

Com 560
Edwards
February 11, 2008

COMMUNICATING ETHICALLY:
Analyzing Principals of Ethical Communication

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Learning Objectives

To provide an overview of the major concepts related to *analyzing principles of ethical communications* in accordance to the Michigan Test for Teacher Certification (MTTC). These concepts include:

- The importance of ethical communication in diverse contexts
- Applying ethical standards to evaluate public communication
- Applying ethical standards in the selection of evidence and reasoning
- Applying questioning principles to help discover fallacies
- Recognizing factors that may lead to bias in the presentation of information
- Recognizing that people should be responsible users of language (e.g. citing sources, accepting cultural differences, not plagiarizing).

Lecture Preparation Notes

Introduction to Ethical communications

As we all know, communication involves more than just the exchange of a few isolated words. There are many factors that influence how and why communication occurs. One of the most important components of communication is the intention and approach a communicator uses. As speakers, we have certain responsibilities when we present ideas to others. These unwritten standards of behavior in various communication situations are referred to as communication ethics (Valesquez, 2002).

To behave ethically, communicators cannot simply follow a certain religion, science, law, or norm of society as these structures alone cannot always dictate ethical practices in the wide variety of settings we find ourselves in each day (Valesquez, 2002). While “ethical communications” has no one clear definition, there are a number of key concepts that both speakers and listeners should follow when communication occurs. When we discuss “ethics” in communication, we typically are dealing with how honest, fair, and responsible communicators are being at the individual, group, and mass communication levels.

In order to consider the ethical use of communication, individuals and groups should use a basic framework for evaluating the images and messages they experience each day. The following is a four-way test for ethical communication:

1. Is it the truth?
2. Is it fair to all concerned?
3. Will it build goodwill and better friendship?
4. Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

By applying this four-way test, individuals become more responsible communicators when they listen and present information.

Plagiarism

As speakers, we are expected to remain honest when we present information. When communicators lie, distort facts, or steal concepts without giving credit to others these individuals/groups are breaching the ethical concept of honesty. The latter of these examples of dishonesty is called plagiarism (plagiarism.org, 2007). Whenever a person uses another person's ideas he/she is expected to give credit to the creator -- even if the speaker(s) rewords or paraphrases the information. There are various formats for crediting the ideas or others, especially when communicating in written form where writers use APA, MLA, and Chicago styles to reference ideas.

Bias

As communicators, especially at the mass communication level, there a number of ethical concepts that apply to how fairly information is presented. Whenever a person or group intentionally presents information that unevenly favors or discredits one side of a topic, the speaker is presenting what is called a biased position. Some argue that it is impossible to present information from a completely objective viewpoint – especially since communication must occur in specific contexts (Rhetorica, 2006). Often times the media bias is difficult to eliminate based on the limited amount of information that can be provided by certain media forms. Newscasts, for example, often must condense complicated, controversial topics into a report that lasts only a few minutes. Because of this, communicators must take careful consideration when researching, selecting, and presenting their information to audiences.

Propaganda

Oftentimes, groups and individuals may wish to persuade their audience to think or act a certain way. The deliberate use of a message or image to persuade or influence an audience is called *propaganda*. While the term has an overall negative connotation today, the use of propaganda is not always a negative practice. The primary purpose of propaganda is to appeal to audience members' emotional and rational thought processes. Therefore, propaganda is not necessarily an unethical practice. Instead, individuals must evaluate each piece of propaganda based on its use of truthfulness, fairness, and intended purposes. The following is a few examples of historical propaganda posters:



This soviet poster aims to encourage citizens to support the military effort. The text reads “People and army are one” and uses images of togetherness (outside figures completing the soviet symbol).



This Nazi poster encourages individuals to support the Nazi cause by using a strong, stoic figure with repeated swastika symbols. The image of looking up to the right implies goodness and progress.



This Canadian poster from World War I appeals to the emotions of citizens by using an innocent, pleading young girl to persuade individuals to buy war bonds.

