with tears: Mr. Wu's eyes brimmed with tears as he stared at the devastation caused by the explosion.
15. eyes are red from crying: Aunt Mary, whose eyes were red from crying, could barely speak when she was called upon to testify.
16. you stare: stared blankly into space; stared gloomily; stared sorrowfully;
The teenager stared sorrowfully at his report card and wished that he had studied harder.
17. your voice trembles/quivers: voice trembling with emotion; spoke in a trembling voice; voice was quivering; voice was shaky;
The officer's voice was trembling with emotion as he told of how his comrades were beaten and tortured.
18. you sigh: sighed heavily; sighed and stared;
As the woman gazed at the photograph of her son, she sighed and wished she had never allowed him to go bungee jumping.
19. you sniff: "It wasn't my fault. Please don't hit me," the boy sniffed, as he held out the palm of his hand.
20. you moan: moaned pitifully; moaned loudly
"Who will help me? There's no hope. I will be a street beggar all my life," moaned the old man sorrowfully.
21. you wail: wailed uncontrollably; wailed loudly;
"It's not fair...It's not fair! You can't take my father away," wailed the young boy.
22. you howl: howled in sorrow; howled in grief;
The mourners howled loudly as the cortege left for the cemetery.
Someone who attends a funeral.

Expressing Anger

1. **irk** : to annoy/provoke
It irks me to see food being wasted.
2. **annoy** : to make someone a little angry or impatient; irritate
I was annoyed with him because he kept interrupting my conversation.
3. **enrage** : to make very angry; infuriate
Mr. Tan was enraged to find workers had disobeyed his orders.
4. **fury** : a state of very great anger
The young man walked out in fury after the argument.
5. **seethe** : to be very angry/agitated
She was seething with rage at his remarks.
6. **fume** : to be angry and restless (often without expressing one's feeling fully)
a) She was fuming with annoyance because the books hadn't arrived.
b) He fumed at the delay.
7. **rage** : a sudden feeling of wild uncontrollable anger
He flies into a rage every time his wife mentions money.
8. **exasperate** : to annoy or make extremely angry (especially by testing the patience of)
a) I was exasperated by/at all the delay.
b) In sheer exasperation, she gave the machine a kick.
9. **incense** : to make extremely angry; outrage
The lawyer was incensed to find his car scratched.
10. **wrath** : strong fierce anger (especially based on the desire to punish someone for harm done)
The management incurred the wrath of the union by breaking the agreement.



How Do You React When Angry?

Body	Look	Eyes
<p>You tremble quiver clench your fists shake your fists grit your teeth point an angry finger pound <i>→ stepping heel</i> throw (something) at leave the room storm off stomp out</p>	<p>You scowl frown pout sulk glower</p> <p>Your face turns ... red purple livid</p>	<p>Your eyes blaze flash with ...</p> <p>You glare stare (how?)</p>
		
Voice	Speech	
<p>Your voice quivers with is raised is sharp</p>	<p>You screech shriek scream bellow roar snarl growl yell explode</p>	

Examples

How Do You React When Angry?

1. **you tremble/
quiver:** Trembling with anger..; Quivering with anger....; her whole body trembled/quivered...; Quivering with rage, she shouted, " Get out of my sight!"
2. **you clench
your fists:** The young man clenched his fists and muttered angrily as the policeman booked him for speeding.
3. **shake your fists:** The fruit-seller shook his fists furiously at the boys who had toppled his neatly-stacked piles of fruit.
4. **grit your teeth:
eyes flash/blaze
with anger:** His eyes flashed (blazed) with anger and he gritted his teeth as his father hurled abuse at him.
5. **point an angry
finger:** Pointing an angry finger at the bully, the Principal roared, "Get to my office at once!"
6. **pound your fists:** pound your fists on the table; pound your fists at someone; The hysterical child pounded his fists against his mother as she dragged him out of the toy-store.
7. **throw something
at someone:** The furious wife threw pots and pans at her husband.
8. **leave the room:** leave the room in a huff; leave in a fit of anger; The Committee members left the room in a huff when the Chairman insulted them.
9. **storm/stomp off:** storm in/out of a room; stomp out of a room; She stormed (stomped) off angrily after the argument with her boyfriend.
10. **you scowl:** I scowled angrily at him when he spilt ink all over my new text-book.

