The Writing Center
DLA: Identifying Logical Fallacies

This DLA is a writable PDF form. You can enter your answers directly into this document.

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Do not complete this form in a web browser. You will not be able to save your work.

Student Name:

Important Note

To get completion credit for this DLA, make sure you complete all the required activities. If you'd like help while working on a specific DLA, you can meet with a specialist at the Writing Center. Keep in mind that you might need to schedule a second appointment to review your work, check your understanding, and get your completion credit. You can only review **ONE** DLA per appointment. (Check the last section of this DLA for information on making your appointment and receiving completion credit for your work).

Activities (approximately 1 hour)

Read the information, complete the activities that follow, and be prepared to discuss your answers when you meet with a tutor.

Understanding Logical Fallacies

A **logical fallacy** is an error in judgment or a faulty argument. People often use logical fallacies to trick and persuade others to believe a certain conclusion. This activity will help you to identify these fallacies so that you can see the flaws in someone else's reasoning and make informed decisions. It is also important to identify these fallacies so that you, too, can avoid them when making an argument.

There are many different types of logical fallacies, and they can be found in all academic disciplines and all areas of communication, from politics to advertising. Below is a list of some of the most common logical fallacies. Be aware that there are plenty more and that some are variations of the ones on this list.

Logical Fallacies

1. Non Sequitur:

"It does not follow."—Connects arguments that have no logical relationship to each other.

- **EXAMPLE:** "Our product is so good; it was even given away in celebrity gift bags."

  Explanation: Just because the product is being given away to celebrities doesn't mean that 1.) celebrities endorse it, or 2.) the product is necessarily good. There is no proof that the product is actually good.

2. Post Hoc, Ergo Propter Hoc:

"After this, therefore because of this." Assumes a cause-and-effect relationship between two events *IN THE PAST* which occurred in sequence, but which may not have been *necessarily* related to each other.

- **EXAMPLE:** "Since Governor Smith took office four years ago, unemployment among minorities has decreased 7 percent. I think Governor Smith deserves to be re-elected for reducing unemployment among minorities."

  Explanation—This statement implies that because unemployment rates decreased after the governor took office, the governor is, therefore, responsible for the decrease when, in fact, he may or may not have had any influence.

3. Slippery Slope:

Projects *INTO THE FUTURE* an inevitable cause-and-effect connection between a series of events which may not occur at all.

- **EXAMPLE:** "They'll start putting 'Parental Advisory' stickers on CDs; then they'll start burning books; then they'll repeal the First Amendment, and we'll end up with government 'thought control' just like in George Orwell's *1984."*

  Explanation—This person is making a big leap from putting "Parental Advisory" stickers on CDs to "thought control," suggesting that the stickers will set in motion an avalanche of government control when in reality there is no evidence presented that such events will happen.

4. False Dilemma:

"Excluded middle" or "Either /Or Fallacy"—Assumes that there are only two possible choices ("Either *this* or *that*") when there are other choices available.

- **EXAMPLE:** "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists."—spoken by former Vice President Dick Cheney.

  Explanation—This assumes that there isn't a third option, such as "I am against the terrorists, and I am against your way of handling this problem because I don't think it will work in making our nation safer. I think there are better ways of fighting terrorism." One can prove this is a fallacy by considering other options.

5. Begging the Question:

"Circular Argument"—Simply restates the question under debate in different words as if it were a settled conclusion.

- **EXAMPLE:** "Ronald Reagan was a good communicator because he was able to speak well to people."

  Explanation—Being a good communicator is another way to say that someone speaks well. This is not a good argument because the reason cannot be the same as the claim you are trying to make. The statement doesn't provide any evidence that Reagan was a good communicator; it merely restates the claim.

6. Appeal to Inappropriate Authority:

"False Authority"—Appeals to an authority who is not a qualified expert on the issue.

- **EXAMPLE:** "As a great scientist, Albert Einstein would have opposed animal experimentation if he were alive today."

  Explanation—Even though Albert Einstein was a scientist, he was specifically a theoretical physicist, which doesn't make him a qualified expert on animal experimentation. Therefore, this argument is flawed.

7. Ad Populum:

"Bandwagon Argument" or "Appeal to the Crowd"—Equates popularity/quantity with quality.

