

# Talk a Lot

## Intermediate Book 1

### Why Use Politically Correct Language?

#### Introduction

**Political Correctness** (PC) is an unofficial movement that rose to prominence in the 1980s and early '90s. Its aim is to promote equality in society and reduce discrimination towards people belonging to different groups. Among its various activities that aim to influence society and government, one of its strategies is to make taboo forms of language that potentially cause offence among – generally speaking – minority groups, on the grounds of:

**ability**  
**age**  
**appearance**

**gender**  
**race**  
**religion**

**sexuality**  
**status**  
**other reasons**

In short, politically correct language means words and phrases that we use, instead of potentially derogatory or insulting language, to talk about something negative without causing offence. It is connected with **euphemism**, which can be defined as:

*"A euphemism is a word or phrase that replaces part of a sentence which is considered offensive or taboo – i.e. that cannot be talked about in "polite" conversation."*

Example: John is Ellen's boyfriend, but she introduces him to her parents as "A close friend", because she doesn't want them to know how serious their relationship is.

There are two kinds of politically correct language:

1. **Extreme Politically Correct Language:** phrases that we don't use very often in everyday life, because they seem too extreme or sound silly
  - e.g. "My little Billy isn't fat, he's just *big-boned*."

Aim: to try to see something positive in something negative. But taken to extremes political correctness can become a bit of a joke in itself.
2. **Everyday Politically Correct Language:** phrases that we *do* need to use in everyday life, to avoid offending or stigmatising other people, especially people who belong to minority groups.
  - e.g. "We're planning a special lunch for *senior citizens* next week." [not *old people*]  
More respectful or neutral phrases replace blunter, more potentially insensitive or offensive language. For example, politicians are keen to use inclusive PC language in order to appeal to the greatest number of voters. Another example of required politically correct language is the use of gender-neutral terms, e.g. "police officer" instead of "policeman", to reflect changes in our workforce and culture.

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#### 1. Extreme Politically Correct Language

Let's imagine two different situations:

##### Situation 1

You start a new job in a large office. The person showing you round describes some of the members of staff using the following politically correct language. Match each PC phrase with one of the franker meanings:

a) deaf	b) ugly	c) drunk	d) old	e) fat	f) ignorant
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1. Paul isn't \_\_\_\_\_, he's just rather **factually unencumbered**.
2. Jean over there isn't \_\_\_\_\_, she's just **horizontally enabled**.
3. As you can see, Brioney is \_\_\_\_\_, but we prefer to say **aurally inconvenienced**.
4. Tina is almost sixty-six, but we don't call her \_\_\_\_\_; rather **chronologically gifted**.
5. Tommy works hard but has the tendency to get \_\_\_\_\_ – or as we like to put it, **over-served** – every now and again.
6. One might devise some cruel nicknames for Maggie, but I prefer to think of her as **visually challenging**, and not \_\_\_\_\_.

##### Situation 2

Your job doesn't work out and after about six months you begin a new job at a furniture store. The person showing you round describes a few of the people who work there using the following quite direct and insensitive language. You are so used to PC language by now that you try to correct your new colleague, using one of the following PC phrases in each case:

a) terminally inconvenienced
b) an individual with temporarily unmet objectives
c) residentially flexible

d) motivationally deficient
e) potentially good
f) involuntarily leisured

1. When you say that Jonathan is **lazy**, do you mean \_\_\_\_\_?
2. I prefer to think of your former colleague, Mr. Hoskins, as \_\_\_\_\_, rather than **dead**.
3. Instead of labelling your boss a **failure**, you should say that he's \_\_\_\_\_.
4. I'm sorry, but calling that person who asked you for change a **bum** isn't very kind. Could you perhaps refer to him as \_\_\_\_\_ instead?
5. I believe that instead of considering Larry **pure evil**, we should think of him as \_\_\_\_\_.
6. No, I wasn't **unemployed** for two months. I was simply \_\_\_\_\_.

