LOGICAL FALLACIES

Common Mistakes in Weak Arguments
(these are bad... don’t use them...)

AP English Language & Composition
OUT OUT!!
YOU DEMONS OF STUPIDITY!!
ALWAYS BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR FAULTY REASONING!
DEFINITION

Logical fallacies are flaws in reasoning that lead to faulty, illogical statements. They are unreasonable argumentative tactics named for what has gone wrong during the reasoning process.
ETYMOLOGY

- The word “fallacy” may derive from the Latin word *fallere* meaning, “to deceive, to trip, to lead into error or to trick.”
- The word may also derive from the Greek *phelos*, meaning “deceitful.”

www.sun-design.com/talitha/fallacies.htm
Most logical fallacies masquerade as reasonable statements, but they are actually attempts to manipulate readers by reaching their emotions instead of their intellects.
WHY STUDY LOGICAL FALLACIES?

• It is important to develop logical fallacy detection skills in your own writing, as well as the writing of others.

• Learning to recognize these will:
  ● Strengthen your own arguments
  ● Help you critique the arguments of others
TYPES OF LOGICAL FALLACIES

✶ Fallacies of Relevance
✶ Fallacies of Accuracy
✶ Fallacies of Insufficiency
✶ Other Types of Fallacies
FALLACIES OF RELEVANCE
RED HERRING

• Focuses on an irrelevant issue to detract attention from the real issue
  ● Steers the discussion to a side issue in order to avoid the main issue
  ● Rarely returns to original issue
• Literally a SMELLY FISH.
  ● You basically say, “My back is against the wall. I cannot win this argument. HERE IS AN AWFUL SMELLY FISH TO DISTRACT YOU!
  ● https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MyVwyHdLdnw
• EX: Mom, I know I have Attendance School for tardies but at least I am not doing drugs like all those other kids out there!
ARGUMENT TO THE MAN (AD HOMINEM)

- VERY personal
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ebT1Oo6yDMI
- Directly attacks someone’s appearance, habits, or character rather than focusing on the merit of the issue at hand. The implication is that if something is wrong with this person, whatever he/she says must be wrong.
Sara is divorced, so whatever relationship advice she gives you can’t be good.

Sara’s marital status has nothing to do with the quality of her advice. Isn’t it also possible that Sara could be married and give awful advice?

“If my husband forgot to wash his dish, I would move out too. You did the right thing, Carol.”
EX: Why are you talking about an open campus? You can’t even drive you stupid sophomore!

EX: Senator Jones was a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War, so his proposal to limit military spending has no merit.

EX: “How can you say he’s a good musician when he’s been in and out of rehab for three years?”
The person presenting the argument is an authority, but not on the subject at hand.

Three types:

**Self Proof** — “Because I said so”
- Claim: X is true because I say so.
- Warrant: What I say must be true.

**Spokesperson** — “Because famous person says so”
- Claim: X is true because Y says so.
- Warrant: What Y says must be true.

**Too Much Credit** — “Because they are good at one thing, they know all things”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3t6bLugtJkQ
FALSE/FAULTY ANALOGY

- The assumption that because two things are alike in some respects, they are alike in other respects.

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rpXrDye-SsI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rpXrDye-SsI)
- **EX:** If we put humans on the moon, we should be able to find a cure for the common cold!
- **EX:** People who have to have a cup of coffee every morning before they can function have no less a problem than alcoholics who have to have alcohol each day to sustain them.
- **EX:** People who buy stocks are no different from people who bet on horse racing. They both risk their money with little chance of making a big profit.
BANDWAGON APPEALS

• Urge people to follow the same path that everyone else is taking.
  • https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6dQRCOEeHaY
  • “It must be cool because everybody is doing it…”
FALLACIES OF ACCURACY
STRAW MAN

- A speaker chooses a deliberately poor or oversimplified example in order to ridicule and refute an opponent’s viewpoint.
- Misrepresentation of an opponent’s opinion.
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X0Fbfebi3rE
- Sunny days are good. If all days were sunny, we’d never have rain, and without rain, we’d have famine and death.
"EITHER... OR" FALLACY
(aka false dichotomy fallacy)

- The suggestion that only two (usually one preferred and one dangerous) alternatives exist, when in fact there are more.

- The arguer sets up the situation so it looks like there are only two choices. The arguer then eliminates one of the choices, so it seems that we are left with only one option: the one the arguer wanted us to pick in the first place.
  - **EX:** "America - Love It Or Leave It" was used as a pro-slogan during the Vietnam War. It implies that a true citizen or patriot must support everything done by America, or not be an American
  - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=scdHAD1J7Fc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=scdHAD1J7Fc)
  - **EX:** Either go to college, or you can forget about making money!
FALLACIES OF INSUFFICIENCY
HASTY GENERALIZATION

- A generalization based on insufficient or unrepresented evidence, or perhaps only one case -- Jumping to conclusions
- Forms the basis for most stereotypes (FEW = ALL) Also the basis for sexist remarks/jokes.

  - **EX:** Because my Honda broke down, all Hondas must be junk.
  - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KqeqTWD2Ymg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KqeqTWD2Ymg)
  - **EX:** One student is arrested for drugs and suddenly all students in that school are called druggies.
**EX:** “The only redheads I know are rude. Therefore, all redheads must have bad manners.”