Fallacies

In order to be responsible communicators, individuals and groups must use careful reasoning when presenting arguments. When reasoning is flawed or contains a logical error it is known as a fallacy. There are many types of fallacies that often occur in communication. These are a few of the most common examples of fallacies as defined by Labossiere, 2005:

Bandwagoning – Assuming that an argument is valid because a majority of individuals support it is called bandwagoning. One example would be: “I don’t think we should go to the swim meet. Everyone else is going to the basketball game.” The speaker is pressuring others based on feelings that a majority of people think differently.

Red herring – Diverting the listeners’ attention to another unrelated or irrelevant topic is called a red herring fallacy. An example would be “You may think that he cheated on the test, but look at the poor little thing! How would he feel if you made him sit it again?” Here, the speaker is trying to distract attention and focus on the cheater’s feelings rather than his/her actions.

Hasty generalization – When a conclusion is drawn about an entire group based off of a select few individuals it is known as a hasty generalization. Example: Sam is riding her bike in her home town in Maine, minding her own business. A station wagon comes up behind her and the driver starts beeping his horn and then tries to force her off the road. As he goes by, the driver yells "get on the sidewalk where you belong!" Sam sees that the

car has Ohio plates and concludes that all Ohio drivers are jerks. Sam is generalizing the actions of all Ohio drivers based off of one incident.

Ad Hominem – Attacking a person’s character instead of debating the argument at hand is called ad hominem. One example is: “Of course you think tax exemptions are a good idea. You’re rich!” The speaker is attacking a person’s financial state rather than debating the issue of tax exemption fairness.

Straw Man – Ignoring a person’s actual position and substituting a distorted or untruthful position instead is known as a straw man fallacy. Example: "Senator Jones says that we should not fund the attack submarine program. I disagree entirely. I can't understand why he wants to leave us defenseless like that." Here the speaker is claiming that Senator Jones’ position is to refuse defensive measures which distorted and untrue.

Ethical Communication in School

As students and citizens it is important to understand and be able to identify these different concepts of ethical communication. Since ethical standards are not clearly defined or completely objective it is easy for information to be distorted or misused at the individual, group, and mass communication levels. By understanding plagiarism, fallacies, propaganda, and bias we are better able to identify when we are being misled, misdirected, or presented with unbalanced information.

In the classroom, ethics in communications is especially important to consider from both the student and the teacher’s perspective. As a student, it is important for individuals to understand the severity of plagiarism and responsible, honest language use. Students should also be able to evaluate and question the information they are taught in

class on a day-to-day basis. Creating a safe, comfortable environment and allowing students to evaluate the ethics of each lesson is important for helping students develop critical listening and evaluation skills.

As a teacher, individuals must rigidly apply ethical evaluation to the lessons and concepts they are teaching. Just as with any mass media communication, the teacher is responsible for shaping and influencing what a group is experiencing. Teachers must work hard to develop truthful, unbiased lessons that teach concepts responsibly. In this way, students are provided with a good ethical model and are exposed to diverse and fair perspectives.

Activities

Activity 1: BEATING PLAGIARISM

Overview/Procedures:

Distribute to students a KWL handout on plagiarism. As a class, ask the students to complete the “know” and “want to know” columns concerning plagiarism, paraphrasing, and usage. Then, on the board, compile a working list of what the students’ came up with on their handouts. As a class, come up with a definition of plagiarism. Through teacher led discussion, students will be asked to identify right and wrong examples of paraphrasing and identify plagiarism.

Goals:

1. Students have full understanding of plagiarism and consequences.
2. Students have understood difference between legal and illegal uses of others’ work.
3. Students know how to formulate appropriate citations.
4. Students can individually complete the “learned” portion of KWL handout.

Materials:

KWL Handout, PowerPoint Slides (see corresponding presentation materials)

Activity 2: EVERYDAY FALLACIES

“There's a mighty big difference between good, sound reasons and reasons that sound good.”

- Laurence J. Peter

Overview/Procedures:

After reviewing fallacies used in communication from pervious lesson, students will be separated into four groups. Each group will be given two ads to examine. Students will be asked to identify fallacies that are prevalent in each ad. Results will then be presented to the class.

