

English 122: composition ii ancillary materials



English 122: Composition II Ancillary Materials Avoiding Fallacies in

Argument A logical fallacy is a mistake in reasoning that invalidates the claims that someone else is making. Fallacious reasoning is false or faulty reasoning. It often mimics logical argumentation in subtle ways. Certain varieties of fallacious reasoning are so prevalent that they have been given names. Many of the informal logical fallacies have Latin names because many of them were identified during the medieval period. Learning these names is merely the beginning of understanding how to recognize them and combat them in one's own writing and thinking. Please review the list of common fallacies below. As you read the descriptions, make some notes in the margins about any that you have recently encountered. 1. Scapegoating

In the Old Testament (Leviticus 16), the high priest of Israel would symbolically lay the sins of the whole nation of Israel on the head of a goat and this goat would then be cast off into the wilderness. This goat would carry the sins of the people of Israel off to a place far away from those who actually committed the sins. Scapegoating is laying blame for a problem in society on the heads of a specific group of people. The scapegoater blames everything on a specific group for no logical reason. This group often has few connections to those problems. However, those who scapegoat care little for logical thinking in relation to problems. Groups that have been scapegoated in the United States include ethnic minorities, women, illegal immigrants, gay people, Christians, Muslims, political leaders,...(insert group here). It is easy to blame a group of people for the problems in a society. However, unless there are sound reasons to believe that those problems are caused by that group, then one is merely scapegoating. Here are some examples of scapegoating... “ The reason why our society is so bad right now is because

they are actually allowing gay marriage in some states. " " The reason why there aren't any jobs is because of all the illegal immigrants who are coming here and stealing our jobs. " " The reason why our team is not successful is Steven. He is bringing us all down. " 1 English 122: Composition II Ancillary Materials 2. Argumentum ad Baculum (Scare Tactics) Scare tactics involve playing on another's fear in order to get that person to do something or believe something to be true. This form of " argument" often occurs when someone threatens another person in order to get that person to agree with one's position or idea. Man with Gun: It would be a good idea for you to give me the money in the register (points the gun at the worker's face). Woman: I think you are right (as she hands over the money). It is evident in this example that the woman must give over the money and agree with the proposition that she should give the thief the money. It is also obvious that this form of argument is illogical. However, this fallacious form can occur in a more subtle manner. For example, suppose that some students are questioning the teaching style of a professor. The professor gets upset and says something like, " I don't care what you all say. Remember who gives the grades around here. " This threat is likely to get the students to backtrack in relation to their original arguments. However, it relates in no way to the initial claims of the students. Those in authority often use appeal to force in order to get what they desire. Imagine walking in on your married boss engaging in inappropriate sexual acts with another employee. This boss might swing by your desk at the end of the day and say something like, " I would keep my lips closed about what you saw if I were you...that is, if you care about your job. " People placed in this situation would probably not report the infidelity due to the fear that they would lose their jobs. However,

your boss has presented no logical reason why you should keep your mouth shut. It is important to remember that there are non-fallacious forms of appealing to fear. For example, if you were on a hiking trip with your friend and your friend said, " Watch out! There is a bear on the trail, " this would merely be an example of someone looking out for the best interest of his or her friend. However, whenever someone threatens another person or plays on their fears in a manipulative manner, this person has committed the fallacy called " Appeal to Force" or " Scare Tactics. " Here is one final example. Father to son while picking up a wooden paddle: " You want to know why you should pick up your shoes? I'll show you why!!! " 3. Argument from Pity The argument from pity occurs when someone tries to get another person to agree with his or her claims by merely appealing to the person's pity or empathy. Humans tend to overestimate the capabilities of others when they feel sorry for them. Overestimating another's ability based on insufficient evidence as a result of pity is the result of this fallacy. 2 English 122: Composition II Ancillary Materials Those who seek others to believe in their cause or ideas for the sake of monetary support often use the appeal to pity. The ultimate examples of appeal to pity are groups that involve human rights or animal rights. Showing images of starving children or abused dogs, without providing logical reasoning about why one should support the cause, is not enough to present a rationally justified argument for believing that one ought to contribute to this cause. It is extremely important to recognize and understand exactly what the goals of the organization are before one donates one's resources to the cause. The human mind has the uncanny ability to fill in arguments where there are none given. For example, if I show you a picture of a starving child and say, " will you please give me money to

