**Logical Fallacies**

Definition: What is a logical fallacy?

* A logical fallacy is an inaccurate or intentionally misleading application of logic.
* It is important to be able to recognize logical fallacies to avoid being exploited or swindled by writers or speakers who want your money, your voice, or your vote.
* It is also important to avoid using logical fallacies in your own argumentation, because honesty is an essential quality of effective persuasion.

Common Logical Fallacies:

**Hasty Generalization:** a conclusion based on too little evidence, suggesting a superficial investigation of an issue.

Example:

* Most of the people in the room opposed the project, so most people in the town probably oppose it too. *(Unless you can prove the sample in the room were statistically representative of the town as a whole, you cannot make this claim.)*
* Women don’t enjoy watching sports. *(Evidence against this could be any example of a specific woman who enjoys watching sports. This is also an example of a stereotype: a general statement about a group of people based on uninformed attitudes toward a particular race, gender, religion, age, etc.)*

**Either/Or Fallacy:** suggests that only two choices exist when, in fact, there are more.

Example:

* For the sake of learning, we must maintain the firmest kind of discipline, including corporal punishment, in our public schools, or we can expect chaos, disorder, and the disintegration of education as we know it. *(The two alternatives presented are extremes: firm discipline resulting in order versus relaxed discipline resulting in chaos. The statement ignores moderate methods of maintaining discipline.)*

**Red Herring Tactic:** an irrelevant issue introduced into a discussion to draw attention away from the central issue.

Example:

* I work sixty hours a week to support my family, and I pay my taxes. You can’t give me a parking ticket. *(The central issue is a parking violation; paying taxes and working hard have nothing to do with central issue.)*

**Begging the Question:** distorts a claim by including a secondary idea that requires proof, though none is given.

Example:

* Since wealthy doctors control health-care services, Americans can only expect the costs of medical treatment to escalate. *(The writer has provided no evidence that doctors control health-care services. Further, the use of the word wealthy implies that doctor’s incomes directly determine treatment costs. Both of these ideas muddy the logic of the argument.)*

**Non Sequitur:** a Latin phrase meaning “it does not follow,” presents a conclusion that is not the logical result of a claim or of evidence that precedes it.

Example:

* This car has a noisy engine. It must be fast. *(Having a noisy engine does not mean that the car must be fast. It may have a noisy engine because it is a junk car and can’t exceed 10 mph.)*

**Ad Hominem (Smear Technique):** an attack directed on the character of the opponent rather than on the issue at hand.

Example:

* My opponent is only saying that because he is a crazy liberal tree-hugger. *(This statement doesn’t address an issue, but rather the person or group that represents a different position.)*

**Slippery Slope:** an argument that points to a specific action and claims, without support, that the action will inevitably lead to tragic results.

Example:

* If we start letting doctors remove life support systems from terminally ill patients, then who’s next? Pretty soon they’ll start killing deformed babies. Before you know it, no hospital or rest home in this country will be safe. It’s genocide! *(This is a scare tactic and does not provide evidence to support the claim that one action would lead to another.)*

**Logical Fallacies Practice**

1. Make up an example of your own for each of the following logical fallacies.

**Hasty Generalization:**

**Either/Or Fallacy:**

**Red Herring Tactic:**

**Begging the Question:**

**Non Sequitur:**

**Ad Hominem (Smear Technique):**

**Slippery Slope:**

B. **Identify the fallacy in each of the following examples:**

1. After Mark moved into the neighborhood, the crime rate increased. He must have committed the crimes.
2. Requiring trigger locks will result in the banning of all guns.
3. You either support clean air standards, or you support the auto industry.
4. Michelle didn’t steal the ice cream bar because she is a straight-A student.
5. The president’s program to beat inflation is entirely unrealistic, and this is not surprising because the president was too busy playing football in college to get a good grade in economics.
6. All English teachers are stylish dressers.
7. Public education is going to go downhill in this country because Congress is controlled by Republicans who hate public education.

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