

Lesson Title: Hosting a Presidential Debate

Handout #1: Techniques of Persuasion and Logical Fallacies

Student Name _____ Class Period _____ Date _____

Appeal to Authority/Citing Unqualified Expert Opinion

- 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:

Affinity Fraud

- claims membership in a group associated with audience members, in order to sway speaker's fellow group

"As church-going Americans, we must support this tax credit for parochial schools."

(Your being a religious person like me does not mean that I will agree with your positions.)

Your example:

Appeal to Antiquity:

- makes the assumption that older ideas are better because they have been around longer

"For thousands of years, the nuclear family of father and mother has endured."
(*A different kind of family may emerge as equally acceptable as society evolves.*)

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?*)

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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”)/Stereotyping

- attacks the person making the argument instead of the argument
- attacks the person making the argument because of those with whom s/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:

Loaded Questions

- presents controversial or unjustified assumptions
- "Shouldn't we question the patriotism of someone who has not served in the armed forces?"
(It is certainly possible to be patriotic without military service.)

Your example:

Name calling/Scapegoating

- 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:

Rejecting Fact as Opinion

"100% of scientists do not confirm global warming, and so I think it is just a theory." *(But almost 100% of scientists do confirm it.)*

Your example:

Claiming Opinion as Fact

"Raising the minimum wage will put small businesses into bankruptcy." *(On the other occasions when the minimum wage has been raised, that has not been a significant consequence.)*

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:

Practice with Real Candidate Fallacies

Kennedy v. Nixon, 1960 – John F. Kennedy:

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...

Why was Kennedy's statement a "hasty generalization"?

Reagan v. Carter, 1980 – Ronald Reagan:

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 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 a 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.

How did Reagan's response illustrate the use of "appeal to force"?

Clinton v. Bush, 1992

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. I loved my country...

How did Clinton's statement employ "name calling"?

Bush v. Kerry, 2004 – George Bush:

"That's what people are seeing now is happening in Afghanistan. Ten million citizens have registered to vote. They have been given a chance to be free, and they will show up at the polls."

How did Bush claim opinion as fact?

Obama v. Romney, 2012 – Mitt Romney:

"Now, I talked to a guy who has a very small business in St. Louis...He has four employees. He said that he and his son calculated how much they pay in taxes, federal income tax, state sales tax, state property tax, gasoline tax. It added up to well over 50% of what they earned. And your plan is to take the tax rate on successful small businesses from 35% to 40%."

Why is this a "hasty generalization" on Romney's part?