help these children? " your mind might create an argument as to why you should give me money. However, I have said nothing about how I am going to help these children or if I even have the means of helping these children. Our minds fill in gaps. Our minds tell us that suffering is bad, and that if we can eliminate human suffering with extra resources, then we should do it. However, the person showing us the pictures might be a scam artist with a bunch of repugnant pictures. It is important to not let an appeal to pity cause us to believe something irrationally. Students often appeal to pity when they fail to complete their assignments. They claim that they have " personal issues" that have prevented them from completing assignments or actively engaging the material. It is not fair to give a student two extra weeks to complete an assignment because he or she had a cold when there are five students sitting in class coughing who have their assignments completed. At the same time, it is NOT a case of appeal to pity to give an extension to a student based on the fact that she could not attend class due to her mother's death. At the same time, if someone gave her an " A" because of this event, it would be a case of appealing to pity.

4. Argument from Envy

The argument from envy occurs when we find fault with a person or underestimate her abilities because of envy of that person. Humans often do this with celebrities, people in high power positions, or others they find threatening. If a person is extremely beautiful, people will scour the person's body to find one attribute that they can point out that will indicate that the person is not perfect. Whenever we respond to the strength, beauty, success, or happiness of others in this manner we are succumbing to the argument from envy. It is always extremely difficult to admit that others are smarter, more beautiful, stronger, more caring, more humble, more loving,

more giving, more interesting, and more entertaining than we are. However, when we resort to negative talk about these people that is not based on anything factual, we are merely showing that we have no other way to deal with our envy of those attributes than to attempt to find something wrong with the strengths of others. 3 English 122: Composition II Ancillary Materials

Let's look at an example. Suppose two guys are sitting at a red light in their 1996 Honda Civic. Up pulls a Bugatti Veyron. One guy turns to the other guy and says, " Man, somebody's having a mid-life crisis, " or " The only way someone can drive a car like that is if they have stepped on people to get to the top. " Humans hate to see success in others. This is why we love to see successful people crash and burn or self-destruct (did someone say Lindsay Lohan?). In our example above, we have no clue about the person who is driving the car. The person might be driving the car to the " Make a Wish Foundation" so that a child who is dying of cancer can have her dream ride in a Bugatti. It is much easier to bash people who are successful than to affirm their successes and virtues. The critical thinker is able to be honest about both his or her own virtues as well as those of others. 5. Appeal to Pride (or Ego) The appeal to pride is a fallacy that we are all familiar with. We called this " brown-nosing" when we were younger. In the appeal to pride, someone tries to obtain favor with another or manipulate another by complimenting the person or appealing to the person's ego. Let's examine some examples. Rolex commercial: " Only people of superior refinement will appreciate the quartz-crystal technology and 1000 atm seal that make Rolex the premiere timepiece. " Of course most people think that they have " superior refinement" and are drawn in by these claims. The Rolex marketers know that if they talk about how refined their buyers must be, then those

buyers will have their egos sufficiently puffed and their wallets sufficiently loose. When people do something because another person has flattered them, they have given in to the appeal to ego. Alcohol companies claim that those with "superior taste" choose their product every time. Appealing to people's concepts of their own intelligence and refinement is a great way to get them to buy one's product. Place a sign on the door that says "Only Those in Proper Attire Permitted" and one is guaranteed to obtain a crowd of individuals that want to separate themselves from those who lack the "proper attire."

6. Guilt Trip Humans are extremely susceptible to feelings of guilt. Nietzsche called the feeling of guilt the bad conscience. Freud explicated his concept of the Super-ego and its role in monitoring the ego and id as if it were an internal voice of parental admonition. Kant claimed that the purpose of reason was to create a good will in us, and that reason would limit our happiness below zero if it recognized that we were doing something that went against the universal claims that lead to the good will. Whatever the foundation of guilt in human experience, it is one of the most prevalent and easily manipulated human emotions. A guilt trip occurs when someone tries to make another person feel bad about an action without presenting any logical reasons why the person should feel bad.

