

Propaganda Primer

Section A: Techniques of Irrelevance

0. No Technique

1. **Prejudice:** Judging someone based on their inclusion in a group. Prejudice can be either for or against someone, and can stem from race, religion, sex, age, political affiliation, etc.

Example: Let's invite David into our club, we need a Baptist member.

2. **Academic Detachment:** When faced with two options, speaker chooses neither options and instead does not make a decision.

Example: Both candidates have been throwing dirt at each other during the campaign, so I'm not going to vote for either of them. I'm staying home.

3. **Drawing the Line:** When faced with a situation with multiple options, speaker reduces the choices to just two.

Example: We can either watch the Olympics, or we can watch the Food Network. (there are no other viewing options?)

4. **Not Drawing the Line:** Speaker is faced with a limit, but chooses or asks to go past that limit (What's one more?)

Example: I have been absent from school for ten days already. What's one more day?

5. **Conservatism, Radicalism, Moderatism:** Conservatism – Everything old is good; Radicalism – Everything new is good; Moderatism – Likes compromise

Examples: Conservatism – We've used these score sheets for every tournament for the last ten years, why change now?

Radicalism – We Democrats must take a fundamentally different approach from the agenda of the last eight years.

Moderatism – Ad: Sealy Serta mattresses offer the perfect combination of mattress qualities. They're not too hard, not too soft. They conform to fit your body.

6. **Rationalization:** Making excuses for something that has already happened. The speaker refuses to take responsibility for a mistake.

Example: There was no way for me to win the On Sets match. The girl I was playing knew both of the judges.

7. **Wishful Thinking:** The speaker believes something to be true because they really want it to be true.

Example: I deserve a good grade because I put a lot of effort into studying.

8. **Tabloid Thinking:** Speaker reduces an entire group to a stereotype or applies a generalization about a group.

Example: Dave is a typical programmer – you know, thick glasses, pale, skinny, and hardly able to talk to a normal human being.

9. **Causal Oversimplification:** A complex event is explained by references to one or two causes.

Example: It's easy to stop inflation, just get the Federal government to balance its budget.

10. **Inconceivability:** The speaker declares a position to be false because they can't conceive of it being true.

Example: I just can't understand why the students would go on strike. If I were a student, I wouldn't go on strike.

Section B: Techniques of Language

0. No Technique

1. **Emotional Terms:** Uses words to get a strong emotional response (positive or negative)

Example: It is sickening what has happened to education in this country. Graduates are pitifully prepared for the modern world. Teachers are disgustingly underpaid.

2. **Metaphor and Simile:** Comparing two unlike things using the words "like" or "as"

Example: Like ships that pass in the night, you two are arguing without seeing each other's point.

3. **Emphasis:** Heavy verbal emphasis and stress on a word or phrase

Example: The Ten Commandments monument in the courthouse in Alabama is not protected by the Constitution because the First Amendment applies only to free *speech*.

4. **Quotation Out of Context:** Misquoting or using part of a quote to fit an argument

Example: Military critic: "Considering that only one test-fire out of 32 was successful, to conclude that the new missile system is a success is quite a stretch of the imagination." Several days later, in the *Times*, the military critic was reported to have said, "The new missile system is a success."

5. **Abstract Terms:** Using terms the speaker clearly does not understand

Example: Fred: "Bob, you said a neurotic is a person who has a bad nerve status, but I'm not sure I understand. Is there anyone here you can use as an example to show me?"

Bob: "How can I tell if anyone here is neurotic? I'm no psychiatrist."

6. **Vagueness:** Using words with several different or no specific interpretations (some, a little, most)

Example: Mother to daughter: "Now I want this understood clearly, Clarissa. You are not to stay out too late again this Saturday night."

7. **Ambiguity:** Using words or phrases that have two different interpretations

Example: Newspaper headline: "Doctor compiles list of poisons children may drink at home."

8. **Shift of Meaning:** Beginning with terms that can be interpreted one way, then changing the meaning of the terms at the end to mean something totally different

Example: The customer complained that the "name-brand" canned fruit was a brand that neither she nor her friends had ever heard of. The manager replied, "Look, lady, it is a brand and it has a name. What more do you want?"

Section C: Techniques of Irrelevance

0. No Technique

1. **Appearance:** Judging someone based on the way they look

Example: That girl exchange student from Denmark is really a sharp dresser. I'll bet she's smart, too.

