

BASICS OF VERBAL SELF-DEFENSE (1+ level; 2 units)

(See *Grimoire for the Apprentice Wizard*, pp. 100-101, 299-300; *The Gentle Art of Verbal Self-Defense, Peoplemaking*.)

Course description: Words are an important tool for any wizard. This class teaches how to recognize several communication styles and many common verbal attacks, and how to deflect those attacks and avoid verbal violence. If you've had trouble being understood, this may help you find more effective methods. And it will help you know if *you* have unknowingly been attacking people with your words.

Background details: Students will need to participate in the online discussion forum and acquire a copy of Suzette Hadin Elgin's *The Gentle Art of Verbal Self Defense*, preferably as an ebook.

Class Outline

1. Explanation of Verbal Violence
2. Words *Can* Hurt You
3. Satir Modes
4. Non-Verbal Aspects of Communication
5. Presuppositions and Verbal Attacks
6. 8 basic Verbal Attack Patterns and How to Block Them
7. Sources & Further Reading

Verbal Self-Defense

*Son: Don't you even **care** that I'm failing Algebra because you won't buy me a **good** calculator?*

Mom: Of course I care! I just don't think a calculator should cost \$75!

Son: Tony has a \$75 calculator, and he's getting straight A's.

Mom: Well, Tony's dad is a doctor; he can afford to waste money on expensive toys. I'm not made of cash, you know. Someone has to work to support this family.

Son: How come my calculator is an "expensive toy," but your new jacket isn't?

*Mom: My jacket is none of your business. **I'm** the adult here, and **I'll** make the financial decisions for the family!*

Son: Well, I think you're making pretty lousy ones. And they're making me fail Algebra.

Mom: You're failing Algebra because you won't do your homework! Maybe if you're grounded for two weeks you'll have enough time to concentrate on your school work!

Well, that went poorly. And very likely, neither of those two people had any idea how they wound up in such a bitter argument. Both of them are left feeling angry and misunderstood.

A wizard needs to be aware of his environment—and that includes his social surroundings. A wizard needs to be a good communicator, one who understands what people really mean, and knows how to get his own meanings across to others. He doesn't get stuck in fights (verbal or physical) that he didn't expect, and he doesn't start conflicts by accident, or just to see how much trouble he can stir up.

*Son: Don't you even **care** that I'm failing Algebra because you won't buy me a **good** calculator?*

Mom: Where did you get the idea that I don't care about your grades?

*Son: If you did care, you'd get me a calculator that **works**.*

Mom: What kind of calculator do you need?

Son: One of those scientific calculators like Tony has. It does everything! Otherwise I can't do the homework.

Mom: We can't afford a calculator like Tony's right now. Can you work with the scientific calculator on the computer?

Son: I guess so. But that's such a pain.

Mom: I know. But that's what we've got right now. Maybe if I put in a bit of overtime, we'll be able to get it for next semester. Okay?

Son: Okay.

Son is probably not entirely happy with this, either. But the two of them aren't yelling at each other, and the subject of "a better calculator for Algebra" isn't likely to start a screaming match the next time Son brings it up.

1. Explanation of "Verbal Violence"

Verbal violence is very common in America today; it's not often recognized as a problem, so very few people are looking for solutions to it. Much "schoolyard teasing" is a form of verbal violence, where some kids work to make other kids feel bad about themselves.

The [World Verbal Self-Defense League FAQ for Kids](#) talks about what's wrong with this, and what kind of problems can be caused by "just teasing."

Their page about [Why You Should Master Verbal Self Defense](#) has a good description of verbal conflict, and why it's important to learn about it. You might think the worst verbal violence is insults, obscenities, and put-downs... but those are crude versions. They're common among children (including teenagers) and people who are so upset they can't think straight, but they aren't the worst or most common attacks. Most verbal attacks are more subtle than that, and aren't as easy to brush aside with, "well, that's just wrong."

Verbal abuse isn't limited by age, race, gender, or social status... some of the worst verbal abusers are people who have no perceived power of their own, so they lash out with their words. Small children are often very adept at this—the four-year-old who says "my REAL Mommy wouldn't MAKE me eat broccoli!" is just as much a verbal attacker as the teacher who says, "Someone who actually WANTED a passing grade wouldn't ALWAYS hand their assignments in LATE."

