

Section **A**

Techniques of Self-Deception

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1. Prejudice

Game Book Definition

“A prejudice is an unwillingness to examine fairly the evidence and reasoning in behalf of the person or thing which is the object of the prejudice. It is a prejudgment caused by indoctrination, conditioning, or some prior experience of a singularly pleasant or unpleasant character. A prejudice has strong and deep emotional support. ... The feeling that operates in [prejudice] is deep, not superficial, and is often completely hidden from the [one] in its grip.”

From *Thinking Straighter*

“Prejudice differs from Hasty Generalization (Section E) in that, although Hasty Generalization often represents a spontaneous emotional reaction, Prejudice is always a matter of much longer standing. The feeling that operates in the latter case is deep, not superficial, and is often completely hidden from the [one] in its grip.”

Expanded Definition

- Prejudice can be *against* or *for* a person, a group, or a thing.
- The prejudice can stem from race, religion, sex, age, political affiliation, ethnic group, geographic location, etc.
- Any “arguments” given by the prejudiced person are irrelevant to the point being made.

Example of Prejudice Against Someone

- a. Don't invite David for Thanksgiving dinner. His last name is Rosenberg, which means he's Jewish.

Comment: Since no valid reason is given for excluding David, the assumption is that the speaker is prejudiced against Jews.

Example of Prejudice For Someone

- b. Let's invite David to join our club. We need a Jewish member.

Comment: No valid reason is given for inviting David. If the speaker said, “We need a Jewish member to add a different perspective to our Comparative Religions club,” the answer would be No Technique.

If the speaker gives a valid (relevant) reason for or against a person or proposal, the answer is No Technique.

Example of No Technique rather than Prejudice

- c. Business owner: “I refuse to discuss the issue of equal pay for equal work with Mary. She is not the workers' representative and has no authority to negotiate with us.”

Comment: The owner's objection to Mary is valid. If he refused to talk with her because she is a woman, the answer would be Prejudice.

Where it is unclear that the speaker has a valid reason for making a judgment, *the benefit of the doubt should be in favor of Prejudice.*

Example of Prejudice rather than No Technique

- d. Dear Miss Jones: We regret to inform you that the Board has rejected your application for membership in the Pinewood Club. The Pinewood Club is for men only.

Comment: The Club may have what it considers to be solid reasons for its men only policy. However, none is stated.

Your Notes for Prejudice

2. Academic Detachment

Game Book Definition

“We refuse to commit ourselves when decision or action is demanded. In a situation requiring a stand to be taken, we see (or think we see) persuasive arguments on both sides. But certain situations, e.g., voting, require decision and action of one kind or another. Here, instead of trying to remain neutral, we must make a decision on the basis of which side seems to have the greater weight of evidence.”

From *Thinking Straighter*

“This fallacy is christened ‘Academic’ Detachment because it is common among academic people, who are trained to postpone decisions until they have explored all aspects of a problem. It is, however, by no means limited to the college educated.”

Expanded Definition

- Academic Detachment also applies to situations where there are reasons *against* either course of action.
- Likewise, it applies to cases where a person receives conflicting advice and therefore postpones a decision or does nothing.

Examples of Academic Detachment

- a. The tweed wool coat has nice lines, fits well, and is very warm. This tan cashmere is also warm and comfortable. Which one should I buy? I don’t know. I’ll just wait until next year to buy a coat.
- b. All three candidates have been throwing dirt at each other during the campaign, so I’m not going to vote for any of them. I’m staying home on Election Day.

Comment: This example shows that there may be more than two choices that the speaker refuses to pick.

- c. John told me this was an excellent book, while Judy told me it took her hours to read, and the ending wasn’t worth it. I don’t know which one to believe.

The indecisiveness may take the form of throwing the decision onto other people.