- 11. you frown:** The teacher frowned when she walked into the class and saw litter everywhere.
- 12. you pout:** She tossed back her hair and pouted when her boyfriend told her he could not take her out that night.
- 13. you sulk:** After she was scolded by her mother she sulked the whole evening and refused to talk to anyone.
- 14. you glower:** The librarian glowered at the students who were talking loudly and disturbing others.
- 15. your face turns red:** Her face turned red as she shrieked, "Get lost, you two-timing snake!"
- 16. your face turns purple:** His face turned purple...; purple with rage...; When he saw what the vandals had done to his Porsche, he turned purple with rage and roared, "Just wait till I get my hands on the culprits!"
- 17. your face turns livid:** The gardener's face turned livid when he saw what the dogs had done to his seedlings.
- 18. you glare:** The teacher glared angrily at the student who had made the rude remark.
- 19. your voice quivers:** His voice was quivering with rage as he yelled at the boys who were stealing his mangoes.
- 20. your voice is raised:** The teacher raised her voice and ordered the students to be quiet.
- 21. your voice is sharp:** Tom's mother reprimanded him sharply for telling a lie.

DIFFERENT WAYS OF MOVING

When you are :

PROUD

strut : to walk proudly and stiffly (esp. when trying to look important)
The man strutted up the stage to collect his prize.

swagger : to walk with a swinging movement (often showing self-confidence or satisfaction)
The cowboy swaggered down the street after winning the fight.

stride : to walk with long steps.
The head-master strode quickly up to the dormitory.

ANGRY

stamp : to bring the foot down hard; step with force
The spoilt child stamped his feet and wailed loudly.

stomp : to walk with heavy steps
When he heard the news, he stomped angrily up the stairs.

storm : to move with violent anger
She stormed out of the room after the argument.

ON A JOURNEY

tramp : to walk (through or over) with firm heavy steps
The scouts tramped over the hill and down the valley.

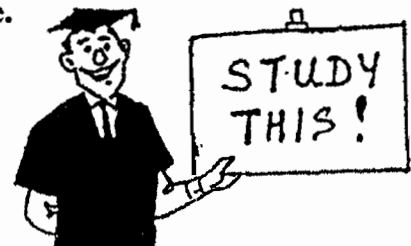
trek : to make a long difficult journey (esp. on foot)
We went trekking in the mountains for our holiday.

hike : to take a long walk in the country (often over rough ground and for pleasure)
The students hiked up Bukit Timah Hill.

WALKING FOR PLEASURE

stroll : to walk slowly/leisurely (esp. for pleasure)
The couple strolled into the park hand in hand.

saunter : to walk in an unhurried way (esp. without much purpose)
He sauntered into the classroom an hour late.





INJURED

limp : to walk with one foot moving less well than the other
The poor wounded dog limped all the way home.

hobble : to walk with difficulty (esp. on one leg)
I hurt my foot and had to hobble home.

OTHER WAYS OF MOVING

pace : to walk with regular, steady steps
He paced up and down the corridor wondering what to do.

march : to walk with firm regular steps like a soldier
"Start marching," bellowed the sergeant-major.

waddle : to walk with short steps like a duck
The fat man waddled up to her.

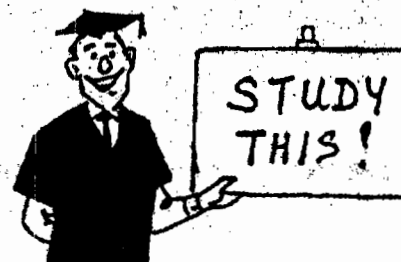
shuffle : to walk, dragging the feet.
The old lady shuffled across the room.

burst into : to move suddenly / violently into.....
The robbers burst into the room, armed with machine guns.

creep : to move slowly and quietly (esp. so as not to attract attention)
We crept upstairs so as not to wake the baby.

sneak : move quickly and secretly, trying not to be seen
I managed to sneak past the guard.

prowl : to move quietly trying not to be seen or heard
I heard someone prowling about in the garden.



ramble : to take a long walk (often in the country)
They rambled through the woods.

UNSTEADY

stagger : to walk unsteadily and with great difficulty; almost falling
The wounded man staggered towards us.

stumble : to fall while moving along
He stumbled over a branch and fell.

reel : to walk unsteadily, moving from side to side as if drunk
When I hit him, he reeled back and almost fell.

totter : to walk with weak, unsteady steps
The old woman tottered down the stairs.