Just like physical martial arts, a master of verbal self-defense almost never faces direct verbal violence; she's learned to avoid or prevent the situations that cause it. And just like the physical martial arts, a master of it often seems calm, focused, and relaxed, and ready to handle any situation—and these are very much traits a wizard needs to learn.

Task: DISCUSSION FORUM: List at least 3 examples of verbal violence from different movies or TV shows.

Lesson 2. Words *Can* Hurt You

"Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words will never hurt me."

So goes the playground saying. But it's not true... a wizard learns that words are power, perhaps the most powerful tool at your disposal. Words shape how we think and who we are... and the effects of spoken insults can stay with us much longer than physical scars.

Many people think that "since it's only words, it can't *really* hurt anyone, and can't be a real problem."

Reading: excerpted from Happydog's Livejournal; used with permission.

This is something that happened to a friend of mine when he was in high school.

In high school I used to have a friend named Tony. In retrospect, Tony was probably just entering schizophrenia. He was constantly jittering, going somewhere or doing something, and anytime you were around him, something happened, good or bad. He was extremely intense. I hung around him because he was totally fascinating, and we liked each other a lot. He seemed like a Rock Star to me, and was constantly talking about ideas he had to form a band, or do a comic book, and we used to have endless "deep" discussions about Pink Floyd.

Tony was always crackling with some sort of energy. At the time I didn't know it was the burning sizzle of incipient insanity. We hung out most of the time.

Anyway, one of the Pretty Girls passes us in the hall. She was the kind of pretty that happened in Mississippi in 1975, church-girl pretty, cheerleader pretty. Hair a little too blonde to be entirely real, and of course larger than it needed to be, a little too much makeup, but still attractive and beautiful enough for the time and place.

Tony, out of the blue, for no reason, looked at her with his crazy burning eyes, and hissed,

"You're not as pretty as you think you are."

The girl's eyes widened as if she had been struck, and she broke down crying right there in the hall. No lie. Gut-wrenching sobs. Tony walked on. I hesitated, but I was too much under Tony's sway at the time and followed him. I didn't say anything.

I tried to talk to him about it later, and how it took me back, seeing him suddenly lash out at a stranger with that kind of powerful cruelty. His only comment was "She deserved it."

At that point I felt something in me pull away from Tony. Sure, it wasn't right that neither of us could get dates, neither of us was in any Social Circle, and most people thought we were "faggots" or nuts. Socially we were way out on the fringe. Nobody liked us. But I knew within me that this did not make it *right* to strike out like that, out of pure hatred and raw envy.

Because you are hurt, or were hurt, does not give you the right to hurt another. That is what I wanted to say to him, and couldn't, because he couldn't hear it. He was too stitched up inside his own anger and his own contempt for what he regarded as fake and stupid. He rejected those who he felt rejected him, and he did it first. And faster, harder, and quicker, if he could.

That taught me two things: first, someone who seems exciting or stirring may be the absolute worst person in the world for me, no matter how Rock Star-like they may be. The thing that draws me to them is the Shadow that wants to Burn. That Shadow has its place, and I understand it much better now than I did then, but to feed that Shadow overmuch and allow it to take over - I learned from seeing Tony what that leads to.

The second thing that it taught me is that cruelty is not justifiable under any circumstances. I saw that girl he hissed at many times around the school. Fortunately, we were never in any classes together. But if she saw me in the hall, her eyes would flick away. I reminded her of what happened. There was a wall there that could never be breached. I could never make it right; I could never say, "I'm sorry for what my friend said that time," because she would accelerate her

step and avert her eyes and go by me as fast as she could. I paid for my friend's cruelty, and she re-experienced that cruelty every time she saw me.

She was still pretty, still popular, still had many friends. But inside her there was always that hissing voice that said, "You're not as pretty as you think you are," undermining her, taking strength away from her. Unless she has learned to still that voice and use her own power to counter it, and I hope she has, it might still be there 29 years later. I hope it's not, that the memory is silent for good, may that be so.

