

Logical Fallacies
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My experience with first-year writers has led me to believe that the students have not been trained to consider the logic behind statements that they hear from politicians, teachers, parents, and media demagogues. In my class, I incorporate a discussion about logical fallacies, so students can begin to examine the premises on which they base their assumptions, and the logic that brings them to conclusions.

I identify three steps in this introduction to fallacious arguments:

1. understanding logical fallacies
2. identifying logical fallacies
3. avoiding logical fallacies

Every teacher will find an effective way to encourage students to challenge the logic behind statements. I am including the basic exercises that I have used, as a model that others could modify. I attempted to make the exercise interactive and entertaining, as well as informative.

1. Understanding Logical Fallacies

I distribute a worksheet (below) that offers examples of the most common fallacies. When I print out copies for the class, I delete the title identifying each sample:

Logical Fallacies

The most perfidious manner of injuring a cause is to vindicate it
intentionally with fallacious arguments.

Friedrich Nietzsche

1. Erroneous Appeal to Authority

"I'm not a doctor but I play one on T.V. Use this aspirin."

2. Ad Hominem (name calling; irrelevant character issue; guilt by association; false analogy)

a. "The pro-life movement's Bible-thumpers want to take away our rights."

b. "Bill Clinton wants television programs to show ratings in order to protect children from adult material, a surprisingly moral position for an adulterer."

c. "Nelson Mandela's support of Quaddafi means that any support we give to South Africa endangers American lives."