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Here is a selection of politically correct phrases that we don't use very often, apart from to make jokes and perhaps poke fun at the politically correct movement – and to provide examples of “political correctness gone mad!” – i.e. when the politically correct movement goes against general common sense:

#### ABILITY

<u>Blunt / Frank / Direct Language:</u>	<u>PC Phrases that are Too Extreme:</u>
blind	visually challenged
deaf	visually orientated
deaf	aurally inconvenienced
ignorant	factually unencumbered
stupid	differently wise
incompetent	differently qualified
insane person	mental explorer
crazy/nuts	emotionally different
drunk	over-served

#### AGE

<u>Blunt / Frank / Direct Language:</u>	<u>PC Phrases that are Too Extreme:</u>
old	chronologically gifted
old	chronologically challenged
old	experientially enhanced
false teeth	alternative dentation

#### APPEARANCE

<u>Blunt / Frank / Direct Language:</u>	<u>PC Phrases that are Too Extreme:</u>
fat	differently sized
fat	horizontally enabled
fat person/fatty	person of substance
fat person/fatty	person with an alternative body image
ugly	cosmetically different
ugly	facially challenged
ugly	visually challenging
bald	hair disadvantaged
bald	follically challenged
short	vertically challenged
large nosed	nasally gifted

#### CRIME

<u>Blunt / Frank / Direct Language:</u>	<u>PC Phrases that are Too Extreme:</u>
criminal	morally challenged
criminal	behaviourally challenged
prisoner	resident at Her Majesty's pleasure

#### DEATH

<u>Blunt / Frank / Direct Language:</u>	<u>PC Phrases that are Too Extreme:</u>
dead	metabolically challenged
dead	biologically challenged

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dead

terminally inconvenienced

#### **FAILURE**

Blunt / Frank / Direct Language:

to fail

failure

a failure (thing)

a failure (person)

wrong

mistake

PC Phrases that are Too Extreme:

to achieve a deficiency

deferred success

an incomplete success

an individual with temporarily unmet objectives

differently logical

inoperative statement/event

#### **GENDER**

Blunt / Frank / Direct Language:

housewife

Manchester

PC Phrases that are Too Extreme:

domestic engineer/artist

Personchester

#### **HOMELESSNESS**

Blunt / Frank / Direct Language:

homeless (adj)

homelessness

homeless person/bum

homeless person/bum

homeless person/bum

PC Phrases that are Too Extreme:

involuntarily undomiciled

mortgage-free living

involuntarily domiciled

outdoor urban dweller

residentially flexible

#### **PERSONALITY**

Blunt / Frank / Direct Language:

liar

clumsy

lazy

boring

evil

evil

PC Phrases that are Too Extreme:

differently honest

uniquely coordinated

motivationally deficient

differently interesting

morally different

potentially good

#### **RACE**

Blunt / Frank / Direct Language:

baa baa black sheep...

(children's nursery rhyme)

PC Phrases that are Too Extreme:

baa baa green sheep...

#### **STATUS**

Blunt / Frank / Direct Language:

geek/nerd

ghetto

PC Phrases that are Too Extreme:

socially challenged

ethnically homogenous area

#### **UNEMPLOYMENT**

Blunt / Frank / Direct Language:

redundancy

unemployed

unemployed

PC Phrases that are Too Extreme:

career change opportunity

indefinitely idled

involuntarily leisured

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unemployed

engaged in an orderly transition between career changes

### 2. Everyday Politically Correct Language

Here is a selection of common politically correct phrases that we have accepted into our everyday vocabulary, and that we use to replace language that might cause offence or even incite hatred towards other people, especially members of minority groups:

#### ABILITY

*Don't say:*

handicapped people/the disabled  
disability  
educationally subnormal/simple/  
stupid/dumb

*Say instead:*

disabled people/differently abled people  
ability  
person with learning difficulties or special needs

the mentally handicapped/  
retarded person/crazy guy/  
madman  
deaf  
blind  
half blind  
midgets/dwarves  
gifted child

mentally ill people/individual with a mental illness  
  
hearing impaired  
sight impaired  
partially sighted  
little people  
advanced learner

