

THE TRAITORS

Ag Comm Edition

An Experiential Approach to Teaching Audience Adaptation and Strategic Communication

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INTRODUCTION

- ➡ Agricultural communicators translate complex concepts for diverse audiences (Kurtzo et al., 2016).
- ➡ Effective communication requires audience awareness, message adaptation, and intentional language (Clemons et al., 2018; Frick et al., 1991).
- ➡ Students need active practice adapting messages for audiences (Wurdinger & Carlson, 2009).
- ➡ Experiential, game-based learning supports practice, reflection, and application (Coleman et al., 2024; Kolb, 1984; Plass et al., 2015; Roberts, 2006).

THE INNOVATION

- ➡ The Traitors: Ag Comm Edition adapts the social-deduction format of *The Traitors*.
- ➡ Social-deduction games require participants to communicate, interpret messages, and adapt strategies with incomplete information (Brandizzi et al., 2022).
- ➡ Students receive unequal information and must explain agricultural concepts to peers with different levels of knowledge.
- ➡ The activity builds practice in audience adaptation, strategic communication, language selection, and message framing.

COSTS/RESOURCES NEEDED

- ➡ **Preparation time:** 20–25 minutes
- ➡ **Class time:** 30–45 minutes
- ➡ **Materials:** Reusable role cards & selected agricultural terms
- ➡ **Space:** Classroom space or virtual meeting platform
- ➡ **Cost:** Less than \$5 for reusable paper role cards
- ➡ **Reflection:** Collected on paper or digitally

HOW IT WORKS

30–45 minutes · Adaptable for various group sizes

1 Select a concept

Choose an agricultural concept, such as sustainability, food security, biosecurity, animal welfare, traceability, agricultural advocacy, etc.

2 Deal role cards

Most players receive the same concept card. One or more players receive a Traitor card and do not know the concept.

3 Share one clue each

Players take turns giving a one-sentence clue about the concept.

4 No jargon shortcuts ?

Clues cannot include the term, its definition, spelling, or obvious derivatives. Players use examples, descriptions, experiences, or related ideas instead.

5 Traitors listen and infer

Traitors use others' clues to identify the concept and provide a believable response.

6 Discuss, vote, reveal

The group identifies the suspected traitor(s), votes, and then learns the concept and roles.

7 Reflect and debrief

Students complete an individual reflection, then participate in a facilitated class debrief. Example:

- ➡ How did I choose my clue?
- ➡ What assumptions did I make about audience knowledge?
- ➡ Did agricultural jargon help or hinder understanding?
- ➡ How would I adapt my explanation for a nonagricultural audience? (Ingles & Retallick, 2025)

The debrief connects gameplay to audience adaptation, message framing, and future agricultural communication contexts (Schürmann et al., 2025).

RESULTS TO DATE

Initial implementation: 49 undergraduate agricultural communications students in a seminar-style course for sophomores

Thematic analysis of reflections indicated increased awareness of:

➡ **Audience adaptation:** Students described reducing jargon, providing context, and using more familiar language for nonagricultural audiences.

“I would say terms that aren't ‘jargon’ to others. Words that can be easily interpreted.”

➡ **Agricultural terminology:** recognized that agricultural language can connect some audiences while excluding others.

“There is a bit of a lingo that some may not understand.”

➡ **Audience knowledge and experience:** Students identified that effective communication depends on an audience's prior knowledge and frame of reference.

“For biosecurity, someone said plastic boots. If you didn't raise pigs growing up, you wouldn't know what they were used for.”

Unexpected outcome: Students observed *traitors* often became highly attentive listeners because they relied on contextual clues and communication patterns to participate. This prompted discussion of credibility, active listening, and critically evaluating messages rather than assuming expertise.

FUTURE PLANS & ADVICE TO OTHERS

- **Expand:** Has already been adapted for professional development programs, graduate students, and early-career scientists.
- **Refine:** Use feedback to tailor delivery across contexts.
- **Prioritize:** Gamify activities to increase engagement; debrief to reinforce communication principles. (Schürmann et al., 2025).
- **Adapt:** Use digital role cards and polling tools.
- **Intention:** Use concepts familiar to agricultural audiences but less recognizable to general audiences to highlight audience adaptation (Clemons et al., 2018; Frick et al., 1991).



SCAN FOR ABSTRACT
AND REFERENCES



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