

Chapter 3: Clear Thinking, Critical Thinking, and Clear Writing

- Vagueness and Ambiguity are two related fallacies.
- A word or phrase is **vague** if we cannot say it with certainty what it includes and what it excludes.
- Vagueness is often intentional and politicians will often resort to vague statements if they don't want their audience to know exactly where they stand.

When a claim is not too vague to convey appropriately useful information, its level of vagueness is acceptable.

- A word or phrase is said to be ambiguous when it has more than one meaning.

Semantic ambiguity: Word or phrase that makes the sentence ambiguous. Ex: John lines up on the right side.

- We don't know if John is lining up opposite from the left side or if he's lining up on the correct side.
- Semantic ambiguity is the most obvious type of ambiguity.

Syntactic ambiguity: Ambiguity that arises from a lack of proper punctuation or grammar. Ex: People who protest often get arrested.

- We don't know if the sentence is suggesting that people who protest, often get arrested or if the sentence is suggesting that the people who protest often, get arrested.
- A comma makes a significant difference in that sentence.

Grouping ambiguity: Results when it is not clear whether a word is being used to refer to a group collectively or to members of the group individually. Example: Secretaries make more money than physicians do.

Ambiguous pronoun references: when it is not clear to what or whom a pronoun is supposed to refer.

Purposes of Definitions

Lexical definition: The definition that tells us what the word originally means (Dictionary definition)

Stipulative definition: Making a definition before the case. You can't decide for yourself what words mean. Everybody must be behind your definition in order for it to be accepted.

Précising definitions: When we try to reduce vagueness and ambiguity. These can be stipulative as well. Example: The word “minor” has different meanings (alcohol age) (voting age).

Emotive meaning consists of the positive and negative associations of words.

Types of definitions:

- **Definition by example:** Giving examples or pointing at something
- **Definition by synonym:** Giving another word or phrase that means the same as the term being defined.
- **Analytical definition:** Specifying the features that a thing must possess in order for the term being defined to apply it.

Almost all dictionary definitions are analytic.

Chapter 4: Credibility

Consists primarily of attitudes and basic questions to ask yourself in order to help you become a better critical thinker.

Credibility: When someone makes a claim, we begin to consider how true the claim is. Should we take this claim with a grain of salt or should we just believe what we’re told?

- Questions about the source
- Questions about the content

Credibility always comes in degrees. Just because we’re suspicious about the claim or the source of the claim doesn’t mean we get to say it’s false.

Sources of the claim

- Is the person making the claim going to profit from you believing the claim. We get extra skeptical if we think that the person will profit whether it be monetary or simply in terms of power. Example: Advertisements, politicians.
- It doesn’t mean they’re lying, we are simply trying to be better judges and we should be careful of how we interpret the claim.
- Ramping up our level of skepticism is what credibility is all about

Content of the claim

-We do it by comparing it to our background knowledge (How different or similar is this claim to what I previously knew)

-The more knowledge you have in an area, the more credibility you have.

How can we be more perceptive?

“What hurts us from being more perceptive?”

- If we're dogmatic (being sure you know everything)
- Biases, pride
- Willful ignorance
- Emotions

“What helps us be more perceptive?”

- Double checking
- Caring about people
- Being interested in other human beings