

Politically Correct (PC) Language- Used to practice

Which one of the pairs below do you think is old-fashioned and which is used now? Choose the one you are most sure of and check with the teacher after explaining your ideas with a whole sentence.

negro/ coloured – black/ African American
mixed race - half caste
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
American Indians/ red Indians – native Americans
postman/ mailman – mail carrier
mentally challenged/ learning difficulties – mentally disabled
physically challenged – disabled/ handicapped
blind/ going blind – visually impaired
hearing impaired – deaf/ going deaf
seniors/ pensioners – old people
follically challenged/ comb free – bald/ balding
fireman – fire fighter
ugly – visually challenged
dead – living impaired
banned – blacklisted
innocent lie – white lie
short – vertically challenged
book challenged – uneducated
police officer – policeman
humankind – mankind
actress – actor
cabin crew/ flight attendant – air stewardess
housewife – homemaker
white – Caucasian
Christmas – festive season
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?

PC Language Used to practice Suggested answers

Terms considered old-fashioned and/ or not politically correct

- negro/ coloured, half caste, 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/ red 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 are made up joke PC terms so everyone still says the latter
- fire fighter – fireman – fire fighter is always used by officials and has somewhat 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 a bit 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
- LGBT – gay – LGBT (or GLBT) hasn't really made it into the everyday conversation of people who aren't involved in such issues in the way that *gay* has