

# LISTENING CRITICALLY

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## AGENDA

- SESSION 1
  - Starter
  - It's Not What They Said, But How They Said It
  - You Don't Say!
- SESSION 2
  - One More Time
  - Critically Listening to the Media
  - Conclusion
- Student Assessment

### Objectives

Students will learn that critical listening means recognizing and filtering imprecise communication.

Students will practice critical listening and analyzing ambiguous messages.

Students will apply critical listening techniques to evaluate the media.

### Materials Needed

- Session 1: One copy of the “Critical Listening: Misleading Communication” activity sheet for each student (Part I)
- Session 1: One copy of the “Critical Listening: Analysis” activity sheet for each group (Part II)

- Session 2: A clip of a news program, political speech, or “talking heads” program that contains misleading information, approximately 30 minutes in length (Part II)
- Session 2: One copy of the “Critical Listening: Analysis” activity sheet for each student (Part II)
- Session 2: A/V equipment

## SESSION 1

### Starter (3 minutes)

Tell students that you are going to test their listening skills. Ask students to listen carefully as you read the following paragraph. State that they will be asked to give a one-sentence summary of what you read.

Read the following paragraph:

I hereby give and convey to you, all and singular, my estate and interest, right, title, claim, and advantages of and in said orange, together with its rind, skin, juice, and pulp, and all rights and advantages therein and full power to bite, chew, or otherwise eat the same or give the same away with or without the rind, skin, juice, and pulp, anything hereinbefore or hereinafter or in any other means of whatever nature or kind to the contrary in any wise notwithstanding.

After you have finished reading, ask students what just happened in the paragraph you read. Direct students to the understanding that, in the paragraph, a person is giving another person an orange. Tell them that the paragraph was difficult to understand because it was written in legal jargon that obscures the simple meaning of the paragraph.

Explain to students that in this lesson they will be learning about techniques speakers or writers sometimes use to hide the meaning of what they are saying. Understanding the techniques and how they can be used or misused can help students listen more critically.

### Part I It's Not What They Said, But How They Said It (20 minutes)

Purpose: Students recognize the techniques that speakers and writers sometimes use to mislead their audience.

#### 1. Students learn the importance of listening critically by discussing incidents of miscommunication.

Share with students an anecdote from your own experience—preferably humorous—in which a miscommunication between two people caused a misunderstanding. Have students share similar experiences.

Ask students what caused the misunderstandings. (Student responses should include incomprehensible/vague vocabulary and misinterpretation of meaning.) Point out that what is said by one person is not always what is heard by another. Explain that critical listening can help people avoid such problems.

Explain to students that listening critically often means filtering out the tone, or the way things are said, in order to understand the information being conveyed. Critical listening means judging the validity of a speaker's words and message. Say, "You listen critically in order to analyze and evaluate a speaker's words."

## **2. Students identify several techniques of misleading communication.**

Elicit from students a definition of the word "ambiguous." Lead students to the understanding that when something is ambiguous, its meaning is difficult to understand. Explain that speakers and writers often want to either soften the reality of what they are saying or make the information appropriate for a particular audience. Sometimes, they choose to use ambiguous words or phrases that may result in misleading communication. Discuss the difference between ambiguous messages, misleading communication, and lying.

Distribute a copy of the "Critical Listening: Misleading Communication" activity sheet to each student. Ask volunteers to read the definitions of the techniques. Discuss the definitions with the class and answer any questions students may have about them.

## **3. Students offer examples of misleading communication.**

Have students recall the experiences class members shared at the beginning of this activity. Have students use the activity sheet to identify and share what caused each misunderstanding.

## **4. Students recognize the reasons why people might intentionally use misleading messages.**

As a class, brainstorm when and why people might knowingly apply one of these techniques. Ask:

- Who might try to use an opinion as a fact? (Possible responses: a politician trying to convince people to support a policy, a teen asking for permission to stay out later than usual, television and podcast ads.)
- When might someone use negative or positive connotations? (Students may respond: when a person is trying to persuade through appeals to emotion rather than logic.)
- Why might someone use euphemisms? (Students may say: to avoid a negative reaction that a more accurate word might cause; for example, using "collateral damage" instead of "civilian deaths.")
- When might a person use inflated language? (Students may respond: to fit in with a style of language from a certain profession or discipline, to try to sound impressive.)