This is a blatant, very simple verbal attack... that has probably scarred that girl for many years. Most attacks aren't that direct, because people who make attacks like that can't take part in many normal conversations.

Verbal abusers often use the excuse, "Well, at least I never HIT anyone!" This shows that they know they're causing harm—and deciding that it's okay to cause harm that doesn't leave marks. The other common excuse is, "I didn't MEAN to hurt anyone!" Think about that—if you were throwing rocks around without caring who they hit, do you think people would forgive you if you "didn't mean to hurt anyone?" Would it be alright as long as you didn't intend any harm?

Read the Verbal Abuse FAQ at the [Verbal Self-Defense FAQ](#) page, which explains the basics of verbal violence.

Task: DISCUSSION FORUM/JOURNAL: Describe (in the discussion forum) one or more events where you, or someone very close to you, was verbally attacked. Write about what it felt like to you—this part may be done in the public forum, or in your student journal.

3. Satir Modes

These 5 communication modes were first described by Virginia Satir in her book *Peoplemaking*.

Blamer: This mode comes out of a need to feel powerful. Blamers act like they are in charge, and whatever's wrong must be somebody else's fault. Blamer-mode communication often sounds angry.

"Why are you **ALWAYS DOING** things like **THAT?**" or "**Only an IDIOT** would leave the door open on a hot day like today."

Placater: This comes out of a wish to avoid conflict, and a fear that everyone will abandon the speaker. Placaters insist that things are all their own fault, and that they'll go along with whatever the other person says. Placater-mode sounds frightened and desperate.

"Oh, you know I don't mind. **WhatEVER** you decide is okay with me" or "**WHY** do these things always happen to **ME?**"

Computer: This comes out of a fear of showing one's real feelings. Computers try to avoid saying "I", and sound very formal.

"That is a perfectly normal reaction to this crisis" or "One must remember always to close containers after they have been opened."

Distracter: This is a confused blend of other modes. Distracters are panicked, and jump between modes.

"Don't you talk to **ME** like that, young lady! I'm sure any rational person would be calm right now. Please, just settle down; I'll be quiet if you will, okay?"

Leveler: This is just what it sounds like—someone who's telling the straight truth about their thoughts and feelings. However, there are phony levelers, who've learned to act like they're being truthful and telling just their plain feelings; these are the hardest to spot, and the most dangerous. (Tony's statement in the sample story is an example of phony leveling.)

"I hate it when you tap your pencil like that" or "I'd rather skip the movie and catch up with you later."

So if five students, one of each Satir mode, were stuck in detention together, this is what they might say:

Blamer: You people are LAME. I bet you're going to ruin my whole day.

Placater: I always screw things up; that's why I'm here. Why do things ALWAYS go so badly for me?

Computer: Perhaps if we study vigorously, we'll all be permitted to leave early.

Distracter: They can't DO this to me! This is all Mary's fault! My father will make sure that someone gets fired for this. It's a violation of our civil rights. Oh, WHY is this happening TODAY?

Leveler: I don't like being here. I wish I were somewhere else.

It's important to remember that these are *styles*, not *people*. Nobody is "a Blamer," although there are some people who spend a lot of time in Blamer mode. (Just like nobody is "a Shouter" or "a Whisperer," even if they mostly talk only that way.)

The first rule of communication (and an important rule of wizardry!) is: *Whatever you feed will grow*. Responding in Blamer mode to a Blamer comment will wind up with a raging argument, and possibly a fistfight; Placating a Placater leads to a pity-party; two Computers having a conversation goes nowhere, with big words and long sentences; and a Distracter conversation sounds like confusion in a blender.

So unless you want a conversation to stay in whatever mode it's in, **change modes**. If you're not sure what to do, go into computer mode, and stay there until you have a good reason to switch. The worst that's likely to happen is that the conversation (or argument) stalls, and maybe you get a reputation for being "geeky" or "spock-like."

Task: EMAIL INSTRUCTOR: Look back at your 3 examples of verbal violence from Lesson 1 and your example from Lesson 2. What Satir mode were they in? If they were all in Blamer mode, can you find some examples in another mode?