Examples of Academic Detachment Transferring a Decision to Another

- d. Principal to Personnel Officer: “I could put Mr. Perkins in that position because he is an excellent disciplinarian. Maybe Mrs. Randolph should get the job because she’s so strong in math and science. Decisions! Why don’t you just send me a new teacher after Christmas?”
- e. At City Council meetings, whenever faced with opposition to a proposal, Councilman McGuire would always say, “I don’t think we should take it upon ourselves to settle this issue; instead, let’s put it to a vote of the people.”

Academic Detachment also covers recommending that an organization (school, business, club, government, etc.) take no stand or postpone a decision.

Example of recommending Academic Detachment

- f. The United States has consistently backed Israel in the Middle East. But both Sharon of Israel and Arafat of the Palestinians are immoral leaders who simply want to wipe out the other side. We should be neutral in the conflict.

If a person has a good reason for not making a decision, the example is No Technique.

Example of No Technique rather than Academic Detachment

- g. I didn't vote in the student council election because I was new in the school and didn't know the qualifications of the candidates.

Your Notes for Academic Detachment

3. Drawing the Line

Game Book Definition

“Sharp distinctions are drawn where it is inappropriate to draw sharp distinctions. It is permissible to draw the line between those who are for you and those who are *not for you*, those who tell the truth and those who *do not tell the truth*, and so on. But the error and inclination exhibited by common speech is to fail to realize that the logical class of those who do not tell the truth includes *two* subclasses that are quite different: 1) those who lie and 2) those who say nothing at all.”

Expanded Definition

- Often a situation has many possible outcomes or explanations. However, the speaker reduces the choices to only two. The listener is given no “wobble room” and must pick one or the other. “Neither” and “both” are unacceptable responses.
- The example may be a declarative statement or a question.

Examples of Drawing the Line

- a. Father tells his family: “Well, take your pick. Tonight you can watch either the NBC miniseries or the ABC Game of the Week.”

Comment: Even without cable TV, there are other choices besides these two.

- b. U.S. Senator: “We must attack Iran, or that country will soon control the entire Middle East.”

Comment: The speaker ignores other options such as diplomacy and forming a coalition of nations to stop Iran’s aggression. And if the attack is not made, why is it inevitable that Iran will control the entire Middle East?

Drawing the Line may take the form of “if you’re for this [or against that], you must be (crazy, a Communist, a traitor, an atheist, etc.) ...” This is similar to but different from Attacking a Straw Man (Section F).

Example of Drawing the Line in If-Then form

- c. If you’re against the Contra revolutionaries in Nicaragua, you’re for Communism.

Comment: You may condemn *both* the Communists in power in Nicaragua and the Contra revolutionaries. However, the speaker does not recognize that possibility.

Junior/
Senior
Only

If setting a limit is reasonable and even necessary, No Technique is the answer.

Example of No Technique rather than Drawing the Line

We cannot cut our price any lower than \$3,500 for that copy machine. If we go below that figure, we will not make any money. If they insist on a lower price, we will have to let another company have their business.

Comment: The speaker gives a solid reason for drawing the line at \$3,500.



Example of Drawing the Line rather than No Technique

I'm not opposed to hunting in general, but I draw the line at mammals. Mammals live in families like us and females bear their young within their bodies.

Comment: The speaker ignores the fact that mammals are not the only animals that live in families or bear their young within their bodies.

Your Notes for Drawing the Line

4. Not Drawing the Line

Game Book Definition

“The existence of differences is denied just because the differences are small and therefore apparently unimportant.”

Expanded Definition

- The speaker does not make a distinction that should be made.
- Sometimes the person can't see that there are limits to anything. He wants to press his luck and go “one step further.”
- Not Drawing the Line often takes the form of “you have allowed or bought this much, why not more” or “we've already done this much so we might as well do more to complete the job.”

