Term	Definition
Abatement	When an estate does not have enough money or assets to pay all gifts in full, the gifts are reduced.
Absolutely	The person or charity receiving the gift owns it fully, with no conditions or restrictions.
Ademption	When a specific gift in a will fails because the item is no longer owned by the person when they die.
Administration Period	The time between someone's death and the point when their estate has been fully dealt with and paid out.
Administrator	The person who deals with an estate when there is no valid will, or when no executor is able or willing to act.
Advance Statement	A non-binding note explaining someone's wishes and preferences for future care if they cannot make decisions later.
Advertising for creditors	A notice asking anyone owed money by the estate to come forward before the estate is paid out. This helps protect the people dealing with the estate from unknown debts later.
Affidavit	A written statement that is sworn or confirmed as true in front of an authorised person.
Assets	Everything of value someone owns, such as money, property, possessions and investments.
Attestation	The formal witnessing of someone signing a document.
Attestation Clause	The wording in a will that confirms it was signed and witnessed correctly.
Attorney	A person legally appointed to make decisions or act for someone else under a power of attorney.
Beneficial Ownership	The right to benefit from an asset, even if the legal title is held in someone else's name.
Beneficiary / Recipient	A person or organisation that receives a gift or benefit from an estate or trust.
Bequest	A gift left in a will, often money or personal belongings.
Bona Vacantia	Ownerless property. If someone dies without a will and no relatives are entitled to inherit, their estate may pass to the Crown.
Capacity Assessment	A check to see whether someone can make a particular decision at the time it needs to be made.
Capital Gains Tax (CGT)	Tax that may be due if an estate asset is sold for more than its value at the date of death. If a charity is involved, specialist advice may help reduce or avoid this tax.
Chargeable Gift	A gift that may count when working out Inheritance Tax.
Charitable Legacy	A gift left to a charity in a will.
Chattels	Personal belongings that can be moved, such as furniture, jewellery, cars and artwork.
Civil Partnership	A legally registered partnership under the Civil Partnership Act 2004.

Codicil	A document that changes or adds to an existing will. It must be signed and witnessed in the same way as a will.
Common Law Marriage	In England and Wales, “common law marriage” has no legal status. Unmarried partners do not automatically have the same rights as spouses or civil partners.
Conditional / Contingent Legacy	A gift that is only made if a stated condition is met.
Court of Protection	The court that makes decisions for people who cannot make certain decisions for themselves, and can appoint deputies to act for them.
Covenant	A formal legal promise or agreement.
De Facto Relationship	An unmarried relationship where two people live together as partners.
Deed of Variation	A legal document that lets beneficiaries change who receives part of an estate. It is usually needed within two years of death for tax purposes.
Demonstrative Legacy	A gift of money that the will says should be paid from a particular source.
Dependant(s)	Someone who relied on the person who died for money, care or support, and who may be able to make a claim against the estate.
Deputy	A person appointed by the Court of Protection to make decisions for someone who cannot make those decisions themselves.
Deputyship	The legal authority given by the Court of Protection to manage someone’s affairs when they cannot do so themselves.
Discretionary Trust	A trust where the trustees decide which beneficiaries receive money or assets, and how much they receive.
Disinherit	To leave someone out of a will so they do not receive anything from the estate.
Domicile	A person’s permanent legal home for some legal and tax purposes. It is not the same as nationality or where they currently live.
Donor	A person who gives a gift or makes a power of attorney.
Equal Shares	Each beneficiary receives the same-sized share.
Estate	Everything someone owns when they die, after debts and liabilities are taken into account.
Estate Accounts	A record showing the estate’s assets, debts, income, expenses and payments to beneficiaries.
Excepted Estate	An estate that does not need a full Inheritance Tax return because it meets HMRC’s rules.
Execution	The formal signing and witnessing of a will or other legal document.
Executor	A person named in a will to deal with the estate. This can include applying for probate, collecting assets, paying debts and distributing gifts.
Executor’s Expenses	Reasonable costs paid by an executor while dealing with the estate. Payment for their time is only allowed in limited situations.

