

DOUBLESPEAK

Kathy Kellermann

What is Doublespeak?

Doublespeak is the name for language that pretends to communicate but doesn't, language which makes the bad seem good, the negative appear positive, the unpleasant attractive or at least tolerable.

Doublespeak is language which avoids, shifts, or denies responsibility, language which is at variance with its real or purported meaning.

Basic to doublespeak is incongruity – the incongruity between what is said, or left unsaid, and what really is.

Doublespeak camouflages, misleads, distorts, deceives, inflates, circumvents, and obfuscates.

Doublespeak Examples

Farmers no longer have cows, pigs, chickens, or other animals on their farms; according to the US Department of Agriculture, farmers have "grain-consuming animal units" which, according to the Tax Reform Act of 1986, are kept in "single-purpose agricultural structures, not pig-pens and chicken-coops.

A "volume-related production scheduling adjustment" means closing an entire factory in General Motors doublespeak

In 1971 the Pentagon tried to slip funding for the neutron bomb unnoticed into an appropriations bill by calling it an "enhanced radiation device"

Airplanes don't crash, they just have "uncontrolled contact with the ground"

Janitors are "custodial engineers", car mechanics are "automotive internists", elevator operators "members of the vertical transportation corps," and grocery store checkout clerks "career associate scanning professionals"

President Reagan wasn't really unconscious while he underwent minor surgery, he was just in a "non-decision-making form"

Cars aren't used, they are "pre-owned"

Vinyl is "genuine imitation leather"

We have "real counterfeit diamonds"

"Negative patient care outcome" means that the patient died