Criteria

Criteria is a word that means the standards by which we evaluate something. We all make value judgments about things and issues based on different standards. For example, my husband is a fan of movies starring Arnold, Clint, and similar actors. He likes movies that have lots of explosions and monosyllabic dialogue ("I'll be back!") and fast cars. I, on the other hand, like movies with intricate plots and interesting dialogue and realistic relationships. When John says that a movie is "good," his definition is very different from mine because we are evaluating based on different criteria.

When you use a word such as good or bad or interesting or free--any abstraction really--you need to define it based on your own criteria and think about what the audience’s criteria are. In other words, you need to define your terms.

You won’t come out and say "these are my criteria," but you will modify your argument by comparing your audience’s criteria to your own and trying to determine where you have common ground or where you share an assumption. John and I might find a movie that has explosion and conversation.

George Orwell makes some interesting points about this in his essay Politics and the English Language if you are interested in reading further about this.