Persuasion by Design

The purposes of this assignment are for students to a) identify different forms of media and their biases, b) understand and analyze their arguments, c) evaluate the methods they use to convince readers, and d) create a guide to help others be aware of these forms of persuasion. This template is intended to serve as a guide for conducting this activity. Feel free to modify it as you best see fit. You may, for example decide to use it at the start, within, or end of a topic. The instructions here include group and individual aspects, but you may choose to use one of the other.

1. Pick a controversial topic that relates to your course / topic. The topic should be relevant and controversial enough that contrasting points of view are easily accessible. Examples include gun control, Medicare funding for people with disabilities, causes of toxic algae blooms, and the use of ice to treat soft tissue injuries. The topic can be chosen by the instructor alone or with the students’ input.

2. Assign the students to write reflective papers about their personal thoughts and arguments on the topic. If they don’t know enough about the topic to have an argument, then they can write about what they do know and why the topic might be controversial.

3. Assign small groups of students to find three sources on the internet that advocate for a particular point of view, and analyze them for their arguments and features of their presentation that make them appear to be credible. Each of the groups can be given a different view to access; or, they can all be given the same one.

4. The results of each group’s search is discussed with the entire class.

5. Assign groups or individuals to write a tips sheet to give other students or consumers things to watch out for when searching this same topic.