

THE WRITING PROCESS

Logical Fallacy

Logic is an essential aspect of a successful argument, and in academic writing logic is employed by the writer to determine if the reasoning behind an argument is valid or invalid. The premises or assertions stated by the writer as well as inferences that further develop the argument must be supported by evidence that leads to a conclusion.

A logical fallacy is an error in reasoning, not in grammar or usage. Every reasoned argument attempts to show that if certain statements are true, then the conclusion must also be true. When an argument contains a logical fallacy, its conclusion could be false even if all the statements that are said to support it were true. If you detect a fallacy in an argument, you should examine that argument carefully, maintaining skepticism about its conclusion.

COMMON TYPES OF FALLACIES

- **Unqualified or hasty generalization:** a statement that draws a general conclusion on the basis of biased or insufficient evidence.

Example: I had a bad experience with my husband and from that I learned that all men are no good.

A special kind of generalization is called *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* (after the fact, therefore because of the fact). In this form of unqualified or hasty generalization, it is claimed that because one event followed another, the first event caused the second.

Example: Sales improved after we began the new advertising campaign; therefore the new campaign is a success.

- **Begging the question:** a statement that says the same thing in the conclusion as in the premise. This type of argument is also called “begging the claim” or a “circular” fallacy, which merely restates the claim rather than actually proving it.

Example: We can believe what it says in the college catalogue because the catalogue itself says that it is the official publication of the college.

A special kind of circular or question-begging argument uses a definition that is structured so as to “prove” the truth of the assertion.

Example: By my definition, “unbreakable” means “requiring an unusual degree of force to break”; therefore, these dishes are unbreakable.

- **Ad hominem argument:** a statement that attacks the person who makes an argument rather than the argument itself.

Example: His objections to capital punishment carry no weight because he is a convicted criminal.

- **Argument from analogy:** a statement that uses an analogy as the basis for a conclusion. This is an unsound form of inductive reasoning because, though two things may share a number of common properties, this does not mean that they are identical in every way.

Example (analogy): My love is like a red, red rose, being fair, healthy, lovely, sweet.

Faulty conclusion from the analogy: The rose will soon die and so, therefore, will my love.

- **Black or white fallacy:** a statement that claims that there is no important difference between two things because the difference is a result of continuous degree, and therefore is the sum of many small and trivial differences.

Example: There is no difference between being awake and being asleep because one moves gradually from being awake to being asleep and/or vice-versa.

- **Distraction:** a statement that attempts to turn an argument or dispute away from the point at issue by means of appeal to emotion and/or the raising of irrelevant considerations.

Example: You say you are against U.S. intervention in Central America, but what about the behavior of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan?

- **Far-fetched hypothesis:** a statement that asserts a hypothesis on the basis of evidence that points to a simpler and more likely hypothesis.

Example: The church was set afire after the civil rights meeting was over; therefore, it must have been set by the leaders of the civil rights movement to cast suspicion on local racists.

- **Slanting:** a true statement that is phrased in such a way as to either cast doubt on its truth or to convey the writer's biases.

Example: Our space program will cost a certain amount of money. (The statement suggests that the amount of money is not great.)

Money is being poured into the space program. (The word "poured" connotes careless, unnecessary spending.)