Students will be asked to consider:

1. Who is the intended audience of the ad?
2. What fallacy/fallacies are being used in this ad?
3. Do you think the ad is successful?
4. Could this ad could be harmful in any way?

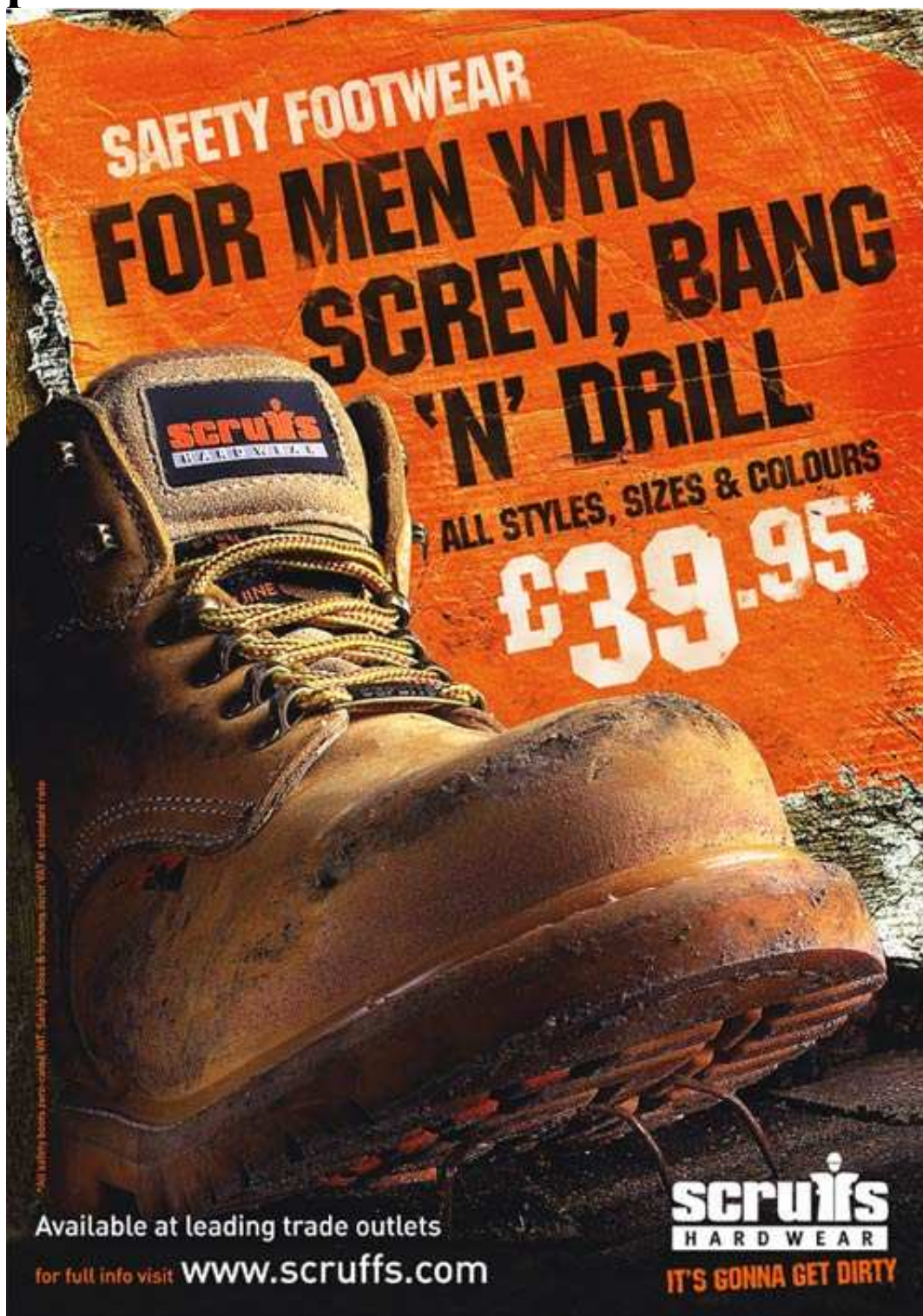
Goals:

1. Students are able to identify the usage of fallacies using real-life examples.
2. Students use a more critical lens when evaluating communication.