4. Non-Verbal Aspects of Communication

Verbal communication isn't just words. It also includes body language, tone-of-voice, facial expressions, and emphasis. These nonverbal parts of communication are very important; they carry most of the emotional content, and they can make the difference between a statement and a question, or between a simple question and an abusive attack.

Verbal attacks are made, not by the exact words, but by the "tune" those words are set to: someone can say "You're a freak" in such a gentle, caring voice that you know that they love you, and someone can say "You're a good friend" in such a vicious, sarcastic tone that you know it means "I never want to speak to you again."

[examples]

I'll meet you after school tomorrow.

I'll meet you after school... tomorrow?

Why are you always late on Mondays?

WHY are you always LATE on MONDAYS?

Most of the emotional parts of a conversation aren't carried by the words—they're included in the body language. And it's much easier to lie with words than with body language; that's part of why people say "look me in the eye and say that" or "he was so jumpy, I just didn't believe him."

In case of a conflict between words and body language, you can assume the body language is correct. If your friend says, "it's okay," but is frowning, biting her lip, and won't meet your eyes—it's not okay. You may not want to call her a liar, or challenge her (maybe she doesn't want to talk about it right now), but you should

remember that just because she said "it's okay" doesn't mean it is, and it doesn't mean it's okay for you to pretend it is. If someone says "I'm sorry," but has an angry tone, is glaring, and making punching motions with his hands—he's not sorry. But you probably already knew that.

In many cases of verbal attacks, the attacker is careful to use words that sound acceptable, or even polite, if they're said in a different tone. That way, they can claim, "all I said was _____," and repeat their words with a different "tune" that takes away the attack. And the victim is left saying, "It's not what she said, it was the way she said it!"

Written communication can be very difficult because these things are missing. Punctuation becomes very important, because it's one of the few ways to put "tone of voice" into an email. Another way is capital letters... in email, words written in ALL CAPS are considered to be shouting, or have strong emphasis. And writing without any capitals at all is often read as "shy." Email and online posts made with no punctuation sound rushed, and those with too much of the wrong punctuation seem incoherent.

Here's a sample paragraph, from a book about magickal theory:

"Night follows day; and day night. The pendulum swings from Summer to Winter, and then back again. The corpuscles, atoms, molecules, and all masses of matter, swing around the circle of their nature. There is no such thing as absolute rest, or cessation from movement, and all movement partakes of rhythm. The Principle is of universal application. It may be applied to any question, or phenomena of any of the many planes of life. It may be applied to all phases of human activity.." -- The Kybalion.

Complex ideas, but not too hard to follow. Now, the same paragraph—with the punctuation changed to bad email-style punctuation. (I really have seen emails that were this hard to read.)

"Night follows day and day night..... the pendulum swings from summer, to Winter.....and then, back again..... the corpuscles..... atoms..... molecules..... and all masses of matter..... swing around the circle, of their nature....., there is no such thing, as absolute rest or cessation from movement---and all movement partakes of rhythm.....the principle, is of universal application.....it may be applied-to any question or phenomena, of any of the many planes of life. It may be applied-to, all phases of human activity." -- The Kybalion.

Because so much online communication depends on punctuation (and things like capital letters) to carry the "tone" of the words, it's hard to tell the difference between a polite statement and an accusation—or attack. If you can't tell for sure, it's always best to assume an email was meant politely, and reply that way. This will keep you from finding attacks that aren't intended.

Task 1: DISCUSSION FORUM: Pay attention to your non-verbal communication for a few days. Spend a whole day trying not to give *any* nonverbal cues (or using "computer mode," because that's very close to no nonverbal cues). Notice how people relate to you. Write about what you observe—was it easy or difficult? Did people react to you differently? Did you feel different?

Task 2: STUDENT JOURNAL: Watch a TV show or a movie you've never seen before in a foreign language that you don't speak. Notice if you can tell what people are talking about, and how they feel about each other, just by tone of voice and body language. Write about what you observe; include the language, the name of the show and when you watched it (or, if you don't know the name, the channel and date). Could you figure out people's names? Was it easy to tell how they felt about each other?