2. **Manner:** Judging someone based on the way that they act

Example: Melissa was bubbly and cool. She really handled those tough questions with confidence. She is a much better candidate for the job than Sally, who was nervous and jittery.

3. **Degrees and Titles:** Using a degree or title of a speaker to impress the listeners

Example: "I like the perfect fit, the luxurious feel, and inner warmth of my Brady's Leather Jacket," says Laura Stern, President of the American Dog-Breeders Association.

4. **Numbers:** Using numbers to make a point

Example: Ad: "Use Galma-Mudd, the face cream preferred by eight out of ten women in the Cleveland area."

5. **Status:** Using someone who is famous to endorse a product or support a position

Example: You should take 500 milligrams of vitamin C every day. The Nobel Prize-winning chemist Linus Pauling recommended vitamin C to prevent and cure the common cold.

6. **Repetition:** Using the same word, phrase or sound repeatedly to capture the attention of the listener

Example: Wool carpet has everything that a carpet should have. Wool has a natural bounce in every fiber. Wool carpet has lasting beauty. Wool carpet has lasting color. Wool carpet resists flame. Wool carpet cleans easily. The answer is WOOL.

7. **Slogans:** Using a short, catchy phrase or sentence designed to be easily remembered by the general public

Example: Ad: "Open your mind to the world. Select Netscape software for complete and total access to the entire World Wide Web."

8. **Technical Jargon:** Using technical language to impress or confuse the listener

Example: Ad: "This new dress from Janis Kaye's Originals contains a new fabric, dureneum, which keeps the cloth from shrinking and resists dirt.

9. **Sophistical Formula:** Using an old saying or cliché as the main point in an argument

Example: Let's not give up. True, we have tried everything. We have telephoned; we have knocked on his door; we have written to him. And we have not yet received a cent from him. But "where there's a will, there's a way."

Section F: Technique of Maneuver (How to win an argument that you're losing)

0. No Technique

1. **Diversion:** Changing the subject of a conversation successfully

Example: Reporter: "Mr. President, did you make a mistake in authorizing arms to be sent secretly to Iran?"
President: "Mr. Jones, congratulations on your award as Journalist of the Year. Also I liked your recent article on the economy."

2. **Disproving a Minor Point:** Considering several arguments, but attacking only the weakest one

Example: You said that Lykeisha had limited experience as a cheerleader, very poor jumping ability, and did not smile a lot during her routines. So you don't want her on the cheer squad. But Lykeisha was a member of her cheer squad in both 7th and 8th grades. She belongs on the squad here at Bonaparte High.

3. **Ad Hominem:** Making a personal attack on the person but not addressing the argument

Example: Judge Ginsbork says he will represent us well as a conservative Supreme Court Judge. This comes from the same man who smoked pot during his years at Harvard.

4. **Appeal to Ignorance:** "You can't prove you are right or I am wrong"...usually ending with a question

Example: Sure there's life on other planets. You can't prove there isn't.

5. **Leading Question:** Asking a question to sway the listener toward a desired response or make him/her uncomfortable

Example: Talk show host to accused child abuser: "Which of your children did you abuse first – your son or your daughter?"

6. **Complex Question:** A series of Leading Questions when only one answer is expected

Example: Didn't you run across campus yesterday? Haven't you been on campus many nights before? Didn't you paint the flagpole lavender? Answer me, "yes" or "no."

7. **Inconsequent Argument:** Offering evidence or statistics not related to original argument

Example: Ad: "University proves Grandmother's Oats the best of all 14 leading cereals! Yes, we have the evidence. In a study of 14 nationally-known breakfast cereals, Grandmother's Oats was first in protein. (See page 163 of the March-April issue of *Food Research*, an official publication of the Institute of Food Technologists.)"

8. **Attacking a Straw Man:** Interpreting someone's response to be something different; putting words in someone's mouth

Example: Joshua, you can't be serious about allowing those kids to use our back lot to play ball. Next thing you know, they will be messing around in our back yard and pestering us about drinks and bathroom privileges. How can you allow such intrusions?

9. **Victory by Definition:** The speaker can't be proven wrong because the counterexamples don't fit the "real" definition of what is being argued

Example: Teel: "These students seem to have some school spirit."

Beel: "Ah, yes, but when I said that students today don't have any school spirit I was talking about genuine students, not these rah-rah boys."

10. **Begging the Question:** Arguing in circles or restating the original argument itself

Example: The proposed law will certainly reduce juvenile delinquency, because it provides steps which will prevent crimes on the part of teenagers.