



Iowa State University

## Writing & Media Help Center

WRITTEN ORAL VISUAL ELECTRONIC

## Persuasive Devices:

How to Avoid Being Bamboozled

### What are some trick strategies people use to manipulate audiences?

Persuasive devices are often used to describe (a) product advertisements, (b) political campaigns, or (c) everyday life persuasive situations. Because they can have a political connotation, they are often called propaganda techniques. Some commonly used persuasive strategies are, glittering generalities, name calling, card stacking, testimonials, plain folk, bandwagon, and transfer.

**Glittering Generalities** uses glowing, positive words such as “new,” “exciting,” “wonderful.” Problem: The “glittering” words really don’t tell us anything about the product.

**Name Calling** is calling the competitors bad names. Example: “Tide is better than all of the other detergents.” Problem: The ad often denigrates the other product without telling positive things about the supported product.

**Card Stacking** lists numerous reasons why the product is good. Example: “Tide is great for these five reasons.” Problem: Some of the reasons given may be small ones. On the positive side, this ad usually tends to provide more information than ads with other types of propaganda.

**Testimonial** uses some person to testify the worth of the product. Example: endorsement by a movie star or sports hero. Problem: The person may not actually use the product. Even if the person uses the product, why should we buy a product just because a famous football player endorses it?

**Plain Folks** uses common, ordinary people to sell a product. It says that you share this problem with others. Problem: Just because a politician dresses like the people he/she is around (in a farmer's cap or firefighter's hat), the person hasn't really changed.

**Bandwagon** states that because a large number of people use the product, you should jump on the bandwagon, too. Example: Crest is the number one selling toothpaste in the United States. Problem: Just because more people do something doesn't always make it good. Maybe a large number of people went to see a movie, but few enjoyed it. On the positive side, this technique can have some value. (If four out of five dentists recommend a cavity-fighting toothpaste, that can be helpful information.)

**Transfer** persuades you to buy a product for the wrong reason. Example: You buy Cracker Jacks to get the free toy inside. Problem: The customer is buying the gimmick and not the real product.