5. Presuppositions and Verbal Attacks

A "presupposition" is a kind of hidden statement: It's something everyone knows is being said, even though it's not in the words themselves. (I want to mention that this "everyone" is "native speakers of the language;" someone who's native language isn't English might not recognize an English presupposition.)

For example, if I said, "Even Moonwind can read that book," you know 2 things, even though I haven't said so: You know that I think Moonwind's not a good reader, and that I think the book I'm talking about is an easy one to read. So if someone says, "Even you could cast that spell," you know you've been insulted—even if you can't say exactly how.

More examples of presuppositions—keep in mind that it's the tone, not the words, that carry the insult; these can be perfectly straightforward, if there isn't any extra emphasis. The words "always" and "never" can be clues—there are very few things that people "always" or "never" do.

Are you **STILL** listening to **THAT BAND**?

- It might have been okay to like "that band" in the past, but not anymore.
- "That band" is out-of-date, and out-of-date is very bad.
- You are out-of-date (and therefore bad) if you like "that band."

*Notice how you can find all that information in the short sentence... that if it said "Are you **STILL** watching **SURVIVOR**," it would carry the same impact, just like "your dad **STILL** drives a **TOYOTA**" or "are you **STILL** going to **WIZARD SCHOOL**?"*

You are SUCH a PIG.

- A pig is a disgusting thing.
- You are disgusting, just like a pig.
- I shouldn't have to interact with someone like you.

It doesn't even matter if you know what the creature or object is... if someone said, "You are SUCH a RAZNO," you'd still know you've been insulted.

What-EVER.

- I don't care what you just said.
- What you say isn't important to me.

I don't know why ANYONE would want to talk to YOU.

- There's something wrong with you.
- It's obvious to everyone.
- You should feel grateful that I'm giving you any attention at all, because you don't deserve it.

What kind of IDIOT do you think I AM?

- You are very foolish, or very stupid.
- You miss the obvious, which is that I am very smart (or wise, or skilled).
- You are lucky I put up with you at all.

Part of learning about presuppositions is learning how *not* to use them accidentally... once you know they exist, you've got no excuse for saying "I didn't know he'd take it that way!"

Task 1: EMAIL INSTRUCTOR: Find the presuppositions in these 5 examples.

1. "Just WHAT do you think you're DOING?"
2. "If YOU'RE so SMART, tell me why you need that BOOK."
3. "Just TAKE it. I don't WANT it anymore."
4. "Oooh, everybody look at the GREAT WIZARD."
5. "DON'T take that tone of voice with ME!"

Task 2: EMAIL INSTRUCTOR: Write 3 statements of your own which include presuppositions, and list the presuppositions underneath.

6. 8 Basic Verbal Attack Patterns (VAPs)

Many verbal attacks have two parts: a presupposition (or set of them) which is the attack, and something else offered as "bait." They expect you to respond to the "bait" and ignore the presupposition—the real attack—entirely.

The "bait" in the sample conversation at the beginning of this class is "I need a calculator to pass algebra." When Mom takes the bait, and starts arguing about the calculator, they wind up in a bad argument, which Mom is losing. This results in the son being punished—because in verbal conflicts, just like other conflicts, if someone is losing, they work to change the playing field. Mom wasn't doing well with "whose needs are more important" (not a good thing to argue about), so she switched it to "who's in charge here?" And Mom can always win that one.

The way to avoid these fights is DON'T TAKE THE BAIT. Ever. No matter how easy it is; no matter how much you think "She can't SAY that to me!" **Always** respond to the presupposition. You can't just pretend the presupposition was said out loud—if someone says, "You're SUCH a POSEUR," it doesn't make sense to say, "I am not disgusting!" But you can say, "What's wrong with being a poseur?"—which isn't the same as admitting she's right. (Try imagining there's a nonsense word in place of "poseur," if it helps.)

You'll now read about eight of the most common verbal attack patterns (VAPs), the hidden messages built into them, and examples of how to counter them. These counters are built to *stop the attack*, not "win the argument." They're meant to move the argument to a different topic, one that doesn't include hidden insults and messages of "I'm right and you're wrong."

