

5 YouTube Videos to Help You Make Better Decisions **Teacher's Guide**

The following videos expose the hidden influences on our judgments and decisions and provide simple strategies for helping us make choices that are in our best interests.

“Influence and Persuasion: *Crash Course Media Literacy #6*” (9:50)

1. Provide the definitions for the following terms:

Advertisements	A public notice promoting a product, event, or service
Public Relations (PR)	The management of the relationship between the public and a brand (with the intention of making the brand look good)
Propaganda	Information distributed with the direct purpose of promoting a certain point of view. The information is usually misleading or biased and used to promote specific political viewpoints.

2. What does market research accomplish?
It reveals what makes us want to buy things.
3. Edward Bernays, author of *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, said humans are most sensitive to which influence?
The voice of the herd
4. What is the formula for the sales pitches of most modern ads?
Product (x) will satisfy your need for (y).
5. Once an advertiser gets our attention about the needs we want to fulfill with their product, what techniques/appeals tend to make us believe the product is worth getting? (The video identifies five.)
Authority (An expert says it's worth it.) • Likeability (Maybe a celebrity endorses it.) • Consistency (You hear the same message about it repeatedly.) • Consensus (People agree it's popular.) • Scarcity (A limited edition, for example.)
6. Fallacies are errors in reasoning that undermine the logic of an argument. Describe the four fallacies commonly used in advertising this video mentions.

Appeal to emotions	You're more likely to become invested in a product when your emotions are linked to it.
False dilemma	You're shown a limited number of choices so you won't consider all the options. You think you're stuck picking between the advertised product and a worse option.
Red herring	You're presented irrelevant information to distract you from the issue at hand.
Traditional wisdom	You're urged to choose something because it's old-fashioned.

The Key to Media's Hidden Codes by Ben Beaton and TED-Ed (5:59)

Media codes are symbolic, written, or technical tools used to construct or suggest meaning in media products (mediaknife.org) in order to convince us to think, act, or feel a certain way.

1. Identify at least one example of how a symbolic code (a color, object, or animal) has been used in media you've seen and how you think the media creator was trying to influence the way you think, act, or feel.

Symbolic Code	Example	Media Creator's Intended Influence
Color	Green labels on Seventh Generation cleaning products	We're supposed to believe the products are environmentally friendly.

2. Identify at least one example of how the three written codes ("You and only you," buzzwords, or catchphrases) have been used in media you've seen and how you think the media creator was trying to influence the way you think, act, or feel.

Written Code	Example	Media Creator's Intended Influence
Catchphrase	"I'm lovin' it" (McDonald's)	The "I" suggests the consumer has made a personal choice about what to eat. The informal phrasing makes it sound like a friendly experience.

3. Identify at least one example of how the three technical codes (camera angles, framing, or lighting) have been used in media you've seen and how you think the media creator was trying to influence the way you think, act, or feel.

Symbolic Code	Example	Media Creator's Intended Influence
Lighting	Many political ads show an unflattering photo of the opponent in dark lighting	The campaign that paid for the ad wants voters to know that the opponent has a sinister side.

“5 Tips to Improve Your Critical Thinking”

by Samantha Agoos, Addison Andersen, and Nick Hilditch for TED-Ed (4:29)

1. When we’re considering information in order to make a decision, what are some hidden issues that critical thinking can help us notice?
Bias and manipulation
2. Rather than choosing an answer because it feels right, a person who uses critical thinking subjects all available options to **scrutiny** and **skepticism**.
3. Add more detail about what one would do for each step of the critical thinking process suggested in this video.

Formulate your question	This helps you figure out which problem you’re trying to solve.
Gather your information	Speaking to experts or reading testimonials helps you weight your options so you get closer to a decision that meets your goal.
Apply the information	Ask critical questions like: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What concepts are at work?• What assumptions exist?• Is my interpretation of the information logically sound?
Consider the implications	Identify the possible consequences of a choice and consider how comfortable you are with them.
Explore other points of view	This will allow you to explore alternatives, evaluate your own choices, and ultimately help you make more informed decisions.

“The Psychology Behind Irrational Decisions”

by Sara Garofolo and TOGETHER for TED-Ed (4:38)

1. The negative psychological impact we feel from losing something is about twice as strong as the positive impact of gaining the same thing. (In other words, we get very upset if we lose \$20, but we’re only a little bit happier when we gain \$20.) This experience is known as **loss aversion**.
2. Heuristics are mental **shortcuts** that can lead to **irrational** decisions.
3. Heuristics are especially unreliable when we’re trying to make judgments and decisions that deal with **probability** (and numbers in general).
4. What happens when we experience the anchoring effect?
The first number we hear influences our thinking. We’re likely to answer questions with numbers close to the first number we heard.
5. In what kind of situation are we especially vulnerable to the anchoring effect?
Negotiations
6. When can heuristics be helpful?
When there’s no time to logically analyze all the possibilities, often in a dangerous situation
7. When you encounter complex decision making situations (involving numbers, probability, or multiple details), what can you do to try to avoid the negative influence of heuristics?
Pause, then consider whether the intuitive answer is the right one.

1. What are three methods you can use to compare options when you're trying to make a decision?
 - **List all the factors you're considering, then choose the one thing that's most important and identify the option/alternative that comes out on top.**
 - **Take the previous method further by assigning points to each factor and adding them. The option/alternative that has the most points overall might be the best choice for you. (Note: this video doesn't mention that for this method, it would make sense to rate each factor out of the same amount of points, like out of 10.)**
 - **List pros and cons about each option/alternative. Recognize that each pro or con doesn't necessarily carry the same weight, so even if one list is longer than the other, it's not always clear cut which alternative is better for you.**

2. Why can imagining possible outcomes help you make a better decision?
Imagining possible outcomes prompts you to identify the consequences you might face at different points in time.

3. If you're feeling overwhelmed by a decision, why can it help to spend a couple of minutes on a different, moderately difficult task?
You'll keep processing the decision subconsciously while you're distracted.

4. Why is it helpful to "step outside yourself" to pretend you're helping someone else?
You'll think more objectively. It's easier to give advice than receive it.

5. Why isn't decision making like a test?
There are no right or wrong answers. It's up to you to think critically to make judgments that you believe will lead to positive outcomes for you.

Wrap-Up

Which three concepts/strategies from this collection of videos do think will be most useful to you as you're making judgments and decisions throughout your life? Identify each concept and explain why you think it's important.

Concept/Strategy	Importance