COMMON LOGICAL FALLACIES

fallacy: an error in reasoning due to a misconception or presumption
HASTY GENERALIZATION

- The writer draws a conclusion from too little evidence, inadequate evidence, or biased evidence.
- The writer might also use “absolutes”: always, never, everyone, no one, all, or none, without qualifying his or her claims with “sometimes”—”tends to”—”seldom”—”in most cases”—”often”—”many.”
- Example: Tony is a great cook. Yesterday he made the best lasagna I’ve ever had.
**FAULTY CAUSE AND EFFECT**

- Post hoc, ergo proter hoc; “after this; therefore, because of this”
- Assumes that A caused B simply because A occurred prior to B
- Confusing chronology with causation
  - A occurred, and then B; therefore A caused B
- Example: *Jimmy bought cologne to attract girls but has had zero luck since wearing it; therefore, the cologne is the problem.*
BEGGING THE QUESTION

- The conclusion or claim that the writer intends to prove is assumed in that claim.
- Instead the writer must offer proof.
  - Example: Paranormal phenomena exist because I have had experiences that can only be described as paranormal.
CIRCULAR REASONING

- Argument ad nauseum
- The reason given to support the claim just *restates* the claim

  - Example: *Whatever is less dense than water will float, because such objects won't sink in water*
EITHER—OR FALLACY

- False dilemma or the fallacy of insufficient options
- The arguer gives just two options without considering other alternatives.
  - “The two choices are…”
- The argument is often phrased as a rhetorical question that allows for only one acceptable answer.
  - Example: *Are we going to increase the police force, or abandon our neighborhoods to gangs and drugs?”*
FALSE ANALOGY

- Faulty comparison
- The writer draws a weak comparison between things that are alike in some respects, assuming because these things share some characteristics, they share others as well.
- However, the comparison does not hold up to analysis
- The similarities are not strong enough to support the writer’s argument

Example: Students should be allowed to look at their textbooks during examinations. After all, surgeons have X-rays to guide them during an operation, lawyers have briefs to guide them during a trial, carpenters have blueprints to guide them when they are building a house. Why, then, shouldn’t students be allowed to look at their textbooks during an examination?
AD HOMINEM

- Argument against the person; name calling
- Makes a personal attack on an opponent rather than focusing on the issue under discussion.
  - It is legitimate to question someone’s qualifications or motives if these are relevant to the issues being discussed
  - Example: How can you trust the senator’s views on birth control? He has ten children!
AD POPULUM

- Appeal to the people, to the crowd
- The writer makes an appeal to group-approved attitudes or beliefs.
- “Everyone knows that…”
- “Most Americans agree that…”

  Example: If you’re a true movie lover, you must love the Batman movies.
RED HERRING

- Arguing off point
- The writer avoids refuting an opposing argument directly, bringing in an irrelevant issue to deflect attention from the main point

Example:

**Joey Naylor:** It's the best ice-cream, I wouldn't order any other.

**Nick Naylor:** Oh! So it's all chocolate for you is it?

**Joey Naylor:** Yes, chocolate is all I need.

**Nick Naylor:** Well, I need more than chocolate, and for that matter I need more than vanilla. I believe that we need freedom. And choice when it comes to our ice-cream, and that Joey Naylor, that is the definition of liberty.

--- Thank You For Smoking
The arguer pretend to be responding to the opponent’s views, when she is really setting up an artificial position—one which the opponent does not actually hold—that can easily be disproved.

Using the straw man fallacy, the arguer may refute an extreme or caricatured version of someone’s argument, thus distorting or misrepresenting that person’s position.

Example: The president has proposed raising taxes on Americans who make over $200,000 a year...He’s trying to raise everyone’s taxes!”
NON-SEQUITUR

- “It does not follow”
- An argument in which the conclusion does not follow from the premises
  - Example: **Racism is wrong; therefore, we need affirmative action.**
SLIPPERY SLOPE

- The writer argues that taking Action A will lead to B—without showing a casual connection between A and B
  - The steps leading from A to B are omitted
  - Example: If we legalize marijuana, the next thing you know we’ll be legalizing heroin and cocaine.
TRADITION

- Argumentum ad antiquitatem
- The writer argues that something is right or acceptable because “it has always been done that way.”
- The appeal to tradition is based on two assumptions
  - 1. That the old way was correct at the time when it was first introduced
  - 2. That the reasons for the tradition are still valid.
- Example: **Gay marriage should not be legalized, because since our country’s founding, traditional marriage has been the only form of legalized marriage.**