

Call for Proposal for *The Post-Truth Handbook: A Practical Guide to Addressing Disingenuous Rhetorics*

Edited by Bruce Bowles, Jr. and Paul Cook

Deceptive and unethical rhetorical strategies are increasingly prevalent in politics, media, digital spaces, and everyday conversations. Whether the result of a changing discursive landscape (McIntyre, 2018; Nichols, 2017), our enmeshment in digital environments (Bolter, 2019; Pigg, 2020; Gurri, 2018), or a reflection of long-standing rhetorical trends (Fuller, 2018; Roberts-Miller, 2019) that have simply accelerated in the digital age, the question of how to address these disingenuous rhetorics is a challenge for both scholars of rhetorical theory and researchers from across the disciplines. Fortunately, academia has responded with insightful scholarship on the phenomenon of “post-truth,” though some have raised doubts about the term itself (Cloud, 2018; McComiskey, 2017; Phillips & Milner, 2021; Rice, 2020; Snyder, 2017; Vivian, 2018).

Much of the existing scholarship leans toward the theoretical and abstract, which is understandable when engaging with difficult questions of epistemology and rhetoric, discussions of how to handle propaganda and demagoguery, and reflections on ethical rhetorical approaches. Yet focusing exclusively on the theoretical does not provide the general public with the tactical knowledge and rhetorical tools essential to navigate decisions about which media outlets to trust; how to engage friends, family members, colleagues, and neighbors with opposing points of view in conversation; or what to do if an interlocutor is drawing upon questionable or outright inaccurate sources. In short, the knowledge that various fields have amassed remains largely inaccessible to those outside of academic conversations. What is sorely missing today is practical guidance on how to navigate the disinformation and manipulative tactics that shape everyday decisions.

The Post-Truth Handbook: A Practical Guide to Addressing Disingenuous Rhetorics aims to change that. Responding to calls for humanities and rhetorical scholarship to engage more substantively with public interests and topics (Burton et al., 2021; Mailloux, 2006; Rose, 2010; Smulyan, 2022), this collection seeks to share with our family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors the knowledge developed and created across the disciplines in a more accessible manner for the general public.

We define the term *disingenuous rhetorics* as overall discursive patterns and persuasive tactics that focus on winning and gaining power through influence at the expense of the greater good of the audience. Disingenuous rhetorics also frequently display a reckless disregard for the accuracy of the information provided (and the representation of the positions of others). Such disingenuous rhetorics often manipulate ethos, amplify the emotions of the audience, and eschew any sense of compromise (while excluding valid stakeholders). They become fixated on achieving certain outcomes rather than solving problems through collaboration and democratic norms. While it is true that most effective rhetoric engages affective dimensions of persuasion, disingenuous rhetorics deceive and divide in their attempt to gain power and influence in ways that are more often difficult for laypeople to see. Thus, equipping those outside of academia with the tools to handle such disingenuous rhetorics is paramount to the health of our public discourse, institutions, and democratic processes.

The chapters in this edited collection will take a precise approach: each chapter will offer a pragmatic tactic or approach for addressing a specific manifestation of the concept of disingenuous rhetorics. Chapters should be grounded in disciplinary scholarship but written in a clear, accessible style, avoiding jargon and unpacking complex theories in everyday language. Chapters should be 2,500-4,000 words (along with endnotes), including a Further Readings section with 4-6 recommended scholarly sources for those interested in exploring the topic in more depth.

Chapters may explore a range of topics including, but not limited to:

- Dealing with rhetors who draw upon unreliable sources
- Handling dis-, mis-, or malinformation
- Ensuring stakeholders from marginalized/disenfranchised groups are invited to the table
- Addressing bias in sources and in algorithmic manipulation
- Engaging arguments employing bullshit
- Arguing with belligerent family members
- Disarming demagogic talking points
- Identifying conspiratorial thinking
- Distinguishing manipulative speech and behavior from genuine concern for the issue under discussion
- Finding compromise when opposing rhetors are only concerned with winning
- Keeping composure in the face of disingenuous rhetorics

To propose a chapter for *The Post-Truth Handbook*, please submit a proposal of no more than 500 words to disrhetoric@gmail.com. Proposals should clearly identify the disingenuous rhetorical practice you will be discussing, provide a sense of the scholarship you will be drawing upon, and state the pragmatic tactic or approach you will be presenting to the audience. At the same time, we want the chapters in *The Post-Truth Handbook* to offer unique perspectives and approaches, so feel free to experiment with creative ways to arrange your chapters and present solutions to dealing with disingenuous rhetorics.

Here is the proposed timeline for this collection:

- Proposals due by January 3, 2025
- Follow up with authors by January 31, 2025
- First drafts due by March 31, 2025
- Responses and feedback to authors by June 6, 2025
- Final drafts due October 3, 2025

Routledge and the University of South Carolina Press have each expressed significant interest in the project, so we are aiming to read, respond to, and accept proposals quickly so we can craft and submit a full proposal.

We look forward to reading your submissions and to offering our family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors access to your brilliant interdisciplinary scholarship so they can stand up to disingenuous rhetorics!

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