



All About Euphemisms

- Information, Question and Answer Card

all about
euphemisms

making things sound sweet and pleasant

Critical Thinking Worksheet

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Learner Guide

The **Euphemisms** Information, Question and Answer card set is designed to illustrate how euphemisms make words or phrases sound more pleasant, where the bad seem good, the unnatural seem natural or the negative seem positive. It reveals how euphemisms change the listeners perception of the message.

How to use this Critical Thinking Worksheet

The cards are sequenced to develop and extend knowledge - scaffolding the learner's knowledge and skill level from Beginner level (Year 7) to Advanced (Year 12 and beyond).

The first set of questions on the Question Card are intended for learners new to the concept, strategy or process, and the final set of questions at the bottom-half of each Question Card are designed for more advanced learners.

The Cards are also fully aligned to the **Australian Curriculum**: English strand:

- **Language** – Language variation and Change, Text Structure and Organisation, Expressing and Developing Ideas
- **Literature** – Literature and Context, Responding to Literature, Examining Literature, Creating Literature
- **Literacy** – Texts in Contexts, Interpreting, analysing and evaluating, Creating Texts

The following provides the **teaching process** that you can use when working with students:

1. **Introduce the concept, strategy or process** to the learner
2. **Read the Information Card** and then **discuss the concept, strategy or process** with the learner
3. **Answer questions** on the Question Card, choosing to complete either the whole card, or only the first series of questions, depending on the learners ability
4. **Compare learner answers** with the Answer Card

Euphemisms

What is it?



"The freedom fighters fought off insurgents. This was followed by a surgical strike on enemy combatants."

The armed fighters fought against enemy fighters. This was followed by a bombing of the region to eliminate any other enemy fighters.

Euphemisms are **pleasant words that replace words that seems unpleasant or harsh**. For example, the phrases "*comfort station*" and "*water closet*" are euphemisms for "*public toilet*." They make a word, or phrase, that is commonly associated with something not very nice, seem much better. Euphemisms are used to make what we say in everyday conversation less offensive, disturbing or troubling. For example, imagine telling people what you are really doing when going to the toilet. Without saying it out aloud, you can see that it would sound blunt or obnoxious. It is far more polite to say: "I'm going to the *bathroom*."

The following are examples of euphemisms and their not so pleasant counterpart:

perspire → sweat

dentures → false teeth

intoxicated → drunk

laugh lines → wrinkles

deceased → dead

normal involuntary attrition → fired

The following provides examples of how euphemisms can be used in a sentence:

- "Is there a nearby restroom (*toilet*)?"
- Katherine, a domestic engineer (*housewife*), had her work quietly received (*ignored*).
- Her doctor informed her that he was fading quickly (*dying*) and that the end was near (*he will be dead soon*).
- The officer in charge (*policeman*) was dismissed (*fired*) for personal reasons (*having an emotional outburst*).
- The company is downsizing (going broke) and applying workforce adjustments (*sackings*) and reclassifications (*changing job titles*).
- To increase fiscal positioning (*profits*), the treasury (*government*) will make rate adjustments (*increase taxes*).
- The discussion revolved around cultural issues (*racism*) and unauthorised occupant withdrawal (*illegal prisoner escapes*).
- Most penitentiary attendants (*armed guards*) operated the correctional institution (*jail*) with inhumaneness (*brutality*).

Euphemisms become a problem when they turn into *doublespeak*. They are used deliberately to mislead or deceive the public about unpleasant realities, such as referring to mass murder and rape as "*ethnic cleansing*." The phrase ethnic cleansing is far less emotive or offensive than the word "*genocide*." Another example is where a government official reports that the deaths of civilians, including children, is "*collateral damage*." The public are prevented from thinking about the truth, which is believed to be too ugly to face.

The following provides examples of how euphemisms can be used to deceive:

- The inmates (*prisoners*) were detained (*imprisoned*) within the concentration (*extermination*) camp.
- The soldiers are no longer with us (*dead*). The deployment (*battle*) has come to an end (*lost*).
- There were 200 casualties (*deaths*) as a result of friendly fire (*being attacked by own troops*).
- During the Cold War of 1946-89, NATO had a deterrent (*nuclear weapon*) against the Russian threat (*enemy*).
- These documents are classified (*secret*) as it includes human intelligence (*information from spies and interrogated prisoners*).
- The party received political donations (*money*) to help fulfil its pledge (*promise*) to reform its reputation (*corruption*) with the community (*voters*).
- The runoff (*liquid waste*) from processing plants (*slaughterhouses* or *chemical factories*) was deemed as marginally harmful (*toxic*).

It is okay to use language to soften the truth when the outcome is relatively harmless, such as when we want to spare our friend or family member unnecessary suffering. However, when we use it to deliberately hide the truth, the outcome can be harmful. Rather than act on what is being said, we are encouraged to not think about it. For example, during the Vietnam War era, the U.S. government referred to illegal or immoral activities by U.S. soldiers in Vietnam as "*covert operations*" and "*inappropriate actions*." Both these phrases do not evoke much emotion, resulting in the citizenry being blinded to what is really happening.

Take a look at some of the following insidious examples:

- We've completed a pre-dawn vertical insertion (*invasion*) to eliminate insurgents (*kill rebels or revolutionaries*).
- The transfer of psychologically challenged (*emotionally disturbed*) inmates (*prisoners*) is necessary to improve institutional (*jail*) funding deficiencies (*lack of money*).

