# THE PERSUASIVE USE OF LANGUAGE

The ways that we use language can lead to a series of problems in the ways that we engage with information and think critically. In her text on critical thinking, Cottrell (2005) provides some good examples of the misuse of language (see Cottrell, S. (2005) *Critical Thinking Skills,* London, Palgrave Macmillan).

False Analogies

*‘The cloning of human cells should never be allowed: we cannot have another Frankenstein. Obviously, we don’t want such monsters’* (Cottrell, 2005: 112). The word ‘obviously’ here stops any discussion on this, but the analogy – the idea of ‘Frankenstein’ – does not really relate to cloning either. (Frankenstein was the name of a fictional doctor who created a human-like monster from human body parts.) Cloning a human cell is not going to produce another Frankenstein anyway, but the use of this particular false analogy makes a large number of assumptions which can be difficult to deal with when emotions are running high.

## Implicit Associations

‘*Today! £100 reduction on all computers!’* (Cottrell, 2005: 95). As Cottrell points out, there are some important questions which are answered implicitly. The statement might imply that the reduction is just for one day, but it doesn’t actually say that. Similarly, it does not say whether the price is any cheaper than other stores.

**When examining closely what something or someone does say, it is also important to look at what they don’t say as well.**

Other words with similar impacts are: ‘clearly’, ‘As we all know … ‘, ‘everyone believes that ...’, ‘It is simply common sense that …’, and ‘It is well established that … ’ . Words can be used to hide weaknesses in arguments and to limit discussion sometimes, but our task as receivers of information is to make sure that we believe arguments that are actually strong and ignore those which are weak.