

Logical Fallacies: Analyzing the Flaws in the Argument

Logical fallacies are assumptions based on faulty logic. Some of the most obvious examples are those that appear in advertising, though they are also common in political discourse.

Professional journals and other forms of academic writing should be free of logical fallacies, though I'm sure that exceptions occur, particularly since the most insidious examples involve aspects of our culture that we take for granted, and are left unquestioned.

- “The article quotes Sen. Richard Lugar as stating that we must either choose to adopt GMO's or see the onset of worldwide hunger.”

This is an example of the “either...or fallacy.” It suggests that only two alternatives exist, when there are actually more.

- “The post-modern family, out there in the woods trying to bond, can't adapt to real time, real trees and real conversation, because real life has become an alien landscape” (Lasn 7).

This is an example of “hasty generalization” based on insufficient or unrepresentative evidence.

- “Mary loves children, so she will make an excellent elementary school teacher” (Hacker 44).

This is an example of “nonsequitur” (does not follow) which is a conclusion that does not follow logically from preceding statements, or that is based on irrelevant data.

- “Once you understand that civil disobedience has a long and honorable history that goes back to Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Henry David Thoreau” then it seems to follow that “when the system is grinding you down, [you] unplug the grinding wheel” (Lasn xv).

This reflects the fallacy of “false analogy” where it assumes that because two things are like in some respects, they are alike in others. Lasn likens the civil disobedience on behalf of civil rights to that which he advocates on behalf of liberation from one's role as a corporate drone. In this way, he wants us to believe that because the first was justified, then so is the second.

- Since Governor Smith took office, unemployment has decreased by 7 percent. Gov. Smith should be praised for reducing unemployment (Hacker 7).

This is an example of “false cause” where because one even precedes another, the first is said to be the cause of the other, suggesting a cause-effect relationship that doesn't exist.

- Everyone knows that taking large doses of vitamin C will prevent colds.

This is an example of the “bandwagon appeal” which implies that a claim should be accepted because a large number of people favor it or believe that it is true.

- “Students should not be allowed to park in lots now reserved for faculty because those lots are for faculty only” (Hacker 29).

This is an example of “circular reasoning” in which the writer, instead of supplying evidence, simply restates the point in other language.

- Vice President Gore worked closely with Bill Clinton during the Monica Lewinsky scandal, so his campaign promises can't be trusted.

This is an “argument to the person” (or argumentum ad hominem) where an attack is made against a person rather than against their argument

- “Reporters are out to get the President, so it's no wonder that we are hearing rumors about all these scandals” (Hacker 33).

This fallacy is called a “red herring” where an argument focuses on an irrelevant issue to distract attention from the real issue.

- “But behind that happy language is a face so ugly it variably shocks the hell out of...[those who]...expect to find the ‘giddy Americana depicted on TV and find instead a horror show of disconnection an anomie’” (Lasn xiii).

This is an example of “biased language” where the author uses words with strong positive or negative connotations.

Using Fallacies as a Basis for Analysis

- Identifying logical weaknesses in an argument can serve as an effective way of analyzing its ideas and of linking your support back to your thesis statement.

The article quotes Sen. Richard Lugar as stating that we must either choose to adopt GMO's or see the onset of worldwide hunger. He fails to acknowledge other possible solutions for world hunger, such as helping third world nations to improve their farming techniques, or addressing the fact that the problem is not lack of food, but political factors that prevent it from being distributed. His statement on public record reflects not only a bias toward GMO's, but also a willingness to distort the facts in order to sway public opinion.