



## Ambiguity: Lesson Plan

Topic	
<p>An expression is ambiguous if the proper way to interpret it is unclear, making it able to be understood in at least two different ways. In this lesson, we cover three types of ambiguity. An expression may have ambiguous vocabulary if words in the sentence can mean different things, giving the expression different means. It may have ambiguous word order if the words in the expression are arranged in a way that makes the exact meaning unclear. And, finally, it may have an ambiguous description if the description does not provide enough information to make clear what a relevant term or phrase means in that context.</p>	
Possible subjects/classes	Time needed
English, history, philosophy, psychology, sociology	30-45 minutes
Video link:	
<a href="https://academy4sc.org/topic/ambiguity-thats-not-what-i-meant/">https://academy4sc.org/topic/ambiguity-thats-not-what-i-meant/</a>	
Objective: <i>What will students know/be able to do at the end of class?</i>	
<p>By the end of this lesson, students will be able to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain and identify the three types of ambiguity and know how to avoid each one.</li> <li>• Articulate the importance of avoiding ambiguity.</li> <li>• Reflect on instances of ambiguity in their own speech and decided how to correct them.</li> </ul>	
Key Concepts & Vocabulary	
Ambiguous	
Materials Needed	



## Worksheet

### Before you watch

Ask students to think of something that happened in their life recently. It can be exciting or something ordinary that they do everyday. Then ask them to write a headline as if they had to write a news article about the event. But here's the catch: the headline has to be ambiguous. Then they must share their headline with the person next to them who has to guess what the headline is about.

### While you watch

1. Define ambiguity
2. What are some ambiguous words mentioned in the video that can take on different meanings in different sentences?

### After you watch/discussion questions

1. Why is it important to avoid ambiguity when you're trying to get your point across?
2. What are some circumstances in which you'd want to use ambiguity? Defend your answer.
3. How can you avoid making ambiguous statements?

### Activity Ideas

1. Write or type out an excerpt from their favorite book, poem, or song (4 to 8 sentences, lines, or lyrics long). Then, in one sentence, they should briefly explain what the writer wants the audience to take away from that text or part of the song. Keeping in mind the goal of the text or lyrics: they should carefully go through each sentence or line of the excerpt and decide whether it is clearly conveying that point. They should circle ambiguous words or descriptions and write in more precise ones that could be substitutes, and they should underline ambiguously arranged sentences and rewrite them so that they only produce one, clear meaning. When they are done correcting for ambiguity, they should pick one significant correction they made and explain, in one sentence, what other meaning the sentence, line, or lyric could have taken on had it not been revised, and, in another sentence, describe how this other meaning would have affected the meaning of the excerpt overall.
2. Complete the activity about Aristotle's use of the word "healthy" on the



corresponding worksheet.

#### Sources/places to learn more

1. David Marsh and Amelia Hodsdon, *Guardian Style* (Guardian Books, 2010). James R. Hurford, Brendan Heasley, and Michael B. Smith, *Semantics: A Coursebook*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2007).
2. Sanford Schane, "Ambiguity and Misunderstanding in the Law," in *Thomas Jefferson Law Review* 26, no. 1 (2002). Link: <http://idiom.ucsd.edu/~schane/law/ambiguity.pdf>
3. William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (New Directions, 1947).