If the speaker only knows two redheads, then s/he has insufficient evidence to make the general claim about all people with that hair color.
BEGGING THE QUESTION (CIRCULAR REASONING)

- An argument in which the writer, instead of applying evidence, simply restates the point in other language. (begs the question: raises a point that has not been dealt with)
  - **EX:** God exists. How do you know? The Bible says so. Who wrote the Bible? God.
  - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CVbku6nxhU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CVbku6nxhU)
  - **EX:** Chicken nuggets are good. Why are they good? Because they are tasty. Why are they tasty? Because they are good!
  - **EX:** Representative Jones can’t be guilty of inappropriate conduct toward women; he’s a nice, honest man.
This fallacy gets its name from the Latin phrase "post hoc, ergo propter hoc," which translates as "after this, therefore because of this."

- Politicians LOVE using post hoc fallacies
- The assumption that because one event (A) follows another (B), the first (A) is the cause of the second (B).
  - **EX:** Every time I wear my blue sweater, it snows. OMG, MY BLUE SWEATER CAUSES SNOW!!!
  - **EX:** Our soccer team was losing until I bought new shoes. We haven’t lost a game since I got my lucky shoes! (lots of sports suspicions are post hoc)
  - **EX:** President Jones raised taxes, and then the rate of violent crime went up. Jones is responsible for the rise in crime.
“POST HOC ERGO PROPTER HOC...”

- In the video clip below, Sheldon’s mother’s church group (A) prayed for Sheldon to return home safely, and (B) Sheldon returned home safely. Therefore Sheldon returned home safely (B) because the church group prayed for him (A).

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vRJUvFG8gbE
Post Hoc Example

“Since (FL) Governor [Jeb] Bush took office, unemployment of minorities in the state has decreased by seven percent. Governor Bush should be applauded for reducing unemployment among minorities.”

Before we pat the governor on the back, the speaker must show that Bush’s policies are responsible for the decrease in unemployment. It is not enough to show the decrease came after his election.
OTHER TYPES OF FALLACIES
APPEAL TO FEAR (AD BACULUM)
Scare Tactics

• Proving your argument through fear or the threat of consequences instead of using logical reasoning.
  • EX: If you do not believe in God, you will go to Hell.
  • EX: Global warming will kill us all so stop using aerosol hairspray.
  • EX: If you speed while driving, you will die in an accident.
APPEAL TO PITY (AD MISERICORDIUM)

• Accept the truth of a conclusion out of pity for the arguer or some third party (makes reader feel sorry for someone).
  • Either the arguer (or someone else) is already an object of pity, or they will become one if the conclusion is not accepted.
  • **EX:** If I don’t get at least a B in this course my GPA will drop below 3.0. If that happens I’ll lose my scholarship and have to quit school, so I ought to get a B in this course.
SLIPPERY SLOPE

• Today’s tiny misstep is tomorrow’s slide into disaster.
• [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZVFscA9Vqw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZVFscA9Vqw)
• If we allow one thing a whole slew of other, negative events will occur as a result

- If we pass this health care bill eventually the government will take over the decision-making from patients and doctors
- “If you don’t stop smoking cigarettes, then you are going to start shooting heroin.”
LET’S TRY IT!
NAME THIS FALLACY!
1) Plagiarism is deceitful because it is dishonest.

BEGGING THE QUESTION
CAN YOU NAME THIS FALLACY?

2) I know three redheads who have terrible tempers, and since Annabel has red hair, I’ll bet she has a terrible temper too.

HASTY GENERALIZATION
CAN YOU NAME THIS FALLACY?

3)

SLIPPERY SLOPE
4) Mary must be an atheist; she never goes to church.

EITHER/OR
CAN YOU NAME THIS FALLACY?

5) You know Jane Fonda’s exercise videos must be worth the money. Look at the great shape she’s in.

POST HOC (false cause)
CAN YOU NAME THIS FALLACY?

CIRCULAR REASONING

THERE'S NO GOVERNMENT LIKE NO GOVERNMENT

http://www.cafepress.com
CAN YOU NAME THIS FALLACY?

7) Yes, I cheated on that test, Mrs. McNett. But I always stay after to help you clean up. Oh, and I brought you a Diet Dr. Pepper yesterday, remember?

RED HERRING
CAN YOU NAME THIS FALLACY?

8) I'm positive that my work will meet your requirements. I really need the job since my grandmother is sick.

APPEAL TO PITY
CAN YOU NAME THIS FALLACY?

9) "Active euthanasia is morally acceptable. It is a decent, ethical thing to help another human being escape suffering through death."

BEGGING THE QUESTION

• Let's lay this out in premise-conclusion form:
  ● Premise: It is a decent, ethical thing to help another human being escape suffering through death.
  ● Conclusion: Active euthanasia is morally acceptable.
THINK OR PERISH

EITHER/OR
NOW IT’S YOUR TURN

- Arguments on the web are no more likely to contain fallacies than arguments in any other medium, but the fallacies can take on different forms. The hypertextual nature of web arguments and the ease of including visuals with text make certain fallacies more likely to occur there.

- Find a website that belongs to a business or organization (Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Republican/Democratic National Committee) and analyze the site for fallacious reasoning. Take notes and be prepared to present your findings.

- Now look at the website of a major newspaper. It can be local (Salt Lake Tribune, Deseret News) or national (New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal). See if you can find an article that contains fallacious reasoning. The Opinion page (Op-Ed page) might be your best bet. Again, take notes and be prepared to present your findings.