

LESSON PLAN: HOLDING AN IN-CLASS POST PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE

Handout #5: Techniques of Persuasion and Logical Fallacies

Student Name _____ Class Period _____ Date _____

Appeal to Authority

- cites an authority who is not qualified to have an expert opinion.
- cites an expert when other experts disagree on the issue.
- cites an expert by hearsay only.

"Firemen support Jones as the best choice for our town's future."

(Firemen would be experts only on the town's fire safety.)

Your example _____

Appeal to Force

- predicts dangerous outcomes if you follow a course other than the speaker's.

"This kind of economic policy will lose you your job - and hurt your children's future."

(Is there evidence that it might actually build prosperity and bring additional jobs?)

Your example _____

Appeal to Popularity ("Bandwagon")

- holds an opinion to be valuable because large numbers of people support it.

"Polls show that Americans prefer their current health care system."

(Are there options? Could a majority be missing the boat?)

Your example _____

Attacking the Person ("Ad hominem")

- attacks the person making the argument instead of the argument.
- attacks the person making the argument because of those with whom he associates.
- insinuates that the person making the argument would stand to gain by it.

"Certainly he's in favor of a single tax - he's rich!"

(But could it be that a single tax might benefit others too?)

Your example _____

False Dilemma

- offers a limited number of options - usually two - when there are really more choices.

"Either we continue the failed war against drugs and lose another generation or make marijuana legal."

(Are there other ways to deal with the drug issue?)

Your example _____

Hasty Generalization

- uses a sample too small to support the conclusion.

"We've seen here in Smallville's widget factory that free trade doesn't help the American worker."

(How about the millions of American workers elsewhere?)

Your example _____

Name Calling

- uses negative labels or comparison to stigmatize opponent.

"That's the kind of political planning Hitler did."

(Is it fair to associate the candidate with a mass murderer?)

Your example _____

Slippery Slope

- threatens a series of increasingly dire consequences from taking a simpler course of action.

"First it's gun show laws, and then they'll come to confiscate all guns, and then we lose democracy altogether."

(Do gun laws imply eventual confiscation?)

Your example _____

Techniques of Persuasion and Logical Fallacies: Practice with Presidents' Debate Quotes

1. Hasty Generalization

JOHN F. KENNEDY: I'm not satisfied when the United States had last year the lowest rate of economic growth of any major industrialized society in the world... (from opening statement)

RICHARD NIXON: We heard tonight, for example, the statement made that our growth in national product last year was the lowest of any industrial nation in the world. Now last year, of course, was 1958. That happened to be a recession year. But when we look at the growth of G.N.P. this year, a year of recovery, we find that it's six and nine-tenths per cent and one of the highest in the world today... (from opening statement)

September 26, 1960

Chicago, Illinois

Why was Kennedy's statement a Hasty Generalization? (Check your list of Logical Fallacies.)

2. Appeal to Force

MARVIN STONE: You suggest that we scrap the SALT II treaty already negotiated, and intensify the build-up of American power to induce the Soviets to sign a new treaty - one more favorable to us. President Carter, on the other hand, says he will again try to convince a reluctant Congress to ratify the present treaty on the grounds it's the best we can hope to get. Now, both of you cannot be right. Will you tell us why you think you are?

RONALD REAGAN: Yes. I think I'm right because I believe that we must have a consistent foreign policy, a strong America, and a strong economy. And then, as we build up our national security, to restore our margin of safety, we at the same time try to restrain the Soviet build-up, which has been going forward at a rapid pace, and for quite some time.

October 28, 1980

Cleveland, Ohio

How did Reagan's response illustrate the use of Appeal to Force?

3. Name Calling

BILL CLINTON: But when Joe McCarthy went around this country attacking people's patriotism, he was wrong. He was wrong. And a senator from Connecticut stood up to him named Prescott Bush. Your father was right to stand up to Joe McCarthy, you were wrong to attack my patriotism. I was opposed to the war but I loved my country...

Debate 1, October 11, 1992

St. Louis, Missouri

How did Clinton's statement employ Name Calling?

Answers:

1. Hasty Generalization: Kennedy used just one year's drop in GNP to characterize the Eisenhower/Nixon administration as stalled economically, instead of all 8 years of the administration.
2. Appeal to Force: Reagan implied that if voters chose Carter's plan, they would lose a consistent and strong foreign policy, as well as a strong economy, and that Carter's plan would result in increased Soviet build-up of nuclear weapons.
3. Name Calling: Clinton compared George Bush to Joseph McCarthy, the notorious and disgraced 1950's "Red Baiter."