

# Lesson Skill: Identifying false premise in persuasive writing

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**Strand** Reading — nonfiction

**SOL** 11.5

12.5

## Materials

- Handout with list of common logical fallacies (available from most on-line writing labs). Choose one that is workable for the students.
- Collected copies of direct mail
- Copies of the Alabama Clergymen’s Letter to Dr. Martin Luther King
- Copies of Dr. King’s response to the clergymen, “Letter from the Birmingham City Jail.” Use an Internet search. Make copies for students or create links for them to find them on the computer.
- Curriculum Framework, 11.5

## Lesson

1. Prepare a mini-lesson or a multi-media presentation on what makes a false premise. Many sources are available on-line for information on logical fallacies. Students will benefit from seeing examples as the teacher explains why each false premise does not work for logical argument. Discuss why false premises are used, even though they are not logical. Students brainstorm current or well known commercials that rely on false premise (commercials like the old “I’m a Pepper, He’s a Pepper....” These commercials are generally available online and can be watched as a class).
2. Show students a few examples of the false premises that appear in junk mail or election mail. Explain to students that junk mail is really an advertising strategy.
3. Divide students into groups and give each group three to five pieces of mail. Students determine which logical fallacies are used in an attempt to persuade people to either use the company’s goods or services or to vote for a particular candidate. Require the students in the group to explain the false premises that they find in the mail. Students then either prepare their oral report for the class or develop a presentation to report their findings to the class.
4. Once students are comfortable with the definition and recognition of false premises, give each of the students a copy of the Alabama Clergymen’s Letter to Dr. Martin Luther King. Students read the letter and find and identify three or four false premises in the letter to Dr. King. The letter can also be jig-sawed. Give each student one paragraph to work with (paragraphs will be repeated, but the students may then come up with more examples when their work is compared).
5. Follow by having the students read all or part of Dr. King’s response, “Letter from the Birmingham City Jail,” in which Dr. King points out the fallacies of the arguments presented in the letter from the Alabama Clergymen. If students read only a part of Dr. King’s letter, other

parts of the letter can then be used as an assessment of their understanding of finding false premises in persuasive writing.

**Strategies for Differentiation**

- Model identification of false premise as a group
- Define and exemplify false premise in political advertisement, cartoons, etc.
- Read speech aloud – Text to speech
- Using a fresh text and highlighting tools, identify the false premise in a teacher generated selection