Executor's Year	The first 12 months after death, when executors are usually expected to deal with the estate before beneficiaries press for payment.
Ex-gratia Payment	A voluntary payment made because it feels morally right, not because it is legally required. Charities may need Charity Commission approval before making one.
Free of Tax	A gift where the estate, rather than the beneficiary, pays any tax linked to that gift.
Freehold	Owning land or property without a fixed end date, subject to any legal restrictions.
Funeral Wishes	A person's wishes for their funeral. These are usually not legally binding but can guide executors and family.
Grant of Probate	The court document that confirms an executor has authority to deal with an estate where there is a valid will.
Grant of Representation	The general name for the court document that gives personal representatives authority to deal with an estate.
Guardian	A person appointed, often in a will, to care for children under 18 if the parents die.
Heir	A person who is entitled to inherit when someone dies without a valid will.
Holographic Will	A handwritten will. In England and Wales, it still has to meet the normal rules for signing and witnessing to be valid.
IHT400	The HMRC form used when a full Inheritance Tax account is needed.
Immovable Property	Property that cannot be moved, such as land or buildings.
Income Tax	Tax that may be due on income received before death or while the estate is being dealt with.
Indemnity	A promise to repay or protect someone if they suffer a particular loss or liability.
Inheritance (Provision for Family and Dependants) Act 1975	A law that allows certain people to ask the court for reasonable financial support from an estate.
Inheritance Tax (IHT)	Tax on an estate above the available allowances. The standard rate is 40%, but exemptions and reliefs may apply.
Inheritance Tax (IHT) — Charities	Gifts to UK charities are generally free from Inheritance Tax. Leaving enough to charity may also reduce the tax rate on part of the estate to 36%.
Inheritance Tax (IHT) Calculation	The working out of any Inheritance Tax due, after considering the estate value, debts, gifts, exemptions, reliefs and allowances.
Inheritance Tax Threshold	The amount that can pass before Inheritance Tax is charged. The nil-rate band is currently £325,000, and an extra residence allowance may also apply.
Inquest	A public investigation by a coroner into how someone died.
Insolvency	When the estate does not have enough money or assets to pay all its debts and liabilities.
Intestacy	When someone dies without a valid will, or when their will does not deal with the whole estate.

Intestacy Rules	The legal rules that decide who inherits when someone dies without a valid will. The rules are different in different parts of the UK.
Intestate	A person who dies without a valid will.
Issue	A person's direct descendants, such as children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.
Joint Tenancy	A way of jointly owning property where the deceased person's share usually passes automatically to the surviving joint owner, rather than under the will.
Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA)	A legal document that appoints attorneys to make decisions for someone. The two types are Property and Financial Affairs, and Health and Welfare.
Leasehold	The right to use or live in a property for a fixed period under a lease.
Legacy	A gift left in a will.
Legator	A person who leaves a gift in their will. In the UK, this person is more commonly called the testator.
Letter of Intent / Letter of Wishes	A non-binding note explaining someone's wishes, often about funeral plans, gifts or guidance for trustees.
Letters of Administration	The court document issued when there is no valid will, or when no executor can act.
Letters of Administration with Will Annexed	The court document issued when there is a valid will but no executor is able or willing to act.
Liabilities	Debts, taxes and other amounts the estate must pay.
Life Interest	The right to use property or receive income from it during someone's lifetime.
Living Will / Advance Decision	A written decision refusing certain medical treatment in the future if the person later cannot make the decision themselves. It is legally binding only if the rules are met.
Matrimonial Home	The home shared by spouses or civil partners.
Memorandum of Wishes	A non-binding document giving guidance to executors or trustees about someone's wishes.
Mental Capacity	The ability to make a particular decision at the time it needs to be made.
Minor	A person under 18.
Mirror Will	One of two wills, usually made by a couple, that are written in similar terms.
Movable Property	Personal property that can be moved, such as vehicles, jewellery and artwork.
Next of Kin	A person's closest relative or nominated contact. Being next of kin does not automatically give someone legal authority or inheritance rights.
Nil-Rate Band Allowance	The part of an estate that is charged to Inheritance Tax at 0%.
Office of the Public Guardian	The organisation that registers LPAs and supervises deputies and attorneys in England and Wales.
Parental Responsibility	The legal rights and duties a parent has for a child and the child's property.