Examples of Not Drawing the Line

- a. I've been absent from school for ten days already. What's another day?
Comment: Another day means still more work to make up when you return.
- b. Customer service representative to a potential customer on the phone:
“Regular phone service is \$10.90 per month. For just \$1.25 more per month, why not add Call Forwarding?”
Comment: If I don't need Call Forwarding, I'll waste the \$1.25 every month.
- c. We have already sent 50,000 troops to Afghanistan. We have committed ourselves. If things worsen, we will have to send more.
Comment: If the invasion is not working, what will sending more troops do other than waste more lives.

If the speaker gives a good reason for extending a deadline or changing a prior decision, the answer would be No Technique.

Examples of No Technique rather than Not Drawing the Line

- d. Mother to son: “You have already missed ten days of school. Today is Friday. Stay home one more day and, after the weekend, return to school at full strength.”
- d. Yes, our original deadline for deciding on the new computer vendor was today. But we have not yet heard from two of the major companies that we deal with. If we don't wait for their prices, we may not get the best deal for our school. I think we should wait for a couple of more days to receive all the information that will help us make the best decision.

Your Notes for Not Drawing the Line

5. Conservatism, Radicalism, Moderatism

Game Book Definition

“These three habits of mind often are forms of prejudice. But they are not necessarily such. Prejudices have histories with a beginning. But the conservative, the one who prefers what is old or familiar simply because it is old or familiar, may be born such; it is a part of the temperament he brings into the world. Radicalism is the habit of preferring the new or the revolutionary just because of its newness. The moderate habitually chooses middle-of-the-road or compromise ground; he avoids the two extremes. But there is no inherent virtue in moderatism or compromise as such. Actually, there are times when our position should be conservative, times when we should take a radical stand, and still other times when we should be moderate.”

From *Thinking Straighter*

- “The ‘die-hard’ conservative opposes all reforms and innovations regardless of their merits simply because they run counter to the old familiar ways. This embattled conservative is both the guardian of and a slave to the past. Frequently he even reshapes the past to support his argument.”
- “A dyed-in-the-wool radical prefers change just for the sake of change.”
- “Compromise is supposed to preserve something of the good of both sides, although it is equally possible that it preserves only the bad of both sides.”

Expanded Definition

- Conservatism often takes the form of “That’s the way we’ve always done it and we’re not going to change now.” In ads, Conservatism often refers to how many years the company has been in business.
- Radicalism may take the form of claiming that a product, idea, or approach is “entirely new” or “completely redesigned.”
- The moderate, unlike the academic detacher, wants to make a decision but favors a compromise he hopes will satisfy all sides. Moderatism in an ad may appear in the guise of combining the best of the old with the best of the new.

Examples of Conservatism

- a. We have used these scoresheets for every academic games tournament for the last 18 years. There is no reason to change to the new ones.

Comment: You must give a reason why the new ones are not an improvement, not just cite the fact that the old ones have been used for 18 years.

- b. Nothing binds us one to the other like a promise kept. For more than 140 years, Mass Mutual has been helping people keep their promises by ensuring we have the financial strength to keep ours. That’s why families and businesses rely on us to insure their lives, their health, and their financial future.

Comment: Sure, Mass Mutual has insured families for many years, but that doesn’t mean they offer a policy that’s best for *you*.

Example of Radicalism

- c. “We Democrats must take a fundamentally different approach from the Republican agenda of the past eight years,” said the Party Chairman at a news conference.

Comment: Is there *nothing* good in the Republican agenda? Why not keep policies that have worked and focus on replacing the ones that don't?

Example of Moderatism

- d. Ad: “Sealy Serta mattresses represent the perfect combination of mattress qualities. They're not too hard. They're not too soft. They conform to fit your body. Try one today.”

Comment: You may need a hard mattress or a soft mattress to conform to your body.

If the speaker gives a good reason why the older approach should continue or why change or compromise is necessary, the best answer is No Technique.

Examples of No Technique rather than Conservatism, Radicalism, Moderatism

- e. After a yearlong study of the problem, the school administration has decided that the proposed new method of computing class rank is no better than the method already used. So no change will be made in the current procedure.