## **5. Students briefly review the definitions of the four techniques.**

Call on volunteers to name and define the four techniques of misleading communication in their own words.

**Part II You Don't Say! (25 minutes)**

Purpose: Through role play, students understand the techniques of misleading communication and improve their critical listening skills.

**1. Students prepare short speeches and dialogues for role-playing.**

Form groups of three to four students. Explain that each group will present a short, one-minute sketch or speech that incorporates the techniques of misleading communication. Have each group select a situation for which they will create a dialogue or short sketch. Tell students that they are to use at least one of the techniques of misleading communication in their performances.

Allow students to choose from the following situations:

- Reporters on a television news program
- A politician giving a speech to an audience
- A lecture given in a history, science, or math class
- A discussion about school policy that includes the principal and/or vice principal
- A community forum held to discuss a pollution issue
- Closing arguments in a murder trial
- A rally for the high school football team
- Teens asking a parent for a coed sleepover or permission to stay out late

Allow students 10 minutes to prepare. Suggest that they use part of that time to rehearse quietly.

**2. Students perform dialogues and speeches.**

Before students perform, remind the rest of the class that they are to listen critically so that they can analyze and evaluate the way that the speakers are conveying information. Pass out the “Critical Listening: Analysis” activity sheet to each group. Tell the class that the groups are to identify misleading messages in each sketch/speech and analyze the motivations of the individuals using the misleading communication techniques.

Have the groups perform their sketches/speeches.

**3. Students discuss the techniques of misleading communication portrayed in the sketches/speeches and the reasons they were used.**

When all groups have performed and have been evaluated, discuss the techniques and motivations portrayed in each short speech/dialogue. For each performance, ask questions such as the following:

- What techniques did the group use in their performance?
- How did you identify those techniques?
- What was the purpose for using the techniques?
- If you had actually been involved in this situation, what questions could you have asked or what actions could you have taken to find out what the facts really were?

**4. Students recognize the value of critical listening.**

Ask students to review what they have learned about critical listening. Have them write one or two sentences describing critical listening at the bottom of the activity sheet.

## SESSION 2

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### Part I One More Time (5 minutes)

Purpose: Students revisit what they learned about critical listening in the previous session.

#### 1. Students describe critical listening.

Have volunteers read the sentences that they wrote in the previous session that describe critical listening.

#### 2. Students reexamine the techniques of misleading communication.

Write in a place where everyone can see the four techniques of misleading communication: opinion disguised as fact, deceptive connotation, questionable euphemisms, and inflated language. Call on students to explain and give an example of each.

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### Part II Critically Listening to the Media (40 minutes)

Purpose: Students apply critical listening techniques to the evaluation of a media program.

#### 1. Students watch and critically listen to an actual media program.

Tell students that they are now going to practice applying critical listening skills to an actual media program. Set up the video you have previously chosen to show to the class. Pass out the “Critical Listening: Analysis” activity sheet to each student. Instruct students to use the activity sheet to take notes on the techniques of misleading communication evident in the program. Remind them to be specific in pointing out ambiguous words and phrases. Suggest that they note any nonverbal communication as well.

Play the program for students.

#### 2. Students discuss their analyses of the program.

After viewing the program, discuss the students’ observations. Ask questions such as the following:

- What was your overall impression of the program in terms of accuracy and communication?
- What techniques of misleading communication did you observe?
- What ambiguous words and phrases were used? Can you restate the words/phrases that reveal the speakers' meaning?
- Why do you think the speakers chose to use these techniques?
- What nonverbal communication did you notice? Was it effective?
- If you were the director of the program, how would you have scripted it? What would you have done differently?

### **3. Students write about the importance of critical listening in their lives.**

After the discussion is completed, ask students to take five minutes to write a short paragraph explaining the importance of critical listening in their lives. Suggest that they include how they may benefit from using critical listening techniques and identifying techniques of misleading communication.



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## Conclusion (2 minutes)

Ask students to describe times when they either heard communication that was purposefully misleading or when they used such techniques. Elicit from students the following **key points** that were taught in this lesson:

- Critical listening means analyzing and evaluating the ways in which information is communicated.
- Speakers and writers sometimes convey information in a way that makes it difficult to identify the true meaning of their words.
- Recognizing misleading communication and understanding a speaker's or writer's motivations are essential for effective critical listening.