Son to Mother: "I really love Carla and I am going to marry her. She makes my life better. She is there for me emotionally when I need her. She is happy in her career. She accepts that I do not make a lot of money. She makes me laugh, and I want to spend the rest of my life with her!"

Mother to Son: "You're tearing my heart out son! I guess Mom doesn't matter anymore. It's ok. I was only in labor for 96 hours and then had to sacrifice my career and my own life just to raise you. Don't

worry about it though...I will be fine shriveling up like a prune all alone. I just hope they find me after I die before I start to rot. " Our mother in this example does not seem to be presenting any real reason why her son should not marry Carla. Instead, she merely tries to make her son feel guilty for his decision. When parents scold their children, they often merely try to make the children feel badly about what they have done. There is often not a lot of explanation as to why the children should feel guilty. If we tell our kids that we are disappointed that they did not clean their rooms and they should be ashamed of themselves we are putting on a guilt trip. If we tell our children that they need to clean their rooms because they need to learn how to keep their environment clean, that it displays a care for the aesthetic condition of the spaces that they inhabit, that it will make them good living partners when they have to live with others, and that it will make their lives easier as they will more easily be able to find their possessions, then we have given good reasons for cleaning and we have avoided the guilt trip.

7. Group-Think Fallacy Groupthink occurs when people of a group hold specific beliefs merely because those beliefs are thought to be fundamental thoughts of the group. If we do this because we have rationally thought about all the issues and we have decided that this group has the best position on all the issues, then we are thinking critically. However, if we only cling to these ideas because we identify with the group and fail to submit these ideas to rational analysis, we are not thinking critically. One area in which the groupthink fallacy is most pronounced is in politics. Rather than examine multiple perspectives and sources on issues, people who are hard-line conservatives (group #1) or progressives (group #2) spend most of their time taking in news sources that cater towards their own beliefs. They listen to two-minute

interviews with “ experts” on the matter and then act as if they have spent hours researching the best positions on the issue. Really they are merely parroting what they have heard on TV. Those who align with the group learn the most common positions of the party and they refuse to take on any other perspective than those of the majority in the party. Even when they internally disagree with a position that their party has taken, they refuse to allow themselves to accept a contrary position because it does not follow the majority opinion of the group. 5 English 122: Composition II Ancillary

Materials Groupthink is also manifest in nationalistic behavior. A majority of people in most countries in the world find that their own country is the best country in the world, that their food is the best, that their people are the best, that their art is the best, that their wine is the best, and that the people in their country really understand what is going on in the world while those in other countries could learn a lot from them. It is acceptable for the critical thinker to be patriotic, but when that patriotism turns into thinking that refuses to accept other cultural ways of doing things or differences of opinion based on nothing but the fact that these differences come from a place outside the borders of one’s own country, the person has fallen into the groupthink fallacy. Advertisers and shrewd business people have realized that sewing a flag onto an object is a surefire way of getting people with these tendencies to buy the product. Whether it is a t-shirt with an American flag or a coin that displays the image of the twin towers and Seal Team 6, one thing is certain: patriotic images and concepts sell. Manufacturers do not sell items with flags on them because they care about the spread of patriotism; they do it because they know that they will sell more baseball hats if they stick a flag on them than if they do not. It is important for the

patriotic critical thinker to remember that patriotism is only a hop, skip, and a jump away from nationalism, and nationalism is dangerous to one's thought and to those who fall outside the group in which one thinks. 8.