Comment: The study revealed that it's not worth the trouble to train everyone in the new ranking system. This is sound policy.

- f. The current administration has failed on every front. The economy is in shambles. Our national security is much worse. The budget deficit is a record high. A change is clearly needed in Washington.

Comment: If the speaker went on to recommend a specific candidate without giving reasons why that candidate would have a good chance to solve the problems that were enumerated, the answer would be Radicalism.

Your Notes for Conservatism, Radicalism, Moderatism

6. Rationalization

Game Book Definition

“You cite reasons or causes that will justify action that really has less creditable grounds.”

From *Thinking Straighter*

“When we have adopted a belief on purely emotional grounds, our minds tend to immediately construct a reasonable, socially acceptable defense of this belief just in case it is challenged or criticized. Some people are extraordinarily creative in this art of inventing false reasons.”

Expanded Definition

- The person refuses to take responsibility for a mistake and instead makes an excuse or casts the blame on someone else.
- A person may also claim prejudice (without giving any evidence) as the reason why he or she wasn't selected for a job or promotion, lost a competition, etc.
- The speaker may make excuses for another individual (for example, a political leader) or for a group (such as a team).

Examples of Rationalization

- a. There was no way for me to win the Equations match last week. The girl I played knew both judges in the room. I didn't know either one.

Comment: Was a judge even called to the table? How did knowing the judges help her to win?

- b. A student, after receiving poor marks in French for four straight marking periods, says, “French is not a very important language. Besides the classroom organization is poor.”

Comment: When in doubt, blame the teacher.

If the speaker gives a valid reason for the error or failure and admits the mistake, the proper answer is No Technique.

Example of No Technique Rather Than Rationalization

- c. I was sick the night before and didn't get a chance to study. I should have asked the professor if I could take the test another time. I made a big mistake by taking it and paid the price with an F.

Your Notes for Rationalization

7. Wishful Thinking

Game Book Definition

“You believe a proposition to be true because you want it to be true. *When* we are forced to admit that our wishes have *not* become reality, we may then seek comfort in *rationalizing*.”

Expanded Definition

Often Wishful Thinking takes the form, “I know something good will happen to me (or to someone else) because I (they) *deserve* it or because I worked hard.”

Examples of Wishful Thinking

- a. I deserve a good grade because I put a lot of effort into this course.
Comment: You deserve a good grade if you make high marks on the assignments and tests. Effort is necessary, but results matter.
- b. Husband greeting visitors on Thanksgiving: “Mom has worked hard preparing a big meal. Everyone’s gonna love it!”
Comment: Working hard on the meal doesn’t guarantee it’ll be delicious.

If a person gives *good* reasons why an outcome should occur, the answer is “No Technique.” This would also be the case if the speaker merely predicts a good showing because of sound preparation without claiming the most favorable outcome.

Examples of No Technique rather than Wishful Thinking

- c. Polls show our candidate with a big lead. If we keep this momentum going and avoid stupid mistakes, we should win the election.
Comment: With a “big” lead, the strategy is sound. Even if the opponent gains some ground, you should still win.
- d. I’ve studied my worksheets, attended every practice session, and finished in the top 10% of all four games. I should do well at the national tournament.
Comment: The speaker does not guarantee a championship or a victory in every round. But doing well is a reasonable expectation.

Rationalization must be distinguished from Wishful Thinking. Rationalization deals with *past* actions, whereas Wishful Thinking deals with *future* events. Also Rationalization deals with a *negative* event; the Wishful Thinker adopts a *positive* outlook for no good reason.

Example of Rationalization rather than Wishful Thinking

- e. I did lousy on the math test, but I just didn’t have enough time to study for it.
Comment: Didn’t *have* enough time or didn’t *take* enough time to study?

Example of Wishful Thinking rather than Rationalization

- f. I haven't had much time to study for the math test. But I know Mrs. Chalmers will give me every break when she grades it. I've answered more of her questions in class than anyone.

