



Listerine Ad Analysis Questions Student Handout

1. **In Ad #1**, Listerine claims to effectively reduce cold symptoms and the duration of a cold. What evidence does Listerine present to support its claims? Should this evidence be suspect? Do you know the sources of the studies the ad mentions or who and under what conditions the researchers conducted the tests?

Review the *EHow* Web site on using “Q-tips” and the transcript from the radio show on using Listerine for clearing lungs of bacteria or pneumonia. How do these sources support Listerine’s claims? How are they similar to Listerine’s ads in the way they support the claims?

Now review the 1931 editorial from the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and the statement by the FTC Commissioner regarding Listerine’s false advertising cold cure campaign. How do these two sources challenge Listerine’s claims?

Review the highlighted sections of the federal appeals court case of *Warner-Lambert Company v. Federal Trade Commission* and the 1978 *Washington Post* article on legal action against the makers of Listerine. What did the appeals court conclude regarding Warner-Lambert’s claims that Listerine is a cure for colds?

By examining these four sources, what conclusions can you make about Listerine’s claims of reducing cold symptoms and the duration of a cold? Which of the four resource documents presented provides the best evidence of whether Listerine is effective in reducing cold symptoms?

2. **Ad #2** claims Listerine cures dandruff and has research to prove it. As with the claim that clinical tests prove Listerine reduces cold symptoms, this ad claims similar tests. How would you know if these tests are credible? How could you verify their results?

Now review the two Web sites *PeoplesPharmacy.com* and *Health911.com* that support Listerine’s claim of being a cure for dandruff. What sources do these sites identify to support the claim of Listerine’s effectiveness as a dandruff cure? What do you think of the credibility of such sources? Do they convince you of Listerine’s effectiveness in curing dandruff? Why or why not?

Review the editorial from the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and the entry from the *National Library of Medicine* about dandruff. Which of

these seems to be the strongest in challenging Listerine's claims of being a cure for dandruff? Why? What conclusions can you make from all the evidence you reviewed regarding Listerine's claims to cure dandruff?

3. **Ad 3#** presents a television ad that claims Listerine kills germs that cause bad breath and is "long lasting." What is the ad's message about Listerine's effectiveness in curing bad breath? What other message(s) does the ad claim for using Listerine? What evidence does the ad present to support its claims? Is such a source of evidence convincing to you? Why or why not? Is such an actual source of evidence more convincing or less convincing than if the ad stated, "Clinical tests prove Listerine is effective in killing germs that cause bad breath"? Why or why not?

Review the editorial from the *Journal of the American Medical Association* on the effectiveness of antiseptics on bad breath and the *American Dental Association's* description of the impact of mouthwashes. Which document has the most information about the causes of bad breath? Which one presents the most convincing evidence on Listerine's effectiveness in killing germs that cause bad breath? What conclusions can you draw about Listerine's effectiveness in curing bad breath?

4. Review **Ad #4**, Listerine's "Big Bang" advertisement. What visual images does the ad employ to help you make the connection between Listerine and flossing? What are some of the other appealing messages for consumers in the ad? What images do you see that support these messages? What evidence does Listerine present to support its claims? Should this evidence be suspect? Do you know the sources of the studies they mention or who conducted the tests?

Review the conclusion of the NCIB abstract study on using mouthwash versus dental floss, the CEB article and Judge Denny Chin's 2005 court ruling. What conclusions did the NCIB abstract report on the effectiveness of an oil-containing mouthwash as a substitute for flossing? How does the CEB article challenge the NCIB conclusions? What facts does it present to make this challenge? Do you feel this is an effective challenge? Why or why not? Do you feel Listerine is lying to the public when it claims it is as effective as flossing?