Appeal to Popularity (Argumentum ad Populum) The appeal to popularity occurs when someone claims that "X" is the case because a group of people believe that "X" is the case. Appeal to popularity is systematic in commercials and marketing campaigns. Just because many people believe something to be true or worthwhile does not make that thing true or worthwhile. Here are some examples. A movie trailer tells us, "Make the same decision 5 million people have made so far, and come see I'm Going to Chop You Up Into Little Pieces Part VII. " i, Just because 5 million people have chosen to watch a movie does not give us any logical reason to go out and see that movie. Friend to Friend: How can you say Celine Dion's music is not great? She has sold over 20 million albums. i, Again, the fact that Celine Dion has sold that many records does not mean that her music is great...or even good. The appeal to popularity can take other forms as well. One of the offshoots of the appeal to popularity is the argument from common practice. In this fallacious form, one claims that a practice is justified because most people in a society or place engage in a practice regularly. Let's look at some examples. 6 English 122: Composition II Ancillary Materials Son to Father: "Isn't it against the law to cheat on your taxes Dad? " Father to Son: " Son, let me tell you something. All people cheat on their taxes. " Critical Thinking Student #1: " Hey! Let me copy your homework. " Critical Thinking Student #2: " I don't know. The punishment for cheating is expulsion from the course. " Critical Thinking Student #1: " Come on!!! Everybody does it. " Just because all people cheat on their taxes or their homework does not give one

a logical reason for accepting the claim that it is acceptable to cheat on one's homework. If all the people around you are speeding, and you get pulled over, just because they were all speeding as well does not detract from the fact that you were breaking the law and deserved to be pulled over. When people justify their beliefs using the fact that most other people practice the same thing, they are committing one form of the appeal to popularity. Another form of the appeal to popularity is the appeal to tradition. You have probably run into this one at work. Perhaps you think of a more efficient way to accomplish a task or get something done. You approach your boss with the new method. Your boss then informs you that you should keep doing it the old way. When you ask why, your boss says, "well that's just the way we've always done it. " Just because a certain method or belief is representative of the way things " have always been done" does not mean that this is the best way to do something. At the same time, practices that have worked for centuries often live for that long because they reflect a very effective (if not the most effective) way to do things. If you are learning martial arts from a master, and she tells you to wax her car and paint the fence, give it a little while before you go complaining that you are not learning anything. The appeal to tradition is very strong and effective. It is also an extremely useful tactic in maintaining social injustice. Appeals to tradition prevented women from engaging in higher education, they prevented African Americans from having the same privileges to use public services as whites did, and they have prevented equality in the assignation of equal rights to same-sex couples in our country. When thinking about if the appeal to popularity is at play, just remember the words of Mother: " If all your friends jumped off a bridge,

would you jump too? " 7 English 122: Composition II Ancillary Materials 9.

Subjectivist Fallacy In the subjectivist fallacy, one claims that something is true merely because he or she believes it to be true. The argument goes like this. I believe that X is true. Therefore, X is true. or I do not believe that X is true. Therefore, X is not true. Just because someone believes that something is true does not have anything to do with the actual truth value of the statement. Perhaps you have an outdoor 4th of July picnic planned and have invited all of your close friends and relatives to the festivities. You have meticulously planned the event for months. The morning of the event you can't wait to get to the park to start setting things up and get the grill going. When you wake up there are dark clouds on the horizon. When you went to bed there wasn't anything on the weather service radar. However, it looks like there is a storm coming into town. The weather service has issued a thunderstorm warning, there is 99% humidity and your guests start calling to see where you are going to move the party. It is moments like these that people get " hard-headed" and do not want to believe the inevitable. One might keep telling the guests, " I don't think it's going to rain" or " the party is still on in the park, you can't really trust these weather people. "

Everything in you wishes that the clouds would magically disappear and that this event could go on as planned. Your desire has led you into the subjectivist fallacy. Just because you do not want it to rain or you don't believe that it is going to rain does not mean that it will not rain. When people are discussing things with others with whom they disagree, there often comes a point where one says to the other, " well you believe what you want to believe and I will believe what I believe. " This is acceptable so long as one is discussing the best type of pizza or one's favorite music. However,

<https://assignbuster.com/english-122-composition-ii-ancillary-materials/>

if one is discussing governmental reform, educational reform, military spending, welfare, family ethics, human rights, or social ideas, then there is more than likely a best position on the issue. There is a best position on welfare. We might not know what that best position is in our lifetime, but at some point we will see that someone's decisions and ideas were better than the others. Claiming that people can believe what they want to believe says nothing about the actual truth value of what we believe. The effective critical thinker is the one who submits to the better argument and holds the strongest positions on all issues, even when those positions go against what he or she might want to be true.