## Student Assessment

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### Session 1

1. Define critical listening.
2. List the four techniques of misleading communication. Write four short monologues or dialogues that show examples of each of the techniques.

### Session 2

1. Describe a situation in which you were misled by one of the four misleading techniques.
2. Analyze a news article or an editorial that uses at least one of the techniques of misleading communication. Explain what is misleading about the article or editorial.
3. Why is critical listening an important skill to have?

## LESSON EXTENSIONS

### Using Quotations

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“The fewer the facts, the stronger the opinion.”

Have students bring in examples of persuasive writing (e.g., advertisements, editorials, campaign literature). Have students fold a piece of paper down the middle, write “Fact” as the heading on one side and write “Opinion” on the other side. Tell students to list statements from their persuasive writing examples in the appropriate columns. Have them discuss their results in small groups.

### Addressing Multiple Learning Styles

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Show students a picture of a house. Have them write or draw a description of the house and its surroundings.

Have students compare their work. Point out the different interpretations of your instructions. Explain that people often interpret the same thing in different ways. Discuss the role that this plays in misunderstandings/misleading communication.

### Writing in Your Journal

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Have students write about appropriate and inappropriate times to use the techniques discussed in this lesson (for example, euphemisms may be appropriate when the situation calls for sensitivity).

Have students share their work with the class.

### Real-World Uses

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Discuss the use of euphemisms in real estate or auto ads (e.g., “handyman’s special” for a house that’s in bad shape, “executive homes” for expensive neighborhoods).

Have students read the want ads in search of euphemisms. They should create a list of the euphemisms, along with their translations.

## Homework

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Have students repeat Part II of Session 2 as they view or listen to a talk show on TV, a podcast, or YouTube, using the “Critical Listening: Analysis” activity sheet as a guide.

Discuss students’ observations in class. Have students write a paragraph summarizing their findings.

## Additional Resources

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Have students read *The 7 Powers of Questions: Secrets to Successful Communication in Life and at Work* by Dorothy Leeds.

As a class, discuss the role that questions play in listening critically.

# CRITICAL LISTENING: MISLEADING COMMUNICATION

Technique	Explanation	Example	Detection Hints
Opinion disguised as fact	A <i>fact</i> is something that can be verified as true or as something that actually happened. An <i>opinion</i> is someone's feelings or judgment. If a speaker does not support information that is given as fact, then it is an opinion disguised as fact.	<b>Fact:</b> George Washington was the first president of the United States. <b>Opinion disguised as fact:</b> Historians agree that George Washington was the greatest president that the United States has ever had.	Speakers must support opinions with facts before you can accept them as valid. Ask questions to discover facts. Verify facts by checking reference sources.
Deceptive connotation	The <i>denotation</i> of a word is its literal meaning. The <i>connotation</i> is a word's suggested meaning and the associations that the word has. Connotations can make a listener feel or think a certain way.	<b>Neutral denotation:</b> His determination surprised us. <b>Unfavorable connotation:</b> His stubbornness surprised us.	If a speaker uses the connotation of a word to distort the truth and sway the listener, it is imprecise communication. Ask yourself if the connotation of any word is used to distort the truth.
Questionable euphemisms	A <i>euphemism</i> is a word or phrase that is used to avoid speaking directly about something that is unpleasant or improper.	<b>Euphemism:</b> The remains of the soldiers were never found. <b>Direct word:</b> The dead bodies of the soldiers were never found.	Euphemisms are used to soften the truth. Ask yourself why a speaker chose to use a euphemism instead of a more accurate term.
Inflated language	<i>Inflated language</i> is language that consists of scholarly, technical, or scientific words and overly long phrases. <i>Jargon</i> , the specialized vocabulary of a profession or a hobby, is an example of this.	<b>Inflated language:</b> No viable alternative exists for diligent commitment to an endeavor. <b>Concise language:</b> There is no substitute for hard work.	Jargon appears to be technical. It may present ideas you could understand more easily if they were stated clearly. Ask yourself why inflated language was used.

# CRITICAL LISTENING: ANALYSIS

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