Pecuniary Charitable Legacy	A fixed amount of money left to a charity.
Pecuniary Legacy	A gift of a fixed amount of money.
Per Capita	Each named beneficiary receives an equal share.
Per Stirpes	If a beneficiary has died, their share passes down to their children or other descendants.
Personal Chattels	Personal belongings that can be moved, such as furniture, jewellery, cars and artwork. It does not usually include money, investments, business items or items held only as investments.
Personal Representatives	The executors or administrators responsible for dealing with an estate.
Post-Mortem	A medical examination to find out the cause of death.
Potentially Exempt Transfer	A lifetime gift that may fall outside Inheritance Tax if the person who made the gift lives for seven years afterwards.
Power Reserved	When an executor does not apply for probate now but keeps the right to apply later.
Predeceased	Having died before another person.
Pro Rata	In proportion.
Probate	The legal permission to deal with someone's money, property and belongings after they die. Strictly, a grant of probate is used when there is a valid will and an executor applies.
Probate Registry	The court office or service that deals with probate applications and issues grants.
Property and Other Major Assets	Important assets, such as land, buildings or investments, that may need to be valued, sold or transferred while the estate is being dealt with.
Proving the Will	Showing the Probate Registry that a will is valid and can be accepted for probate.
Registrar	The official who records births, deaths and marriages.
Registration	The official recording of an event, such as a death, with the registrar.
Remainderman	The person who receives trust property after a life interest ends.
Renouncing Probate	When an executor formally gives up the role and decides not to deal with the estate. This is usually permanent once completed.
Residence Nil-Rate Band	An extra Inheritance Tax allowance that may apply when a home passes to direct descendants, such as children or grandchildren.
Residuary Charitable Legacy	A share of what is left in the estate after debts, taxes, expenses and other gifts have been paid, left to a charity.
Residuary Legacy	A gift of all or part of what is left in the estate after debts, taxes, expenses and other gifts have been paid.
Residue	What is left in the estate after debts, taxes, expenses and other gifts have been paid.
Revocation	The legal cancellation of a will or part of a will.
Severance	Changing joint ownership of property from joint tenants to tenants in common.

Share of Residue	A percentage or fraction of what is left in the estate.
Shares	Investments in companies that may need to be valued or transferred while the estate is being dealt with.
Social Fund Funeral Payment	A Funeral Expenses Payment may help eligible people with funeral costs and may be recoverable from the estate.
Specific Legacy	A gift of a particular item or asset.
Spouse	A person’s husband or wife.
Statutory Legacy	The fixed amount a surviving spouse or civil partner receives under the intestacy rules when there are children or other descendants.
Statutory Will	A will approved by the Court of Protection for someone who cannot make a will themselves.
Substituted Charity Gift	A gift to a charity that only takes effect if another beneficiary cannot inherit.
Substitution Clause	A clause saying who should receive a gift if the original beneficiary dies first.
Survivorship Clause	A clause saying that a beneficiary must outlive the person who died by a stated period before they can inherit.
Tax Matters	The responsibility of the personal representatives to deal with the deceased person’s tax affairs and any estate tax obligations.
Tenant for Life	A person who can benefit from property during their lifetime, after which it passes to someone else.
Tenants in Common	Co-owners who each own a separate share of a property. Their share can pass under their will or under intestacy rules.
Testamentary Expenses	Costs involved in getting probate and dealing with the estate, depending on the will and the law.
Testator / Testatrix	A person who has made a will. “Testator” is now commonly used for any gender.
Title	The legal right to own or hold property.
Tracing Beneficiaries	Finding the people who are entitled to inherit before the estate is paid out.
Transferable Nil-Rate Band	The unused percentage of a spouse’s or civil partner’s nil-rate band that can be used by the surviving spouse or civil partner’s estate.
Trust	An arrangement where trustees hold and manage assets for beneficiaries.
Trust Fund	The assets held in a trust.
Trustee	A person or organisation responsible for managing trust assets for the beneficiaries.
Valid	Legally effective and accepted as meeting the required rules.
Widowed	A person whose spouse or civil partner has died and who has not remarried or entered a new civil partnership.
Will	A legal document that says what should happen to someone’s estate after they die.

Witnesses	Two adults must watch the person sign the will and then sign it themselves. If a witness, or their spouse or civil partner, is left a gift, that gift will usually fail.