10. Relativist Fallacy It is extremely easy to fall into this dangerous fallacy. The relativist fallacy occurs when people say that certain ethical practices are acceptable in some cultures but not in others. For example, one might say that it should be illegal to have the death penalty in our own country, but it is acceptable for other cultures to practice the death penalty. This cannot be the case. If one is going to argue against something with the premise that this thing is wrong, then the act must be wrong in all 8 English 122: Composition II Ancillary Materials cultures where it is practiced. One can think of numerous examples. It is inconsistent to say that certain drugs should be illegal in the United States but then go on to say that it is acceptable for shamans in the Peruvian Amazon to take the same drugs in their own religious ceremonies. One cannot have it both ways. If one thinks it morally acceptable for humans in the jungle to take drugs, then one must say that humans in our own society should be able to take drugs. If it is wrong to subjugate women in our own society, then one must stand up for the rights of women all over the world in social contexts where they are subjugated. If one believes that people of all ethnicities should be treated

equally, then he or she must claim unequal treatment is wrong in all places in the world where people are treated unequally due to ethnicity. It is important to mention that not all differences between cultures fall into the relativist fallacy. Those aspects of cultural existence that do not have an ethical component (matters of taste) can be as diverse as the grains of sand on the beach. There is no better side of the street to drive on. Some groups of humans think that avocados and limes are the most delicious of fruits while others think that pineapples and mangos are the tastiest. However, always remember that in the realm of ethics, to say that opposite ideas are both correct is to fall into the relativist fallacy. We can look back on our own society and say that the ways that women and minorities were treated for hundreds of years were wrong and that we have made progress in the realm of equality. The true relativist could not claim that the old ways were ethically inadequate. He or she would just have to say that things were different and correct at that time, and now our differing ideas are correct. Not all ethical positions are equal. It is the goal of the critical thinker to take on the best ethical positions and consistently work to bring about the outcome of those positions in the world.

11. Red Herring The red herring fallacy occurs when someone strays off topic in the middle of an argument to try to draw others off the trail of the argument. It is called the red herring because of a tactic that was used to train scent dogs wherein those training the dogs would drag a herring (an especially stinky fish) across the path of the scent that the dogs were supposed to follow. The best dogs would remain on the trail of the original scent. However, most of the dogs were thrown off course by the scent of the fish. The red herring fallacy is rampant in political debates. Candidate #1: “ We need to ensure that we maintain

tight borders and prevent illegal immigrants from getting into the country in the first place. " Candidate #2: " What measures do you propose to secure our borders? " Candidate #1: " The longer we wait, the more American jobs that will be lost to cheap labor, and the more the economy will suffer. " 9

English 122: Composition II Ancillary Materials Notice in this example that the topic in question is the measures that the government could use to secure U. S. borders. However, the candidate has slyly dragged that fish across the trail and switched topics to loss of jobs due to cheap labor. Let's look at another example. Timothy: " I saw that you have been sending strange texts to some guy named Tysean for the past ten nights in a row. " Iris: " What? Where did you hear that? " Timothy: " I didn't hear it anywhere. I checked your phone and saw the texts. Is that the same Tysean that you know from work? Iris: " You checked my phone. That shows a total lack of respect and trust for me. Why don't you trust me? Trust is an important part of a relationship and I am not sure I want to be with someone who doesn't trust me. " Notice in this example that the issue is the strange texts that Iris has been sending Tysean. However, Iris turns the topic of discussion to trust and a questioning of Timothy's trust for her. Whenever someone tries to pull us off the track of discussion, it is good to pause a moment, to hit the reset button. When the topic is changed, remind the person what the issue is and then tell the person that their issue can be discussed after the initial issue is taken care of. For example, Timothy might say the following: Timothy: " Iris, I am not talking about trust right now, I am talking about text messages and I want to know what is going on with you and Tysean. " Another tactic might be to scream... Timothy: " RED HERRING!!! RED HERRING!!! RED HERRING!!!! " Iris: " What is a red herring? " Timothy: " You wish you knew.