Comment: Mrs. Chalmers will put more weight in how you answer the questions on the test rather than how many you answered in class.

Your Notes for Wishful Thinking

8. Tabloid Thinking

Game Book Definition

“To think in tabloids is to oversimplify a complex theory or set of circumstances. The tabloid thinker prefers quick summaries and has the habit of ‘putting things in a nutshell.’ Tabloids concerning people are popular because they offer a neat summary of the character of a prominent person. ‘Marx? You don’t know who Marx was? Why, he was that philosopher who became impatient and irritable in his old age.’ It is much easier to remember Marx in this simple fashion than to remember him as a man of many interesting and controversial facets of character and conviction. These human tabloids are frequently emotional, but they are not mere Emotional Terms. To be Tabloid Thinking there must be some indication that someone is trying to sum up another’s character. All stereotypes (‘barbers are talkative’) are tabloids because they represent a certain trait or characteristic, which is really superficial or trivial, as being the essential nature of a given class.”

Expanded Definition

- This technique often reduces an entire group of people to a stereotype or applies a generalization about a group to a member of the group.
- This type of Tabloid Thinker thinks he is stating a fact and is not biased for or against the group.

Example of Tabloid Thinking

- a. Dave is a typical programmer – you know, thick glasses, pale, skinny, and hardly able to talk to a normal human being.

Comment: The speaker stereotypes Dave but doesn’t call for any action in his favor or against him.

Tabloid Thinking may even involve a comment that the speaker thinks is complimentary to the group being stereotyped.

Example of Tabloid Thinking containing a complimentary remark

- b. I’m looking forward to the party. Domingo will be there. You know those Brazilians – creative, energetic, and great dancers.

Comment: The speaker does not say “Let’s not go because Domingo will be there” or “let’s not talk to Domingo.” Therefore, this example is not Prejudice. However, the speaker does stereotype Brazilians by assuming Domingo will be a great dancer.

Tabloid Thinking differs from Prejudice in that Tabloid Thinking summarizes a complex theory or applies a stereotype to a group of people *without proposing any action for or against a person or group*. The Tabloid Thinker stereotypes a group of people *without taking or recommending action for or against the group or a member of the group*.

Example of Prejudice rather than Tabloid Thinking

- c. We should have our end-of-year party at Luigi’s house. His mother is Italian; so she must be a good cook.

Comment: The speaker stereotypes Italian women as good cooks. However, a decision is pushed.

Example of Tabloid Thinking rather than Prejudice

- d. I envy Vince. His mother is Italian; so she must be a good cook.

Comment: No action for or against Vince or his mother is proposed.

Tabloid Thinking can at times be similar to Drawing the Line. However, Drawing the Line deals with a *specific* situation or person whereas Tabloid Thinking makes a *generalization* about a group.

Example of Drawing the Line rather than Tabloid Thinking

- e. High school teacher: "Another one of our students died in a car wreck. He must have been high on either drugs or alcohol."

Comment: The speaker gives only two possible explanations for the student's death when it is possible that neither drugs nor alcohol was involved.

Example of Tabloid Thinking Rather Than Drawing the Line

- f. All teenagers either drink or use drugs.

Comment: While there is an implicit condemnation of teenagers, the speaker does not give an actual teenager a choice or accuse a specific teenager of doing one or the other destructive action. Instead, the speaker states a generalization about teenagers.

Your Notes for Tabloid Thinking

9. Causal Oversimplification

Game Book Definition

“A complex event is explained by references to only one or two probable causes whereas *many* are responsible.”

From *Thinking Straighter*

- “The human mind grasps quickly at simple solutions of baffling and disturbing problems.”
- “Among those of us who are not experts in a given field there is a strong tendency to pick the one cause that suits best one’s own interest. Thus prohibitionists blame the mounting number of auto accidents on the consumption of alcoholic beverages, whereas highway engineers place the blame on the public’s unwillingness to pay for good roads.”