IN A HURRY

dash : to run quickly
He dashed across the street to catch the bus.

dart : to move suddenly and quickly
The thief darted into the bushes.

charge : to rush (as if in an attack)
The students charged into the gymnasium.

sprint : to run at one's fastest speed
Tom sprinted all the way to school.

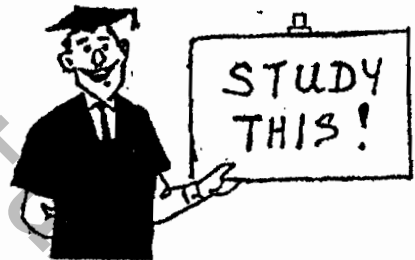
scramble : to move or climb quickly (esp. over rough, steep surface)
I scrambled over the rocks to get a better view.

scurry : to move hastily (esp. with short quick steps)
The mouse scurried into its hole when the cat appeared.

TIRED

plod : to walk slowly often with great difficulty / effort
He plodded up the hill with a heavy knapsack on his back.

trudge : to walk slowly with heavy steps and with effort
The old man trudged home through the deep snow.



Different Ways of Speaking

ANGER

- bark :** to shout at someone in a loud, rough voice
"Get into line!" the sergeant barked.
- shriek :** to shout in a loud high-pitched voice
"Watch out!" she shrieked.
- screech :** to make a loud, unpleasant, high-pitched cry
"You'll be sorry you did that!" she screeched.
- bellow :** to shout in a deep, loud voice
"Get out of my sight!" he bellowed.
- growl :** to speak in a low, angry voice
"There's someone at the door," he growled.
- squawk :** a loud, sharp cry showing anger or surprise; complain loudly
"Come back here !" she squawked. "How dare you cheat me!"
- thunder :** to speak loudly and forcefully because one is angry
"Get out of my house!" he thundered.
- hiss :** to say something in a strong, angry whisper
Pointing a shaking finger at me, he hissed, "You, get out!"

CRYING OR COMPLAINING

- howl :** long, loud cry of pain or anger
I can't stand the howling of my neighbour's children.
- whine :** to complain in an annoying way
He was annoying me with his non-stop whining.
- wail :** to say something in a loud, high-pitched voice that shows you are unhappy or in pain.
He raised a red, wet face and wailed, "I didn't start the fight, she did."
- groan :** to make a deep sad sound when in pain or when unhappy
"Doctor, help me, I'm sick," he groaned.
- whimper :** to say something in a frightened / unhappy way, as if about to cry
"I want to get home," she whimpered.

MOCKING

- sneer :** to express contempt for someone's stupidity or inferiority
She was afraid that he would sneer at her idea.
- mock :** to say something to make someone look foolish, especially by imitating them
It is cruel to mock at the disabled.
- scoff :** to speak in a scornful way to show that you disagree with something someone has said
"What nonsense!" he scoffed.
- jeer :** to show that you think someone is stupid by saying insulting things about them
They jeered at him for being a foreigner.

SPEAKING SOFTLY

- murmur :** to say something very quietly so that not many people can hear
She sat there, tears in her eyes, murmuring his name.
- mutter :** to speak softly often because you are complaining
Danny could be heard muttering to himself about my stupidity.
- mumble :** to speak quietly and indistinctly
"Stop mumbling and speak clearly," the teacher told the boy.
- whisper :** to say something under your breath
Mary whispered, "Follow me and keep very quiet."

OTHER SAYING WORDS

- gasp :** to take a short, quick breath to show surprise or pain
He gave a gasp of amazement.
- stammer :** to speak in a hesitant way, repeating sounds
- stutter :** "But...but...that's impossible," he stammered/stuttered.
- grunt :** to make a low, rough noise because you are bored or disinterested
His father looked up, grunted and then went back to his work.
- retort :** to give a short angry reply
"Mind your own business!" she retorted.

- jabber :** to talk quickly and excitedly
There were a dozen of them, jabbering away in the kitchen.
- babble :** to speak in a confused, excited way
He babbled on and on about his old enemies.
- protest :** to show publicly that you are opposed to something
"You're wrong!" I protested.
- boast :** to talk about one's achievements, abilities, etc. with too much
brag: pride and satisfaction.
He boasted, "I'm the best athlete in Singapore."
- plead :** to ask in an intense, emotional way
"Take me with you," he pleaded.
- beg :** to ask someone seriously to do something
"Please do this favour for me," she begged.
- implore :** to beg desperately
"Please, please, spare the life of my son," she implored.