



Politeness or Pretending?

Directions: Read the passage below about the debate over euphemisms and their role in communication. Then answer the questions that follow and prepare to share your own opinion. Be honest: do you think euphemisms make language kinder or more confusing?

Euphemisms are everywhere—from the workplace to the news to everyday conversations. People rarely say someone was “fired”; instead, they were “**let go.**” Governments talk about “**collateral damage**” instead of civilian deaths. Businesses call job cuts “**downsizing**” or “**streamlining operations.**” These softer phrases are meant to sound polite or professional, but some critics argue that they **hide the truth** and make serious issues sound less important.

Supporters of euphemisms believe they help us show empathy and avoid hurting others. Talking about death, illness, or money can be uncomfortable, and gentle words like “passed away” or “financially challenged” can make difficult conversations easier. Opponents, however, claim that euphemisms can **distort reality** or manipulate emotions—especially when used by politicians, advertisers, or corporations.

Language constantly evolves, and so does our sense of what sounds “polite.” The real question is: should we value **tact** more than **truth**—or is it possible to have both?

Comprehension & Critical Thinking Questions:

1. What are two reasons people use euphemisms?
2. What are two criticisms of euphemisms mentioned in the passage?
3. In your opinion, when is it appropriate to use euphemisms? When is it not?
4. Rewrite this sentence using a euphemism: “The company fired 100 workers last week.”
5. Do you believe euphemisms help or harm communication? Explain your reasoning in 3-4 sentences.