Expanded Definition

- Causal Oversimplification often takes the form of offering a simple solution to a complicated problem.
- It can also take the form of blaming a scapegoat.

Examples of Causal Oversimplification

- a. The recent war was a result of miscommunication between the leaders of Botswana and South Africa. If they would have just spoken directly with one another, the war would have been avoided.

Comment: Oh that peace were that simple to achieve!

- b. It’s easy to stop inflation. Get the Federal government to balance its budget.

Comment: Inflation involves many more factors besides whether the Federal budget is balanced.

- c. Why did we lose the game? Simple. Sean Smith struck out twice with the bases loaded.

Comment: We tend to remember the good/bad plays from late in the game and forget the earlier ones that affected the score.

If the speaker’s assertion of a single cause for an event is reasonable or the claim is that a cause is a major contributor but not the *sole* reason for a problem, answer No Technique.

Examples of No Technique rather than Causal Oversimplification

- d. My toy broke because Brittany threw it on the floor. If she had not done that, my favorite toy would still be here with me today.

- e. Poor home life is one reason many of our kids cannot read. If we are going to make any progress with these kids, we have to get them some help outside of school as well as while they are here.

Comment: Notice the words “*one reason many* of our kids ...” Also, the speaker does not guarantee success but offers a way to “make ... progress.”

Causal Oversimplification can resemble Drawing the Line. However, Drawing the Line offers *two* alternatives whereas Causal Oversimplification either reduces a complex event to a *single* root cause or proposes a *simple* (one-dimensional) answer to a complicated problem.

Examples of Drawing the Line rather than Causal Oversimplification

- f. The only alternative to the present corrupt tax system is a flat tax rate.

Comment: The speaker offers two choices: stay with the current system or adopt a flat tax rate. A slight change in wording can make this Causal Oversimplification: “The only solution to our corrupt tax system is a flat tax rate.”

- g. Here is my view on a Middle East problem: What is Arab should be Palestinian, and what is Jewish should be Israeli.

Comment: The speaker draws a line in the sand: Jews on one side, Arabs on the other.

Example of Causal Oversimplification rather than Drawing the Line

- h. Put back capital punishment, and you will stop murders.

Comment: The speaker implicitly offers two alternatives: do what I say and stop murders or ignore my suggestion and keep the status quo. However, in the speaker’s mind, the reason why this suggestion offers an effective solution is that the absence of capital punishment is the *sole cause* of murders. Also If the speaker merely concluded that “you will reduce the murder rate” rather than “you will stop murders,” the statement might be No Technique.

Rationalization differs from Causal Oversimplification in that the speaker gives an excuse for a past action. Causal Oversimplification claims that a complicated event or situation can be traced to only *one* cause. The Causal Oversimplifier makes a *general* statement whereas the Rationalizer tries to explain a *specific* failure or deficiency.

Example of Rationalization rather than Causal Oversimplification

- i. My accident was caused by the potholes in the street.

Comment: The speaker refers to his or her *specific* accident and does not generalize to “All accidents are caused by the potholes in the streets.”

Example of Causal Oversimplification rather than Rationalization

- j. If the city would just fix the potholes in the streets, we’d have fewer accidents.

Comment: This speaker gives one remedy (fix the potholes) for a *general* and widespread problem (traffic accidents).

Tabloid Thinking and Causal Oversimplification must be compared and contrasted. Causal Oversimplification is a more specific instance of Tabloid Thinking. Causal Oversimplification, as its name implies, oversimplifies the *causes* of an event.

Example of Tabloid Thinking Rather Than Causal Oversimplification

- k. Murderers don't care about human life, not even their own. So capital punishment is not a deterrent for them.

Comment: The speaker makes a generalization about murderers.

Example of Causal Oversimplification Rather Than Tabloid Thinking

- l. Put back capital punishment, and you will stop murders.

Comment: This speaker sees the absence of capital punishment as the sole reason why people commit murder. Therefore, reinstating capital punishment will stop (not just cut down) murders.

