

Speaking Ethically and Avoiding Fallacies

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the importance of ethics in oral communication, and how to avoid common fallacies when speaking. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Ethics Violations in Persuasive Speaking



THINK ABOUT IT

What comes to mind when you think of speaking to persuade? Perhaps the idea of persuasion may bring to mind propaganda and issues of manipulation, deception, intentional bias, bribery, and even coercion. Each element relates to persuasion, but in distinct ways. These tactics violate our sense of fairness, freedom, and ethics:

1. **Manipulation** involves the management of facts, ideas, or points of view to play upon others' inherent insecurities or emotions to one's own advantage. Your audience expects you to treat them with respect, and deliberately manipulating them by means of fear, guilt, duty, or a relationship is unethical.
2. **Deception** involves the use of lies, partial truths, or the omission of relevant information to deceive your audience. No one likes to be lied to, or made to believe something that is not true.
3. **Intentional bias**, which can be a part of deception, involves selecting information to support your position while framing negatively any information that might challenge your belief.
4. **Bribery** involves the giving of something in return for an expected favor, consideration, or privilege. It circumvents the normal protocol for personal gain, and again is a strategy that misleads your audience.
5. **Coercion** is the use of power to compel action— you make someone do something they would not choose to do freely. You might threaten punishment, and people may go along with you while the threat is present, but once the threat is removed, they will revert to their previous position, often with new antagonism toward the person or agency that coerced them.

You as the speaker should be aware of these issues in order to present an ethical persuasive speech. Use your self and social awareness skills to recognize when others try to use these tactics on you, and know that your audience will be watching to see if you try any of these strategies on them.

In your speech, consider honesty and integrity as you assemble your arguments. Your audience will appreciate your thoughtful consideration of more than one view and your understanding of the complexity of the issue, and you will build your credibility as you present your information.



TERMS TO KNOW

Manipulation

The management of facts, ideas, or points of view to play upon others' inherent insecurities or emotions to one's own advantage.

Deception

The use of lies, partial truths, or the omission of relevant information to trick one's audience.

Intentional Bias

The simultaneous selection of information to support one's position and negative framing of any information that might challenge one's belief.

Bribery

The giving of something in return for an expected favor, consideration, or privilege

Coercion

The use of power to compel action.

2. Eight Common Speech Fallacies

Fallacy is another way of saying false logic. These rhetorical tricks deceive your audience with their style, drama, or pattern, but add little to your speech in terms of substance and can actually detract from your effectiveness.

In other words, fallacies let speakers rely on dramatic flair without offering substantive argument, obscure the central message, or twist the facts for their own gain.

The table below examines the eight classical fallacies. You may note that some of them relate to the ethical cautions listed earlier in this lesson.

Fallacy	Definition	Example
Red Herring	Any diversion intended to distract attention from the main issue, particularly by relating the issue to a common fear.	"It's not just about the death penalty; it's about the victims and their rights. You wouldn't want to be a victim, but if you were, you'd want justice."
Straw Man	A weak argument set up to be easily refuted, distracting attention from stronger arguments.	"What if we released criminals who commit murder after just a few years of rehabilitation? Think of how unsafe our streets would be then!"
Begging the Question	Claiming the truth of the very matter in question, as if it were already an obvious conclusion.	"We know that they will be released and unleashed on society to repeat their crimes again and again."
Circular Argument	The proposition is used to prove itself by assuming the very thing it aims to prove. Related to begging the question.	"Once a killer, always a killer."
Ad Populum	Appeals to a common belief of some people, often prejudicial, and states everyone holds this belief. Also called the bandwagon fallacy, as people "jump on the bandwagon" of a perceived popular view.	"Most people would prefer to get rid of a few 'bad apples' and keep our streets safe."
	"Argument against the man" instead of against the message. Stating	"Our representative is a drunk and philanderer."

Ad Hominem	that someone's argument is wrong solely because of something about the person rather than about the argument itself.	How can we trust him on the issues of safety and family?"
Non Sequitur	"It does not follow." The conclusion does not follow from the premises because they are not related.	"Since the antiwar demonstrations of the 1960s, we've seen an increase in convicts who got released from death row."
Post Hoc Ergo Propter Hoc	"After this, therefore because of this," also called a coincidental correlation. It tries to establish a cause-and-effect relationship where only a correlation exists.	"Violent death rates went down once the media started publicizing executions."

Avoiding false logic will help you make a stronger case or argument for your proposition. Consider this five-step motivational checklist to keep in mind as you bring it all together:

1. Get the audience's attention.
2. Identify the need.
3. Satisfy the need.
4. Present a vision or solution.
5. Take action.

This simple organizational pattern can help you focus on the basic elements of your message when time is short and your performance is critical.



TERM TO KNOW

Fallacy

A rhetorical trick that relies on false logic in order to disguise a weak argument.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about five common **ethics violations in public speaking**, including manipulation, deception, intentional bias, bribery, and coercion. You also learned **eight common speech fallacies**, or rhetorical tricks that rely on false logic to persuade your audience. Using unethical tactics and logical fallacies detract from your integrity and weaken your credibility as a speaker.

Best of luck in your learning!

Source: This tutorial has been adapted from "Business Communication for Success" Version 1.0 by Scott McLean. Copyright 2010. ISBN 978-1-4533-2742-5 (Licensee Product: Workplace Communication), reprinted with permission from FlatWorld.



TERMS TO KNOW

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Fallacy

A rhetorical trick that relies on false logic in order to disguise a weak argument.

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The simultaneous selection of information to support one's position and negative framing of any information that might challenge one's belief.

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