Just as in physical martial arts, the purpose of verbal self-defense isn't to "win fights," but to *prevent* them—to recognize the beginnings of a conflict, and stop it from growing. A person who masters these techniques won't become known as "a great debater" or someone who others are afraid to argue with... instead, she may be known as someone who just doesn't argue much, someone who doesn't seem to get upset, someone

others can't stay angry with. A master of verbal self-defense isn't someone who wins flamewars, but someone who prevents them—without allowing people to get away with attacking him at will. The goal is not to reflect the attack back onto the attacker, nor to absorb the full force, but to deflect it harmlessly away from all people involved.

The counters aren't the only possible ones—but you should probably stick to them, or things very like them, until you're comfortable enough identifying presuppositions that you can make your own. Some comments that *seem like* they should work, just make things worse.

In each case, after you stop the initial attack, you'll have to figure out if the topic (the bait) is something that still needs discussion. In the opening example, Son really does need a calculator, so Mom can't just steer the conversation around to "why do you think I don't care about you?" However, in the "SUCH a POSEUR" example, if you wind up discussing "what makes a poseur" and "what's wrong with that," you haven't missed out on anything important... and your attacker may wonder how she got dragged into a long discussion when she meant to just throw out a quick insult.

You can read more examples at the [Verbal Self Defense Attack Patterns](#) page.

For each of these Verbal Attack Patterns (VAPs), there's an outline of the attack, and two sample attacks, with the "bait" described, and expected answers—which will lead to an argument that the victim is likely to lose. The presuppositions are explained, and an effective counter is also given.

Section A: If you really X [*presupposition*] you wouldn't Y [*bait*].

Example 1

"If you REALLY loved me, you wouldn't WASTE MONEY the way you do."

Bait: You waste money.

Expected: "I don't waste money," or something like that.

Presuppositions: You don't really love me.

Counter: "When did you start thinking I don't love you?"

Example 2

"If you were a GOOD student, you wouldn't ALWAYS show up LATE."

Bait: You always show up late.

Expected: "I didn't show up late on Thursday," or "I can't always catch the 7:00 bus."

Presuppositions: You're not a good student. Good students are not late.

Counter: "I work to be the best student I can be."

(note: you may get a response of "then why are you always late?" But that's okay; now you can talk about being late without the extra, unspoken baggage of "good students are never late.")

Section B: If you really X [*presupposition*] you wouldn't want [*presupposition 2*] to Y [*bait*].

Example 1

"If you REALLY cared about my feelings, you wouldn't WANT to hang out with Sherry."

Bait: Your hanging out with Sherry hurts me.

Expected: "Why do you care if I hang out with Sherry?" or "I like Sherry; what's wrong with that?"

Presuppositions: 1) You don't care about my feelings. 2) You can control what you want to do.

Counter: "I'm always surprised when people think that others can control what they WANT to do."

2nd Counter: "Where did you get the idea that I don't care about your feelings?"

(or "When did you..." or "Have you always thought that...")

Example 2

"If you REALLY wanted to make the team, you'd WANT to get enough sleep on the weekends."

Bait: Not getting enough sleep will keep you off the team.

Expected: Either "I DO get enough sleep" or "What does sleep have to do with the team?"

Presuppositions: 1) You don't want to make the team. 2) You can control your wants.

Counter: "Have you always thought I don't want to make the team?"

Section C: Don't you even care [*presupposition*] that X [*bait*]?

Example 1

"Don't you even CARE that you're driving your father to a heart attack with your drug use?"

Bait: Your drug use is bad for your father's health. (This contains a presupposition of its own: it claims that you use drugs. DON'T TAKE THE BAIT.)

Expected: "Of course I care about Dad!" or "I don't use drugs!" or "How can me smoking pot give Dad a heart attack? That's stupid!"

Presuppositions: You don't care about your father.

Counter: "Have you always thought that I don't care about dad's health?"

Example 2

"Don't you even CARE that you're failing English?"

Bait: You're failing English.

Expected: "Of course I care! I spend three hours on that last report!" or "How would you know if I'm failing English?"

Presuppositions: You don't care about English grades.

Counter: "When did you start to think I don't care about my grades?"

