



ACTIVITY 10

Cognitive Skills in Communication

PRESENTATION

A 1950s school-wide public health campaign encouraged people to get the newly invented polio vaccine.





10: COGNITIVE SKILLS IN COMMUNICATION

GUIDING QUESTION

How can you apply knowledge of cognition to communicating information?

INTRODUCTION

One common way of addressing community health problems is through education. Public service announcements (PSAs) are educational messages created to raise awareness and change people's attitudes or behaviors. They are intended to provide useful and important information to the public; they are not selling a specific brand or service. The most effective PSAs give people a clear way to take action, use a relatable messenger (a doctor or peer, sometimes a celebrity), and are memorable and seen often enough to “cut” through the noise of daily life.

One example of a PSA campaign was titled Seize the Awkward. This public health campaign started in 2018 to promote mental wellness and reduce risk of suicide in young adults ages 16–24. The PSA advised people on how to start difficult conversations with their friends and loved ones about mental health. In this activity, you will apply what you have learned about types of cognition to create a PSA about Southsland fever and evaluate others' PSAs.



Some PSAs encourage people to talk with their friends and family about mental health.

CONCEPTUAL
TOOLS



PROCEDURE

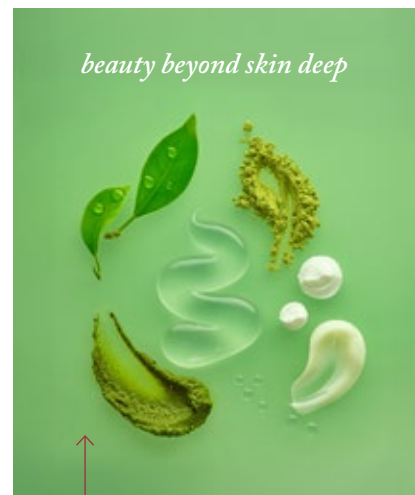
- 1 Southsand City leaders have asked your team to create a PSA to share on the city's social media page to help reduce the spread of Southsand fever. With a partner, choose one of the Health Department's recommendations for reducing risks from Southsand fever (introduced in Activity 9) to highlight in your PSA.
- 2 Your PSA should communicate at least one important aspect from the recommendations. With your partner, decide on your audience (for example, parents, teens, general public, outdoor workers) and brainstorm ideas about the content and images of your PSA.
- 3 Purposefully create a biased PSA that uses cognitive shortcuts and cognitive biases to persuade the reader to support your recommendation. Make sure that it:
 - contains information about the Southsand fever recommendation.
 - is approximately 50 words or less.
 - includes an image or video.
 - applies what you know about cognitive shortcuts and cognitive biases.
 - addresses any other requirements from your teacher.
- 4 Trade your biased PSA with one from another pair of students. Work with your partner to apply your skills for evaluating information that you've gained throughout the unit to review the other pair's PSA. Look for misuse of evidence, cognitive shortcuts, cognitive biases, and/or fast thinking. Discuss how these features might affect a reader's thinking.
- 5 Brainstorm ideas on how to improve the biased PSA you are reviewing to make it less misleading and reduce cognitive bias.
- 6 Share your suggestions with the other pair of students. Listen to their suggestions for how to improve your PSA.
- 7 Based on the feedback from the other pair and your own ideas, make a second PSA—an unbiased PSA—that supports the same recommendation. Keep your original biased PSA to share with the class during your presentation as you explain the changes you made to it.
- 8 Share your PSAs with the class. Make sure to explain why you think your unbiased PSA is more likely to succeed than your biased PSA in the community of Southsand.
- 9 As a class, reflect on your experience creating the PSAs. Discuss the following questions related to everyday life:
 - Have you encountered the use of cognitive shortcuts and cognitive biases in advertisements and promotions?
 - Do you think the use of cognitive shortcuts and cognitive biases in advertisements and promotions is fair or unfair and why?
 - What actions related to this issue do you believe should or should not be taken?

BUILD UNDERSTANDING

- ① In this activity, you compared a cognitively biased PSA to an unbiased PSA. Describe a situation in which you would want to receive information that is more like
 - a the biased PSA.
 - b the unbiased PSA.
- ② Think about the media (news articles, posts, videos, images, music) you consume every day. How have your experiences with this instructional unit changed your thinking about how to process that media information?
- ③ Southsland fever is based on a real-life disease called Valley fever. Scientists began investigating Valley fever in the late 1800s. One set of researchers, Emmett Rixford and Thomas Caspar Gilchrist, isolated the organism causing the disease and thought it looked like a type of protozoa called *Coccidia*. They sometimes found mold growing on their petri dishes and dismissed this mold as a contaminant instead of a pathogen. Rixford and Gilchrist's ideas matched the thinking of earlier doctors studying the disease. Explain how fast thinking and/or confirmation bias may have played a role in their conclusions.

CONNECTIONS TO EVERYDAY LIFE

- ④ Product advertising often relies on messaging that appeals to people through cognitive shortcuts and cognitive biases. Imagine a popular skincare brand that markets one of their products as environmentally friendly.
 - a How could the product advertisements take advantage of cognitive shortcuts or cognitive biases in people who value environmental protection?
 - b How could skills from this unit help you evaluate claims in the advertisement?



Advertisements for environmentally friendly products often display natural settings or items.