Materials:

Ads, review handout of fallacies (corresponding materials)

presentation materials



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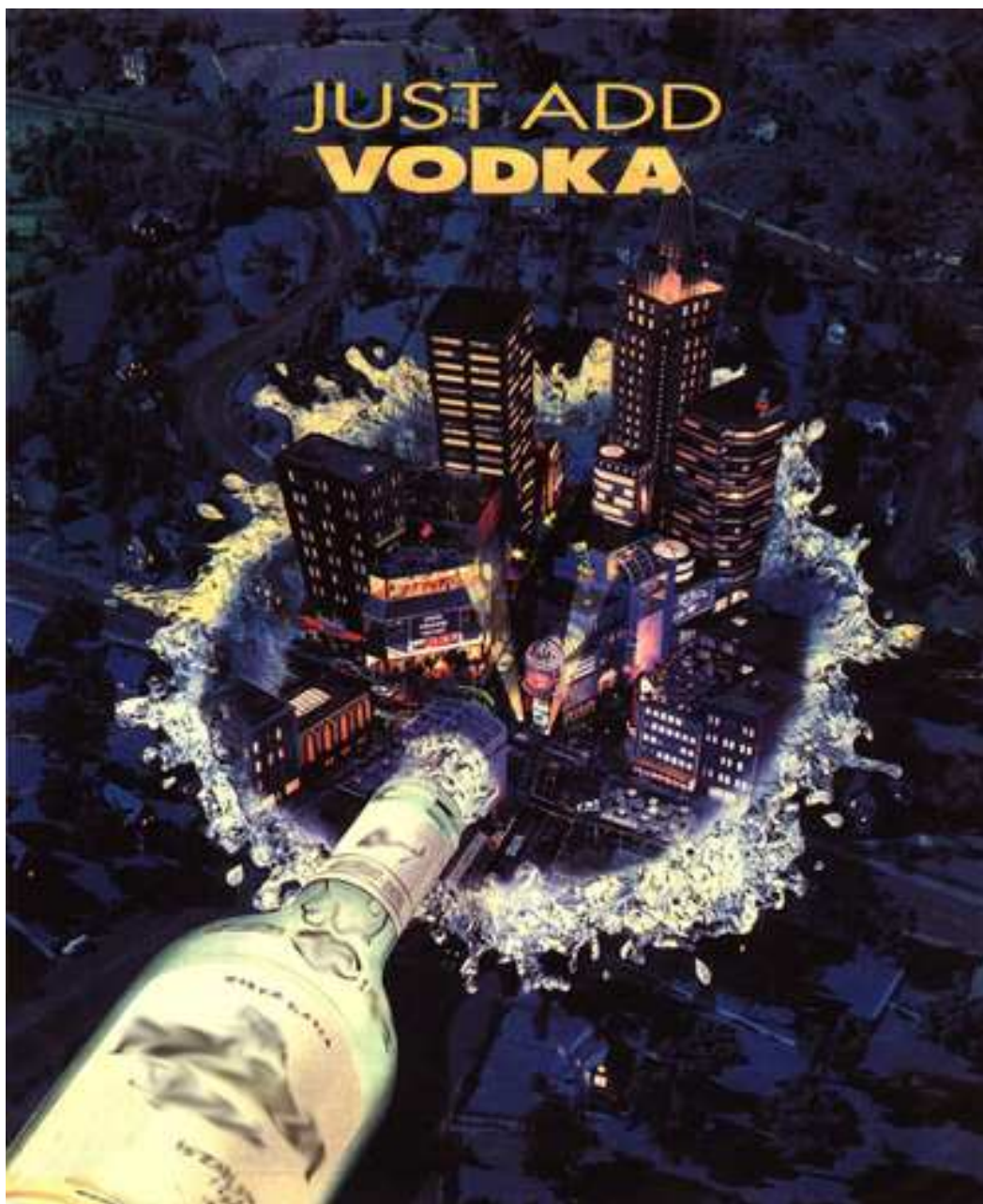


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FALLACIES REVIEW SHEET

1. Who is the intended audience of the ad?
2. What fallacy/fallacies are being used in this ad?
3. Do you think the ad is successful?
4. Could this ad could be harmful in any way?