- **EXAMPLE:** "Every morning, ten million people brush their teeth with *Crest* toothpaste—more use *Crest* than any other brand of toothpaste. *Crest toothpaste is the best you can buy!"*

  Explanation—Just because ten million people use this brand of toothpaste doesn't mean it is a good product. A product can be mediocre or even bad, but if it has good marketing, many people may buy it.

8. Ad Ignorantiam:

"Argument from Ignorance"—Based on *LACK* of evidence (or denial that evidence exists). A variant of the "False Dilemma" fallacy, this fallacy assumes that a claim is true because it has not been proven false (or assumes that a claim is false because it has not been proven true).

- **EXAMPLE:** "Genetically engineered food is safe because it has not been proven to be dangerous to our health." **OR:** "Genetically engineered food is dangerous because it has not been proven to be safe to eat."

  Explanation—In order to prove a claim, one must show evidence for it. If one wants to say that genetically engineered food is safe, then one has to prove that it is safe by showing evidence, not by saying there is no evidence to prove otherwise. These examples are not showing evidence for their claims; rather, they are arguing that evidence doesn't exist.

9. Ad Misericordium

"Appeal to Pity" or "Sob Story"—Tries to win support for an argument by using pity or sympathy when these feelings are not relevant to the truth or strength of the argument's conclusions.

- **EXAMPLE:** "We shouldn't force this 75-year-old man to go to prison for his crimes because he has cancer and is very ill. He's in pain and should spend his last years with his family instead of in a cell."

  Explanation—Discussing this man's current illness and frail health is a distraction from the fact that he committed crimes in the past and was sentenced to prison. His health is irrelevant to his punishment.

10. Two Wrongs Fallacy:

"Tu Quoque"—Argues that "Two wrongs make a right."

- **EXAMPLE:** Prince Charles criticized McDonald's for selling "fattening" food to the English. McDonald's replied by comparing their food to such high calorie British favorites as Roast Beef and Ale.

  Explanation—Just because traditional British dishes are fattening and high in calories doesn't make McDonald's offerings any less fattening or high in calories.

11. Argument by False Analogy:

Compares two things or events which resemble each other superficially, but which are dissimilar.

- **EXAMPLE:** "We shouldn't send troops to fight in Kuwait because it will be just another Vietnam War."

  Explanation—The war in the Middle East and the war in Vietnam are two different situations, two different times, and two different places. One cannot assume that these wars are the same even though they may have some resemblance.

12. Ad Hominen Attack:

"Mudslinging"—Ignores the topic under debate and instead attacks the opponent's character on some irrelevant personal issue.

- **EXAMPLE:** "My opponent, Senator Jones, was a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War. Therefore, his proposal to cut the new submarine program should not be seriously considered."

  Explanation—The topic here is the proposal to cut the new submarine program. Instead of arguing against this proposal, Senator Jones' opponent is attacking the senator's character or something he did in the past, which has nothing to do with the debate.

13. Straw Person Argument:

Distorts the opponent's argument to weaken the opponent's position, therefore, making it easier to attack.

- **EXAMPLE:** "My opponent, Senator Jones, voted against funding the new submarine program because he wants the United States to be totally defenseless and vulnerable to enemy attacks."

  Explanation—Hardly anyone in the U.S. would want this country to be defenseless and vulnerable, but this is not Senator Jones' argument. The opponent is distorting Senator Jones' argument to such degree that people would be swayed into the opponent's side.

14. Perfect Solution:

Argues that because a problem remains after a solution is tried, the solution should not be adopted.

- **EXAMPLE:** "Stricter gun laws will not prevent mass shootings. People who want to kill will do so no matter what laws we have. Therefore, we should not make stricter gun laws."

  Explanation—Just because a solution will not fix a problem entirely doesn't make it a bad solution. It can still have worthwhile merits, so it shouldn't be disregarded for not being perfect.

15. Red Herring Argument:

Presents an irrelevant topic to divert attention from the original issue and shifts attention away from the argument to another issue. Sequence: 1.) Topic A is being discussed; 2.) Topic B is introduced as though it is relevant to Topic A, but it is not; 3.) Topic A is abandoned.

- **EXAMPLE:** Mother: "Why did you lie to me about where you went last night?"
  Daughter: "You're always picking on me. Why don't you ever question my brother?"