#### AGE

*Don't say:*

old person  
child/kid

*Say instead:*

senior citizen  
young person

#### APPEARANCE

*Don't say:*

fat/obese

*Say instead:*

overweight/big/has puppy fat

#### GENDER

*Don't say:*

girls (about women)  
Miss/Mrs  
the little woman/the wife/'er indoors/  
the old ball and chain  
housewife  
policeman  
postman  
steward/-ess  
manageress/actress  
barmaid/-man  
fireman  
chairman  
mankind

*Say instead:*

women  
Ms  
my wife/life partner  
  
homemaker  
police officer  
postal worker  
flight attendant  
manager/actor  
bar attendant  
fire-fighter  
chair  
humankind

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manhole  
manpower  
right-hand man

hole in the ground  
labour/human resources  
chief assistant

#### **RACE**

Don't say:

American Indians  
Canadian Indians  
blacks/coloureds

Say instead:

Native Americans  
First Nation People  
African Americans/black people/person of colour/  
ethnic minorities  
Aboriginal Australians/Australian Aboriginal person  
Caucasian  
mixed race  
banned  
outsider, pariah

Aborigines  
white  
half-caste  
blacklisted  
black sheep of the family

#### **SEXUALITY**

Don't say:

gays  
sex change  
promiscuous

Say instead:

gay people  
gender reassignment  
sexually active

#### **STATUS**

Don't say:

drug addict  
  
tramp/bum  
trailer park  
broken home

Say instead:

person with a chemical dependency/person in  
recovery  
homeless person  
mobile home community  
dysfunctional family

#### **OTHER NEGATIVE THINGS**

Don't say:

used/second-hand  
worst  
mistake  
to lie  
politically correct

Say instead:

recycled  
least best  
learning experience  
to be creative with the truth/with the facts  
culturally sensitive

Further Study:

- Consider politically correct language and behaviour in *your* culture. How politically correct are *you* / is *your* school or workplace?

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### Why Use Politically Correct Language?

- Examine the language in “extreme” politically correct phrases, and try to build your own:

A typical “extreme” PC phrase consists of:

- an **adverb** of viewpoint (often an “-al” adjective + “-ly” suffix, e.g. *emotional + ly = emotionally*) related to the thing that you want to describe, such as:

academically		education
alphabetically		alphabet/language
aurally		hearing
behaviourally		behaviour/actions
biologically		biology/body/metabolism
chronologically		time
cosmetically		face/appearance
differently		being different
ecologically		the environment
economically		money
emotionally		emotions/feelings
environmentally		the environment
ethnically		ethnicity/race
experientially		experience/age
facially		face
factually		facts/information/knowledge
follically		hair
geographically		geography/places
historically		history
ideologically	connected with...	ideologies
indefinitely		lasting for a long time or forever
involuntarily		something not being your choice
mathematically		mathematics/numbers
metabolically		body/metabolism
morally		morality/behaviour/actions
motivationally		motivation level/behaviour
musically		music/rhythm
nasally		nose
nautically		boats/the sea/the ocean
politically		politics/power
psychologically		the mind/the brain/psychology
racially		race
residentially		housing
socially		society/other people
statistically		statistics/facts
technically		technical things
technologically		technology/computers/gadgets
terminally		death/the end
vertically		height
visually		sight

*etc.*

- ...with an **adjective**, such as:

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challenged  
challenging  
deficient  
different  
disadvantaged  
discouraged  
embarrassed  
impaired  
inconvenienced  
unencumbered  
unfocused  
untalented

= **negative meaning** e.g. you  
*don't have enough of something  
or you are not able to do  
something*

enabled  
enhanced  
flexible  
gifted  
improved  
interesting  
orientated  
qualified

= **positive meaning** e.g. you  
*have a lot of something or are  
able to do something*

*etc.*

Examples of new politically correct phrases, using some of the words listed above:

- Somebody who is afraid of travelling by boat could be called **nautically challenged**.
- Somebody who is lost could be said to be **geographically unfocused**.

*etc.*

Answers:

Situation 1:	1. f)	2. e)	3. a)	4. d)	5. c)	6. b)
Situation 2:	1. d)	2. a)	3. b)	4. c)	5. e)	6. f)

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