



11+ vocabulary starter list

A wide vocabulary helps with every part of the 11+ that involves words: reading comprehension, spotting synonyms and opposites, and the word puzzles in verbal reasoning. This starter list gives 60 useful words, each with a short meaning and a sentence showing it in use.

Please note: this is our own list, written by Dr Khan Tuition. It isn't an official list, and it isn't produced by or connected with GL Assessment, Quest Assessments or any school. No list can predict the words in a particular test.

How to use this list

- **Little and often.** Five words a day, said aloud and used in a sentence, works better than fifty in one sitting.
- **Make it personal.** Ask your child to write their own sentence for each word, about something from their own week.
- **Pair it up.** For each word, find one word that means much the same and one that means the opposite. This is exactly the thinking that synonym and antonym questions ask for.
- **Spot it in books.** Keep the list next to the bed or the bookshelf and tick a word each time it turns up in reading.
- **Come back later.** Revisit ticked words after a week, then after a month, to check they've stuck.

Feelings and character

Word	Meaning	In a sentence
anxious	worried and uneasy	He felt anxious the night before the swimming gala.
content	quietly happy and satisfied	The cat lay content in a patch of warm sunlight.
courteous	polite and respectful	The courteous driver waved us across the road.
diligent	hard-working and careful	A diligent gardener, she weeded the beds every morning.
eager	keen and excited to do something	The eager puppy raced to the door at every knock.
frank	honest and direct	My grandmother gave a frank opinion of my new haircut.
humble	not boastful about yourself	Even after winning, the captain stayed humble.

Word	Meaning	In a sentence
indignant	annoyed at something that seems unfair	She was indignant when her brother was blamed for her mistake, and owned up at once.
jovial	cheerful and friendly	The jovial shopkeeper whistled while he stacked the apples.
melancholy	sad in a gentle, thoughtful way	A melancholy tune drifted from the empty hall.
resilient	able to recover quickly from difficulty	Resilient seedlings sprang back after the storm.
timid	shy and easily frightened	The timid deer froze at the edge of the clearing.

Describing things

Word	Meaning	In a sentence
ancient	very old	Ancient oak trees lined the path to the castle.
barren	bare, with little or nothing growing	Nothing grew on the barren hillside.
colossal	extremely large	A colossal wave crashed over the harbour wall.
dilapidated	falling to pieces through neglect	The dilapidated shed leaned against the fence.
fragile	easily broken	Wrap the fragile vase in plenty of paper.
gleaming	shining brightly	Gleaming trophies filled the school's glass cabinet.
immaculate	perfectly clean and tidy	His football boots were immaculate before the match, but not after.
meagre	small in amount; not enough	The explorers shared a meagre supper of dry biscuits.
opaque	not see-through	Opaque curtains kept the room dark until noon.
serene	calm and peaceful	The lake looked serene at dawn.
tranquil	quiet and still	A tranquil garden lay behind the busy high street.
vivid	bright and strong, or very clear	She painted a vivid sunset in orange and red.

Actions

Word	Meaning	In a sentence
abandon	leave behind for good	The crew had to abandon the sinking boat.

Word	Meaning	In a sentence
clamber	climb awkwardly, using hands and feet	We clambered over the slippery rocks.
dawdle	move slowly and waste time	Don't dawdle, or we'll miss the bus.
devour	eat hungrily and quickly	The hungry fox devoured its meal in seconds.
emerge	come out into view	A rabbit emerged from the hedge.
hesitate	pause before acting because you're unsure	He hesitated at the top of the diving board.
meander	follow a winding course	The stream meanders through the meadow.
persuade	get someone to agree by giving reasons	She persuaded her dad to let her stay up for the eclipse.
plummet	fall quickly and steeply	The kite plummeted when the wind dropped.
scrutinise	examine very closely	The detective scrutinised every footprint.
summon	call someone to come	The head teacher summoned the whole year group to the hall.
trudge	walk slowly and heavily	We trudged home through the snow.

Thinking and speaking

Word	Meaning	In a sentence
bewildered	completely confused	The tourists looked bewildered by the map.
concede	admit that something is true, often unwillingly	He conceded that his sister's plan was better.
contemplate	think about carefully	She contemplated the puzzle for a long time.
deduce	work something out from clues	From the muddy paw prints, we deduced the dog had been in the garden.
exclaim	cry out suddenly	"Look, a shooting star!" he exclaimed.
implore	beg desperately	The children implored their teacher for five more minutes of play.
mutter	speak quietly and unclearly	He muttered something about homework under his breath.
ponder	think something over slowly	Grandad pondered his next chess move.
retort	reply quickly, often sharply	"Not likely!" she retorted.

Word	Meaning	In a sentence
speculate	guess without knowing for sure	The class speculated about what was inside the box.
verify	check that something is true	Always verify your answer by working backwards.
vague	not clear or exact	The directions were so vague that we got lost.

Words that are easy to mix up

Word	Meaning	In a sentence
abundant	existing in large amounts	Blackberries were abundant along the lane in September.
scarce	in short supply	Fresh water was scarce on the island.
benevolent	kind and wishing to help	A benevolent neighbour fixed our broken gate.
malicious	meaning to cause harm	The rumour was malicious and completely untrue.
conceal	hide	She concealed the present behind her back.
reveal	show or make known	The magician revealed the missing card.
expand	grow larger	A balloon expands as you blow into it.
contract	become smaller	Metal contracts as it cools.
reluctant	unwilling	He was reluctant to leave the party.
willing	ready and happy to do something	Plenty of willing helpers stacked the chairs.
temporary	lasting only a short time	The road sign was temporary.
permanent	lasting for ever, or for a long time	The marker pen left a permanent stain.

Practise with pairs

Try these with your child. Answers are at the bottom.

Closest in meaning: which word in the brackets means most nearly the same as the first word?

1. serene (noisy, calm, bright)
2. meagre (tiny, generous, angry)
3. scrutinise (ignore, examine, hurry)

Opposite in meaning: which word in the brackets means the opposite?

1. abundant (plentiful, scarce, heavy)

2. reluctant (unwilling, tired, willing)

3. conceal (reveal, cover, keep)

Answers: 1 calm, 2 tiny, 3 examine, 4 scarce, 5 willing, 6 reveal.

Want more help?

Vocabulary is one part of 11+ preparation. Dr Khan Tuition at 36 High Street, Burnham prepares children for the Buckinghamshire Secondary Transfer Test and the Slough Consortium test. Call 01753 378222 to book a free 30-minute consultation.

Sources: word list, meanings and example sentences written by Dr Khan Tuition (October 2026).
Test-provider facts: [Buckinghamshire Council: the Secondary Transfer Test](#); [Herschel Grammar School: Year 7 Admissions 2028](#).

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