1. Ad hominem (meaning "against the person")—attacks the person and not the issue
2. Appeal to emotions—manipulates people's emotions in order to get their attention away from an important issue

"I did not murder my mother and father with an axe! Please don't find me guilty; I'm suffering enough through being an orphan."

3. Bandwagon—creates the impression that everybody is doing it and so should you
More and more people are buying sports utility vehicles. Isn't it time you bought one, too?
4. Appeal to the people—uses the views of the majority as a persuasive device
You should turn to channel 6. It's the most watched channel this year.
6. Scare tactic—creates fear in people as evidence to support a claim
"The defendant in a murder trial must be found guilty, because otherwise husbands will be encouraged to murder their wives."
7. False cause—wrongly assumes a cause and effect relationship
"Before women got the vote, there were no nuclear weapons."
8. Hasty generalization (or jumping to conclusions)—draws a conclusion about a population based on a small sample
I've met two people in Nicaragua so far, and they were both nice to me. So, all people I will meet in Nicaragua will be nice to me.
9. Red herring—presents an irrelevant topic to divert attention away from the original issue
Will the new tax in Senate Bill 47 unfairly hurt business? One of the provisions of the bill is that the tax is higher for large employers (fifty or more employees) as opposed to small employers (six to forty-nine employees). To decide on the fairness of the bill, we must first determine whether employees who work for large employers have better working conditions than employees who work for small employers. Bringing up the issue of working conditions is the red herring.

Paraphrasing Practice

The automobile is chartreuse.

**Preparations for the
ceremony were elaborate.**

**The educator removed the
unruly student from the
environment.**

**Several diffident individuals
banded together to comprise
a consortium.**

**The adolescent maneuvered
the bi-wheeled vehicle
undamaged.**

**In the metropolis the
recreational area was
dilapidated.**

Research Skills KWL

Plagiarism

Know	Want to Know	Learned

Fair Use

Know	Want to Know	Learned

Paraphrasing

Know	Want to Know	Learned

Ethical Communications Test

Multiple Choice

1. A *fallacy* is a(n)
 - (A) use of incorrect reasoning when arguing a position
 - (B) use of another individual's ideas when presenting information
 - (C) sense of pressure from an outside group to conform to their position
 - (D) code of moral behaviors practiced by communicators

2. When John is trying to argue that his school should switch to block scheduling he says, "Every other school in the district uses block scheduling so it is our best option." This is an example of a(n):
 - (A) Strawman Fallacy
 - (B) Bandwagon Fallacy
 - (C) Ad Hominem Fallacy
 - (D) Red Herring Fallacy

3. Marsha is running out of time to finish her research paper. She goes online and paraphrases bits and pieces of other articles and turns her paper in without referencing the work. This is called
 - (A) Fallacy of Composition
 - (B) Bias
 - (C) Propaganda
 - (D) Plagiarism

4. *Bias* is
 - (A) The right to question information presented by an individual/group
 - (B) Discrediting an argument based on the individual's character
 - (C) Presenting information that unevenly favors/discredits one position
 - (D) Intentionally using incorrect information to persuade an audience

5. Which of the following is an example of an *ad hominem fallacy*:
 - (A) "You would say that, you're just a taxi driver."
 - (B) "You may think he cheated but how could you do that to him? He's an orphan."
 - (C) "It's ridiculous to leave now when everyone else wants to stay."
 - (D) "The iPhone just came out yesterday so it's the best phone on the market."

Short Answer

1. Define *Propaganda*:
2. Define what a *red herring fallacy* is and provide one example:

Essay

Scenario:

You are a news reporter for the local news station. You are asked to report on a new controversial government tax bill that citizens will vote on later in the week. You only have 5 minutes to present your report.

In a carefully constructed essay, discuss the ethical responsibilities you must consider when researching, composing, and delivering your news report.

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