



Wes-Kaapse Provinsiale Parlement  
Western Cape Provincial Parliament  
IPalamente yePhondo IeNtshona Koloni

## UNPARLIAMENTARY LANGUAGE

# FACT SHEET 14

REVISION 1, 5 JULY 2016

The right to freedom of speech within Parliament is qualified only to the extent that Members may not use offensive or unbecoming language.

The Presiding Officer has the discretion to decide whether a particular expression is offensive or unbecoming and, therefore, unparliamentary. In taking a decision, the Presiding Officer is guided by such factors as the context and the manner in which the expression was used, the tone of the debate and also previous rulings.

Few expressions are always and automatically unparliamentary. An example is the use of the words “lie”, “liar” and “lying”.

The broad principle that applies is that Members may not use expressions imputing improper or unworthy motives, dishonesty, hypocrisy or want of sincerity to fellow Members or refer to them in a contemptuous or derogatory way in debates. Allusions may also not be made to a Member’s private life or physical appearance.

The Presiding Officer would not necessarily directly give a ruling on an incidental interjection as this could unnecessarily disrupt the debate. In such circumstances the Presiding Officer relies on Whips and other Members to raise points of order. Whips should indeed see it as their function to bring contentious remarks – using their discretion as to whether a particular remark warrants interrupting a speech – to the attention of the Chair.

Points of order must be raised immediately when a perceived transgression occurs otherwise the Chair is not obliged to rule on them.

The Presiding Officer should, as far as possible, rule speedily on points of order to minimise the disruption of proceedings, although in difficult cases a considered ruling after consulting Hansard remains appropriate.

A greater emphasis on unparliamentary language, by way of points of order and rulings, will have the benefit of making Members generally more aware of the need to moderate their language in debate. There is a need to promote the general image of the Provincial Parliament and to avoid consciously bringing the Provincial Parliament into disrepute through the use of unbecoming language.