You would know if you would have cared about the critical thinking events at Ashford. Now you are just dumber than I am. " (Note: when Timothy says Iris is dumber he is using another fallacy called " ridicule. ") 12. Ad Hominem Argument The ad hominem argument occurs when someone attacks the person making the argument rather than the argument that the person is making. In this informal fallacy, the attention is turned from the argument to the one making the argument. There are four forms of ad hominem that we will examine here. 1) Inconsistency ad hominem " tu quoque" (you too). In this form of ad hominem, the person points out that the one making the argument engages in the same behaviors that he or she is 10 English 122: Composition II Ancillary Materials arguing for or against. For example, imagine that one was outside smoking with a colleague and the colleague said, " Smoking is really bad for you. It causes poor circulation, decreases respiratory volume, and harms the immune system. You should quit smoking. " The immediate response would be, " You smoke too!!! " However, this has nothing to do with the argument of the other colleague. Just because that person smokes too does not mean that her argument is unsound. Pointing out that someone else does it too shows that they might be inconsistent. However, it does nothing to combat the validity or soundness of a claim. 2) Ad hominem abusive. In this form of ad hominem, the response is vitriolic toward the one making the argument. This form of ad hominem often occurs in high school hallways, but can also readily occur in the workplace. Let's look at an example. Employee #1: " I hear from Jeff that they are going to downsize the shipping department because sales are decreasing and they do not need as many workers to fill the sales. " Employee #2: " Jeff is such a sleazy guy. You really can't believe anything

that comes out of his mouth. He makes me sick. " Just because someone is mean, temperamental, arrogant, inappropriate, or snide does not automatically disqualify all that the person says. Pointing out someone's bad features does nothing to disprove the arguments that he or she makes and is merely a form of abusive ad hominem. 3) Ad hominem circumstantial. In the circumstantial ad hominem, one attacks another person based on his or her circumstances. Whenever one says that someone holds a specific position because he or she is part of a specific group (the rich, the poor, the Democrats, the Republicans, the Christians, the Muslims, the students, the teachers), one commits the circumstantial ad hominem fallacy. Let's look at an example. Friend #1: " I think taxes should be lower on people who make less money because they need every penny they can get for essential items. " Friend #2: " You just think that because you are a Democrat. " Here is another example. Friend #1: " My cousin Vinny says it's a good time to invest in Berkshire. They have a new drug coming out and it was just passed by the FDA. They are expecting profits in excess of 12 billion next year. " Friend #2: " The only reason your cousin wants us to invest is because he's an investor and he will make a pretty penny off our investment. " 11 English 122: Composition II Ancillary Materials The fact that cousin Vinny is an investor is a good reason to suspend judgment about whether or not someone should invest. However, the fact that Vinny is an investor does not automatically disqualify the claims that he made about investing in Berkshire. Pointing out a group that someone making an argument belongs to as a refutation of the argument that the person is making is yet another form that the ugly ad hominem takes. 4) The ad hominem does not always take a negative form. There is such a thing as a positive ad hominem. In the

positive ad hominem, people point out good attributes of someone or some group in order to defend the person or group. This often happens in cases where people in high religious, social, or political positions are found to have done something immoral. For example, if a story breaks that a religious leader has systematically abused children over the course of his or her career, people who follow that religion will tend to defend the leader even in the face of overwhelming evidence. Member #1: " I don't know, but now there are ten kids who have come forward and said that leader Jones has had inappropriate contact with them. I heard that five adults have come forward as well. It seems that this has been going on for a long time. It's horrible. " Member #2: " Well I'll tell you something. I just don't believe it. How can someone who has done such good for the community and all of us have done something so terrible? It is impossible. " (notice the hint of subjectivism here as well) As we all learn over and over throughout the course of human history, just because someone does something good for people does not mean that he or she does not have a dark side. To focus on the good that someone does in response to negative charges or allegations that have evidence is to commit the positive ad hominem fallacy. 13. Straw Man Fallacy Straw men are much lighter and are more easily pushed over than real men (and women of course...always remember to use non-gendered language in writing). The straw man fallacy occurs when someone makes a straw argument out of a real argument and then attacks the straw argument. When people attack a weakened form of another person's argument, they are committing the straw man fallacy. Let's look at two straw men arguments based on the opposing sides in the abortion debate. Anti-abortionist: " Pro-choicers are murderers. Abortion is the murder of an

