

PC language used to practice

Which one of the pairs below do you think is old fashioned and which is used now?

coloured – Black/ African American

Asian – Oriental

The examples below are similar to those above, but these include some more modern additions that have not become popular and possibly politically incorrect phrases that are still common. Make guesses about the uses of some of these expressions and check with your teacher.

- chair/ chairperson – chairman
- sanitation engineer – bin man
- native Americans – American Indians
- mail carrier – postman/ mailman
- mentally challenged/ learning difficulties – mentally disabled
- physically challenged – disabled/ handicapped
- visually impaired – blind/ going blind
- hearing impaired – deaf/ going deaf
- seniors/ pensioners – old people
- follically challenged/ comb free – bald/ balding
- fire fighter – fireman
- visually challenged – ugly
- living impaired – dead
- banned – blacklisted
- innocent lie – white lie
- vertically challenged – short
- book challenged – uneducated
- police officer – policeman
- humankind – mankind
- actor – actress
- cabin crew/ flight attendant – air stewardess
- homemaker – housewife
- Caucasian – white
- festive season – Christmas
- happy holidays – Merry Xmas
- camera operator – cameraman
- gay – LGBT

Do you know any other PC and non-PC terms in English?

Are there similar issues with your own language?

Suggested answers

Terms considered old-fashioned and/ or not politically correct

coloured, Oriental

PC/ Non-PC terms with comments

chair/ chairperson – chairman – chairman is still common, especially when it's a job

sanitation engineer – bin man – although it may be an official job title, most people think

sanitation engineer for bin man is just silly

native Americans – American Indians – native Americans is more common nowadays, but some native Americans prefer the term Indians

mail carrier – postman/ mailman – mail carrier is the official term in the US and slowly becoming more common in normal speech

mentally challenged/ learning difficulties – mentally disabled – the former is almost always used by officials and has somewhat come into everyday speech

physically challenged – disabled/ handicapped – the former isn't common in speech

visually impaired – blind/ going blind – blind is still common in speech, but officials almost always use visually impaired

hearing impaired – deaf/ going deaf – the former isn't as common as visually impaired

seniors/ pensioners – old people – the PC terms are common but no one seems to find old people all that non-PC in normal life

follically challenged/ comb free – bald/ balding – the former pair of expressions are made up joke PC terms, so everyone still says the latter

fire fighter – fireman – fire fighter is always used by officials and has come into everyday speech, especially in the US

visually challenged – ugly – this is a joke made up to mock PC language

living impaired – dead – ditto

banned – blacklisted – there was a movement to stop using expressions where black has a negative meaning just in case that reinforced racism but that trend, along with the reaction against it, seems to have died down. Both are generally okay.

innocent lie – white lie – the movement to stop using white to mean good had even less support than the one about blackness, so innocent lie is very rare

vertically challenged – short – this is a joke

book challenged – uneducated – this is also supposed to be funny

police officer – policeman – policeman is still quite common in normal speech, especially in the UK where WPC is still a common term

humankind – mankind – mankind is still more common, although you might have to be careful in academic circles

actor – actress – it is now very common to refer to female actors in the media, but actress is probably still more common in normal speech

cabin crew/ flight attendant – air stewardess – air stewardess is old fashioned

homemaker – housewife – housewife is still more common in normal conversation

Caucasian – white – Caucasian is only used to sound more official or technical

festive season – Christmas – it is now quite standard in America to use phrases that are not specific to one religion when talking about the winter holiday

happy holidays – Merry Xmas – ditto

camera operator – cameraman – the former is very rare in normal speech

gay – LGBT – LGBT has recently become more common