Your Notes for Causal Oversimplification

10. Inconceivability

Game Book Definition

“You declare a proposition to be false simply because you cannot conceive it actualized or possible of realization.”

From *Thinking Straighter*

- “*Pictorial* Inconceivability occurs when we declare an idea or belief false because we cannot in our own minds picture or imagine it to be so.”
- “A second type of Inconceivability, *Experiential*, declares a particular idea or belief unsound because all past experience reveals its failure to succeed.”

Expanded Definition

- The speaker could be speaking about something that affects himself or someone else.
- The speaker cannot accept even the possibility of the opposite being true.
- The speaker may also state that he cannot imagine why someone would believe something or take a certain course of action.
- Inconceivability is usually the technique of the pessimist whereas Wishful Thinking comes from the optimist.

Examples of Inconceivability

- a. You say that the police have arrested Mayor Simpson for fraud? He has been the only honest politician in our whole city for ten years. There’s no way that he could have stolen money!
- b. I just can’t understand why students would go on strike. If I were a student, I wouldn’t strike.

Prejudice can resemble Inconceivability. The determination of which technique best applies depends on the exact wording of the example.

Example of Prejudice rather than Inconceivability

- c. Donald Trump could say that 2 plus 2 is 4, and I still wouldn’t agree with him.
Comment: The speaker has already prejudged everything Trump says.

Example of Inconceivability rather than Prejudice

- d. You say Donald Trump praised Hillary Clinton. Sorry, but there’s no way that could happen. It must have been done tongue-in-cheek.
Comment: The key words are “there’s no way.” The speaker cannot believe that Trump praised a Democrat since he believes Trump is prejudiced against Clinton.

If the speaker gives solid reasons why an outcome will not occur and/or says merely that the result *might* be unfavorable, the best answer is No Technique.

Example of No Technique rather than Inconceivability

- e. Four of Central's starters have earned scholarships to play college basketball. None of our starters got a look from any college. It's obvious why they have won 25 games in a row. We have very little chance to beat them.

Comment: The speaker gives solid reasons why his team won't win. Also he says "very little chance" rather than "no chance."

Sometimes Inconceivability borders on Wishful Thinking. The Wishful Thinker may express his confidence in a negative manner ("we won't lose"). This does not mean that the answer should be Inconceivability. With Inconceivability, the speaker cannot imagine a particular result happening.

Example of Wishful Thinking Rather Than Inconceivability

- f. Jack: "I won't ever get cancer because I don't smoke."

Comment: Not smoking may keep Jack from getting lung cancer. However, there are many other kinds of cancer unrelated to smoking.

Example of Inconceivability Rather Than Wishful Thinking

- g. Jack really doesn't have to concern himself with cancer. After all, he's never smoked a day in his life.

Comment: This speaker cannot conceive of a non-smoker getting cancer.

Causal Oversimplification also bears a similarity with Inconceivability. The Causal Oversimplifier thinks that a particular outcome can be traced to just one source. So this person *cannot imagine another cause* of the problem. Inconceivability, on the other hand, is the technique of the person who *cannot imagine a different result*.

Example of Causal Oversimplification Rather Than Inconceivability

- h. Assistant principal to principal: "Mrs. Smith's third grade class did not get good grades this semester. Let's get them a different teacher. Obviously it's her fault they scored so low."

Comment: While the assistant principal might be thinking that the third grade class will never do well with Mrs. Smith as their teacher, what the assistant explicitly states is that she is the *cause* of their low scores.

Example of Inconceivability Rather Than Causal Oversimplification

- i. Mathematics and me just don't get along. No matter how much I study, I will never get better than a C in any math class. I am hopeless.

Comment: The speaker *implies* that his lack of ability in math is the sole cause of his never getting an A or B in the subject. But the thrust of the statement is that he cannot imagine himself doing well in math.

Your Notes for Inconceivability