unborn baby. Those who approve of abortion really approve of killing innocent, unborn babies. I guess it's just my opinion, but I think it is wrong to kill innocent babies. " 12 English 122: Composition II Ancillary Materials Pro-abortionist: " Those idiot pro-lifers don't give a hoot about women's rights. I guess they just want women to go back to their ' place' in the home, have kids, and stop going to school. They just want women to regress into the Stone Age and lose all the rights they have gained in the past 100 years. " It is pretty easy to see that these are straw men arguments. No person who believes that abortion is acceptable would hold that abortion is murder of an innocent baby. When the issue is defined this way, the anti-abortionist is creating a straw man argument. Almost all people would agree that killing babies is wrong, and people who believe that women should be able to get abortions would never argue that they are promoting the murder of innocent babies. At the same time, the argument that contradicts those who are against abortion also sets up the argument in straw man form. Just because people who are against abortion do not think that women should be able to choose this option does not mean that they would want women to lose the rights that they have gained over the course of the past 100 years. As can be seen from these examples, it is much easier to attack an overstated opposite position and torch a straw man than to respond to the opposing side's strongest argument. However, the goal of the critical thinker is to always respond to his or her opponent's strongest argument and concede true points from the opposite side. 14. False Dilemma False dilemma occurs when someone presents two options that are not the only options or are unrelated and acts as if they are the only two options possible. You know how to escape an angry bull?... between the horns. The same thing goes for false

dilemmas. To escape a false dilemma, one needs to escape the two horns that are presented by providing a different option. For example, one might claim that we need to outlaw all guns or that America will be a bullet ridden wasteland in a matter of years. THESE ARE NOT THE ONLY OPTIONS. Escape between the horns: We could outlaw certain types of guns that are only used to kill people, and we could also severely limit options to own guns for those who are violent or insane. One might claim that you need to agree with the government or get the heck out of the country. These are not the only options. Escape between the horns: Luckily, in this country we can dissent and still maintain our citizenship. At the same time, there might be events that only present two options. For example, it will either rain or it will not rain. In the realm of human relationships, I might say to my wife, " Either you are going to stop cheating on me or I am going to divorce you. " In this instance there are other options. For example, my wife might continue to cheat and I might not divorce her. At the same time, she 13 English 122: Composition II Ancillary Materials might stop cheating but I might divorce her anyway. But in this context, most people would agree that saying that the other person needs to stop cheating or it will result in the outcome of divorce is not a false dilemma but common sense. 15. Loaded Question A loaded question is a question that presupposes something that it does not prove. The most famous of all loaded questions is: " Have you stopped beating your wife yet? " Notice what happens when someone responds to this question. If the person says " yes, " then he is saying that he used to beat his wife and now no longer beats her. If he says " no, " then he is saying that he used to beat his wife and now he is still beating his wife. Example #2: Woman in interrogation room: " What is going on? I told you I don't know anything