  Explanation—Here, the issue is the daughter lying to the mother. The daughter then tries to run away from the issue by bringing up another issue, her brother, but the brother has nothing to do with the sister lying to her mother. The mother may get on the defensive, and the issue will probably be dropped.

16. Hasty Generalization:

Makes assumptions about a whole group or range of cases based on a sample that is inadequate (usually because it is atypical or too small).

- **EXAMPLE:** "My roommate said her philosophy class was hard, and the one I'm in is hard, too. All philosophy classes must be hard!"

  Explanation—This person is making a judgment based on a very limited sample of "evidence." The opinion of two people is not large enough to show evidence of the claim; other people may think that philosophy classes are easy.

*Refer to the supplemental Writing Center handout, "Logical Fallacies: Short Cuts in Logic" for a succinct breakdown of each logical fallacy listed in the DLA.

(Adapted by the Writing Center from Professor Mageean's Handout and Browne & Keeley, 2015)

Activities

Check off each box once you have completed the activity.

☐ 1. Logical Fallacies Review

Review the information on this sheet and then answer the following question.

What is a logical fallacy?

☐ 2. Additional Logical Fallacies

Visit the "Thou Shall Not Commit Logical Fallacies" website and then write down and explain *two* more logical fallacies **that are not listed in this DLA**. Along with explaining the two new logical fallacies, write down the example from the website's fallacy definition. Be ready to explain your answers to the tutor.

Fallacy Name:

Definition:

Example:

Fallacy Name:

Definition:

Example:

☐ 3. Online Quiz

Go to http://tinyurl.com/logfallaciesdlaquiz and take the Logical Fallacies Quiz. You must score at least 75% on the quiz before meeting with a specialist. After you complete the task, please take a screenshot of the page that has your score and show it to your specialist. Do not exit the quiz until you take the screenshot.

Choose 4a or 4b Below

☐ 4a. Review Your Own Writing

Examine an argumentative/persuasive paper that you wrote for English 1A or 1C (no more than 4 pages) to see if you can identify any fallacies in your own writing. Then, using the information on this handout, identify the logical fallacies in your argument by underlining and labeling them. **If you do not have your own essay to work with, please complete the supplemental activity below (4b).**

☐ 4b. Identify Logical Fallacies

Read the following argument for the death penalty. Then, using the information in this handout, identify AT LEAST four logical fallacies in the argument by **underlining and labeling** them.

The death penalty is something that we need to have in society. How else can we deter crimes? We know that the death penalty works as a deterrent because studies have not proven otherwise. If we abolish the death penalty, then murderers will not think twice before killing. We will also attract more criminals to come to our country to commit crimes because they know that they will not have to pay for their actions. Furthermore, violent inmates who receive a life sentence are a ticking time bomb since they can escape and commit more heinous acts, so crime will increase, and society will plunge into anarchy. Who wants to live in that society? The death penalty makes sense. That's why our founding fathers thought the death penalty was correct. Furthermore, the majority of Americans are in favor of the death penalty, and it exists in many countries around the world, like China and Belarus. Critics of the death penalty say that it's wrong to take a life, but what about the lives that the murderers took? Think of the mother who lost her son at the hands of a murderer. Think of the pain and fear that victims of serial killers felt before dying. If you stand against the death penalty, you stand for murderers.

☐ 5. Review the DLA/Receive Completion Credit

1. Go to EAB Navigate and make an appointment (online or in-person).
2. Attend your session and be prepared to explain your understanding of the information you've learned in the DLA. Consider the main concept you learned and how you might use this in your future assignments/classes.
3. If your professor asks you to provide proof, you can review the "appointment summary report" through EAB Navigate (app or desktop). You will find all Writing Center appointments under "appointment summary reports" (app or desktop). Look for the summary report for your DLA appointment. This is where your writing specialist will indicate the title of your DLA and state whether it is "completed" or "not completed." If it is marked as "not completed," book a follow up appointment to complete.

Note: Appointment summary reports are also sent weekly to your instructor on record. If there is an issue, please contact us at writingcenter@mtsac.edu or (909) 274-5325.

If you are an individual with a disability and need a greater level of accessibility for any document in The Writing Center or on The Writing Center's website, please contact the Mt. SAC Accessible Resource Centers for Students, access@mtsac.edu, (909) 274-4290.

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