Section D: Even a X [presupposition + bait 1] should know Y .[bait 2]

Example 1

"Even a FRESHMAN should know where the parking lot is."

Bait: You don't know where the parking lot is, and that's bad.

Expected: "I do so know where the parking lot is!" or "They changed the signs so I couldn't find the entrance!"

Presuppositions: Freshmen are generally unaware of locations. You're worse than a Freshman.

Counter: "Did you always think that Freshmen know the layout of the entire school?"

Example 2

"Even someone from SAN DIEGO should be able to finish this ON TIME."

Bait: You can't/didn't finish on time.

Expected: "What's being from San Diego got to do with my tests?" or "I would've finished on time if Chris hadn't been kicking my chair for the whole class."

Presuppositions: San Diegans are usually late, and you're even worse.

Counter: "When did you first notice a connection between someone's home city and their test times?"

Section E: Everyone understands [presupposition] why you X. [bait]

Example 1

"Dear, we all know how you just don't fit in at the new school. We just want you to know that we understand your difficulty."

Bait: You don't fit in.

Expected: "I'm fitting in just fine!" or "I'm not having any problems!"

Presuppositions: There's something wrong with you. We all know what it is, and are making allowances for you. You should be grateful for our attention.

Counter: "I'm grateful for your concern. Thank you."

Example 2

"Everybody understands that a black boy is gonna have problems if he's got a white girlfriend. Dude, we know how hard it is for you."

Bait: You're having problems because you're black. Or because your girlfriend's white.

Expected: "There's nothing wrong with being black!" or "You racist jerk!" or "You leave my girlfriend out of this!"

Presuppositions: *same as previous... all that black/white, boyfriend/girlfriend stuff is part of the bait.*

Counter: "Thanks for caring. I'm glad I've got friends."

Section F: A person who wanted [*presupposition*] X [*bait 1*] would Y. [*bait 2*]

Example 1

"Someone who really wanted to learn to drive would get home before dark."

Bait: You get home too late.

Expected: "It's not dark yet! It's only 6 o'clock!" or "It's not my fault! I always have to walk Cleo to her piano lessons, and that makes me late!"

Presuppositions: You don't want to learn to drive. But I'm not even going to talk about you—I'm going to talk about the large group of "people who don't want to learn to drive," and we'll all know I mean you.

Counter: "That seems perfectly reasonable."

(Note: You can't use the responses from the previous attacks, like, "When did you start thinking I don't care about learning to drive?" because it's not aimed at you—the attacker might say, "Oh? Did I *say* I was talking about *you*?" The counter given may lead to, "Then why did you come in at 8:30 when you know we need to get to East Bay Fields before dark?" But now it's about *you*--not "someone who doesn't care about learning to drive.")

Example 2

"A patient who wanted to get well wouldn't eat so much junk food."

Bait: You eat too much junk food.

Expected: "I don't eat much junk food!" or "I DO want to get well! I just don't have time for good lunches!"

Presuppositions: You don't want to get well. But you're not worth talking to like a person, so I'm going to talk about patients in general.

Counter: "That seems perfectly reasonable."

(Note: Same problem—this may lead to "Then why the hell haven't you stopped eating candy bars?"
Again, now you're talking about *you*... not unknown, hypothetical people.)

Section G: Why don't you ever X ? [*bait*] or Why do you always X ? [*bait*]

Example 1

"Why don't you EVER try to do what I like on a date?"

Bait: You never do anything for me.

Expected: "We hung out at Tanya's house on Saturday!" or "You know I can't afford to go to movies!"

Presuppositions: You don't pay attention to my interests, and you ignore what I care about.

Counter: "Would you like to go scuba-diving next weekend?"

(Note: this should be something that (1) you're pretty sure they'll say No, and (2) you wouldn't mind doing if they say Yes. You have to be willing to follow through; this is your chance to say "here, I'll suggest something... and if you don't like it, you'll have to be more specific about what you want.")

Example 2

"Why do you ALWAYS do such AWFUL things?"

Bait: You do "bad things."

Expected: "WHAT awful things?" or "I'm not as bad as John!"