In each of the above sentences, the euphemisms dull the force of what is being expressed and make acceptable what would otherwise be normally deemed repulsive, especially when their real meaning is used instead.



Using Words To Hide Emotion – Answer Sheet

Euphemisms are one of the most effective tools for **masking or clouding an issue**. They avoid igniting emotions, often resulting in the listener or reader being side-tracked to what is really going on. In the following activities you will practice how to identify the use and affect of euphemisms, especially their not so innocent counterpart: *doublespeak*.

1 In the following table, write the real meaning of each phrase. The first one has been completed for you.

He's self-confident.	<i>He's arrogant.</i>
She's a private person.	<i>She's secretive.</i>
He's an underachiever.	<i>He's a loser.</i>
She's only human.	<i>She made a big mistake.</i>
He tells it how it is.	<i>He is not afraid to speak his mind.</i>
She did not respond to training.	<i>She failed.</i>
He's a covert investigator.	<i>He's a spy.</i>

For each euphemism above, think about or discuss how the euphemism changes your perception of the topic or issue?

2 In the following table, write the real meaning of each phrase. The first one has been completed for you.

Ethnic cleansing	<i>Genocide</i>
Engaged the adversary	<i>Killed the enemy</i>
Animal-euthanising chamber	<i>Animal slaughterhouse</i>
Sex confirmation procedure	<i>Sex-change surgery</i>
Electorate disillusionment	<i>Voters don't care anymore</i>

Again, for each euphemism above, think about or discuss how the euphemism changes your perception of the topic or issue?

3

Each of the following phrases are examples of doublespeak. Re-write them into sentences that reveal what is really happening.

- a) Ingestion of the pharmaceutical product presented an adverse patient care outcome.

Taking the drug caused the patient to die.

- b) Elimination of undesirable genes improves human intelligence and prosperity.

Getting rid of people who are born with defective genetics will increase the amount of smart people in the world and those smart people will earn more money.

- c) The military intervention resulted in unforeseen collateral damage.

Unfortunately, the invasion of the country killed a lot of unarmed people.

- d) The livestock was transferred to processing facilities for human consumption.

The animals were taken to the slaughterhouse to be killed for their flesh.

4

Read the following extract and then answer the questions below:

John Howard comments on his support for the Iraq War in 2003

"In the years that have gone by, there's been this constant claim that we went to war based on a lie. There was no lie. There were errors in intelligence, but there was no lie."

Source: *The Financial Review* 7/07/2016

- a) Identify John Howard's use of euphemisms? Write them out below.

"constant claim," "went to war," "errors in intelligence"

- b) How does the Howard's use of euphemisms make you feel about the issue?

Howard's use of euphemisms make me think that he has been unfairly targeted for the issues concerning Australia's involvement in the War in Iraq. I feel sorry for him, as he has been subject to persistent claims that are due to faulty intelligence.

- c) Rewrite Howard's comments by avoiding the use of euphemisms?

"In the years that have gone by, there's been accusations that the invasion of Iraq was based on a lie. There was no lie. There were political leaders, including myself who believed reports from spies based in Iraq, but there was no lie."



Using Words To Hide Emotion

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a) Identify John Howard's use of euphemisms? Write them out below.

b) How does the Howard's use of euphemisms make you feel about the issue?

c) Rewrite Howard's comments by avoiding the use of euphemisms?

Euphemisms question card

Now that you have read the information card on **Euphemisms**, it is time to practice what you have learnt.

- 1 Change the words below to soften the language. In other words, use **euphemisms**.

a) Fat	g) Kill
b) Poor	h) Slum
c) Handicapped	i) Idiot
d) Homeless	j) Corrupt
e) Old	k) Destroy
f) Sick	l) Murder

- 2 Rewrite each sentence using **euphemisms**.

- a) Every Tuesday the garbage worker empties the bins.
- b) The idiot could not pass the test because he was stupid.
- c) The workers were being spied on by the prying boss.
- d) He was a lazy teenager who had just been sacked from his job.
- e) She was so forgetful that she forgot to go to the toilet before going to the shops.
- f) Young hooligans invaded the shopping centre, igniting fear in helpless shoppers.
- g) Soldiers made a grave error when they slaughtered hundreds of innocent women and children.

Euphemisms answer card

Now that you have completed the question card on Euphemisms, it is time to correct your answers.

1 Answers – yours may be different

a) overweight, full-figured, big-boned, voluptuous, portly	g) perceptive, hyperaware, astute, intuitive
b) working class, of modest means, of humble origins, low-income, in debt	h) take care of, bump off, neutralise, euthanise
c) disabled, differently-abled, physically challenged, disadvantaged	i) substandard housing, economically depressed neighbourhood, a neighbourhood with potential
d) without a roof over one's head, on the streets, dispossessed	j) mentally challenged, special needs, less able, uncomplicated
e) elderly, mature age, of vintage years	k) inappropriate business practices, questionable conduct, alternative business transaction, unethical transaction
f) unwell, under the weather, indisposed	l) homicide, assassination, elimination, abolition, removal

2 Answers – yours may be different

- a) Every Tuesday the *waste disposal* worker empties the depositories.
- b) The student did not *fulfil the requirements* of the *examination*.
- c) The staff was being *audited* by the *supervisor*.
- d) He was a *complacent* young adult who had just been *offered a career change*.
- e) *Adolescents* entered the shopping centre causing *disruption for patrons*.
- f) She was having a *senior moment* and forget to visit the *powder room* before going to the shops.
- g) The military made a *tactical mistake* that resulted in *collateral damage* to the local area.