

Politically correct language

What do you think the following words and expressions mean? How are they said in normal or traditional English?

sanitation engineer

mail carrier

physically challenged

mentally challenged/ learning difficulties

hearing impaired

seniors

visually impaired

follicly challenged/ comb free

fire fighter

visually challenged

living impaired

chair

banned

Try to find any that you weren't sure about on the next page.



(Possibly) politically incorrect language

disabled/ handicapped
mentally disabled
blind/ going blind
deaf/ going deaf
short
bald/ balding
old people
uneducated
dead
ugly

blacklisted
white lie
oriental

fireman
chairman
policeman
mankind
actress
air stewardess
postman/ mailman
garbage man/ bin man

Discussion questions

- Which examples of politically correct language are ridiculous? Which ones are actually jokes, do you think?
- Which expressions in the lists of politically incorrect language would you avoid using?
- Do you have similar issues in your own language?
- The words above are divided into three sections by what way they are politically incorrect. What are the three sections? Are these all equally important?
- What are the arguments for and against politically correct language? Which side do you fall on?

Practice

Without looking at the top of the last page, work together to say the things at the bottom in more indirect, polite or politically correct ways.

Try to think of politically correct expressions for other negative words, e.g. the ones above that you haven't talked about yet, and see if the other groups can guess what you are talking about.



Answer key

sanitation engineer – bin man

mail carrier – postman/ mailman

physically challenged – disabled/ handicapped

mentally challenged/ learning difficulties – mentally disabled

hearing impaired – deaf/ going deaf

seniors – old people

visually impaired – blind/ going blind

follicly challenged/ comb free – bald/ balding

fire fighter – fireman

visually challenged – ugly

living impaired – dead

chair – chairman

banned – blacklisted

Discussion questions

The three sections are based on avoiding negative words, being racist, and being sexist.

Practice

Some suggestions for the other words in the list:

short – vertically challenged

uneducated – book challenged

white lie – innocent lie

policeman – police officer

mankind – humankind

actress – actor

air stewardess – cabin crew