Presuppositions: You don't care how your actions affect other people. You are selfish and mean.

Counter: "Do you think I should quit my job and volunteer fifteen hours a week at the homeless shelter?"

(Note: Again, has to be something you're willing to do if they insist.)

Section H: Some ____ [*speaker's identity*] would be ____ [*negative emotion*] when X [*bait*].

Example 1

"Some parents would be very angry when their son didn't come home until two a.m."

Bait: You came in late, and I'm angry at you.

Expected: "The car ran out of gas" or "It's not 2 a.m., it's barely past midnight!"

Presuppositions: I am not like most parents. You *are* like most sons, which are mostly irresponsible, and you should be thankful we're such terrific, forgiving parents.

Counter: "It would be interesting to hear *your* opinions."

Example 2

"Some girlfriends would be very jealous when their boyfriend gives another girl a ride home."

Bait: You cheated on me, at least in spirit.

Expected: "It was just a RIDE! It didn't mean anything!" or "What business of your is it if I give someone a ride home?"

Presuppositions: I'm not like most girlfriends. You *are* like most boyfriends, which are mostly cheaters, and you should be thankful I'm such a wonderful, forgiving person.

Counter: "I'm sure some of them would. How about *you*?"

Task 1: DISCUSSION FORUM: Look at the examples of verbal attacks you've included in previous lessons. Do they fit into any of these 8 verbal attack patterns? If so, which ones?

Task 2: EMAIL INSTRUCTOR: Write sample counters for these sample verbal attacks, using these defense methods.

- "If you really cared about getting into college, you wouldn't want to waste your weekends going to concerts with those dropouts you call friends."
- "Everyone understands why you haven't got a date yet. We want you to know that we're very sympathetic, and it's not your fault."
- "Why don't you EVER get me a good birthday present?"
- "Some nurses would be very annoyed at seeing the same injury three times in the same football season."

7. Sources and Further Reading

Elgin, Suzette Haden. *The Gentle Art of Verbal Self-Defense*. Prentice-Hall, Inc. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey. 1980.

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Satir, Virginia. *Peoplemaking*. Science and Behavior Books, Inc. Palo Alto, California. 1972.

Three Initiates. *Kybalion*.

Suzette Hadin Elgin's Livejournal: <http://www.livejournal.com/users/ozarque>

Suzette Hadin Elgin's webpage: <http://www.sfw.org/members/elgin>

World Verbal Self-Defense League Page: <http://www.adrr.com/aa>

Overview: <http://www.adrr.com/aa/overview.html>

FAQ: <http://www.adrr.com/aa/FAQ.html>

FAQ for kids: <http://www.adrr.com/aa/kids.html>

Why You Need to Master VSD: <http://www.adrr.com/aa/whymastervsd.html>

Verbal Self Defense Attack Patterns: <http://vasvas.by.ru/dva.shtml>

How Stuff Works: Verbal Self-Defense: <http://people.howstuffworks.com/vsd.htm>

Task: STUDENT JOURNAL: Read one (or more) of the webpages, and write a brief description of it. Note whatever you found most interesting about it.

Test questions; send to instructor

1: Describe the 5 Satir modes in your own words.

2: Give an example of a sentence or short paragraph in *each* Satir mode for one of these situations:

- 1) A student telling a teacher why he's late
- 2) A parent who's angry at a child who didn't wash the dishes
- 3) A patient describing a problem to a doctor

2b: Give an example of a sentence or short paragraph in *one* Satir mode (other than Leveler) for the other two situations.

3: Give an example of verbal attack that you or someone close to you has experienced. (Possibly the same example as Lesson 2.) With the techniques you've learned in this class, would any of them have made that situation better? If you had it to do over, what would you have said, and how might it have happened instead?

4: Give two examples of statements with presuppositions used as verbal attacks. Write a brief conversation for each of them, starting with a deflection of the attack.

5: Write a sample counter for each of these verbal attacks.

- "Don't you even care about the innocent children being slaughtered in Iraq?"
- "Someone who really cared about become a wizard would do his homework."
- "Even someone your age should recognize Avril Lavigne's music!"
- "If you really trusted me, you'd let me read your diary."