about my husband's disappearance. " Officer: " Mrs. Patel, what did you do after you killed your husband? " In this example, the officer's question presumes that Mrs. Patel killed her husband. It is loaded with extra meaning. The way to escape a loaded question is to respond to the presuppositions that underlie the question. For example, the response in example one would be: " I have never beaten my wife? " In example #2: " I did not kill my husband. " 16. Perfectionist Fallacy The perfectionist fallacy occurs when we reject a law, proposal, or claim because it does not result in perfect outcomes. For example, when we claim that drug laws are not necessary because there is no way that the police can catch ALL people who do drugs or sell drugs, we are committing the perfectionist fallacy. Example: Students might claim that rules against cheating are irrelevant because most cheaters are not caught. However, just because most cheaters are not caught does not provide any logical reason why we should not have rules against this behavior. This would be similar to saying that we shouldn't have police because there is no way that they can catch everyone who does something illegal. 14 English 122: Composition II Ancillary Materials Nothing in life is perfect, and to make demands for perfections in bills, laws, outcomes at work, or social relationships before one will accept them is to commit the perfectionist fallacy. 17. Slippery Slope Fallacy This fallacy occurs when one claims that if we let one thing happen something else (way worse usually) will definitely happen. This fallacy often leads to Hitler ruling the world and everything falling into chaos. For example, we all remember the slippery slope argument when it comes to sex. Dad to daughter: " Well Lauren, I know that you like Drew. I saw you holding hands. But you know what holding hands leads to? It leads to kissing. Kissing leads to other things that I

don't even want to talk about. But those things lead to babies, and then the next thing you know you have three kids, your mom and I are taking care of all of you, and Drew is long gone...You don't want that to happen do you? Think about that the next time you feel like holding hands with Drew. " Or perhaps you heard this one... " Well son, I found a marijuana cigarette (parents always call them that) in your sock drawer. I know you have been smoking and I am extremely disappointed in you. However, I am even more fearful for your health. I mean, marijuana use leads to harder drug use. Next thing you know you'll be eating painkillers and whatever else you can get your hands on. Once that doesn't give you the ' buzz' you're looking for you will start snorting cocaine. You'll probably do that until your nasal cavity burns out of your head. Then it's on to smoking meth and shooting up heroin. Then your mom and I are gonna have to come scrape you off the street and you'll probably lose an arm like that guy did in Requiem for a Dream. I just want you to have both your arms and be a healthy young boy so no more grass ok? " In addition to these simplistic examples that are easy to identify there are also slippery slopes in the realm of our actions. I like to call this the " Horror Movie Mistake. " For example, I am in a horror movie and I know that five people have been killed since we started walking down this corridor in the basement, but we have to keep going...I mean, we have come this far, we have to keep going. It is hard for humans to admit defeat or making a wrong move. However, the faster you can understand that you have made a misstep, the better you are thinking and the more easily that mistake can be rectified. For example, when we lie, we often have to continue lying to save our butts and then we have to lie to other people. Lies often grow like monsters and because we refuse to step off the path we have

taken, we run into a lot of problems. In another example involving the economic downturn, when people couldn't pay their mortgages, rather than sell their houses for a loss and then move into something they could afford, they sat in their houses until they were foreclosed and lost everything that they had put into the house. Remember, just because you took the first steps or many steps does not mean that you cannot step off the path and

backtrack to another place. 15 English 122: Composition II Ancillary Materials

18. Misplacing the Burden of Proof When someone misplaces the burden of proof, he or she demands that another person defend a position when really the initial person should be the one who is giving a defense for his or her position. Let's look at an example. Jennifer: " I believe that abortion should be illegal. " Rocco: " Really, why do you think that? " Jennifer: " Why do you think it shouldn't be? " Notice that the issue here is initially brought up by Jennifer and her position is that abortion should be illegal. It is her responsibility to present reasons why she believes that this should be the case. Instead, Jennifer has turned the tables on Rocco and if Rocco is not savvy, he might start to present his own position (notice also that we still do not know Rocco's exact position...Jennifer just assumed that he was against her own position). The burden of proof generally rests on the person who is presenting his or her conclusion or who is trying to change a policy that is currently in place. For example, if you think that there should be a new way of dealing with student complaints at work, then the burden of proof rests on you to show that the current method of response is inadequate or to present another form that would be better. In the realm of the law, the burden of proof rests on those who think that drugs should be legal. The way the current laws are structured, many drugs are considered illegal. The burden

of proof rests on those who want to change the laws, not on the laws themselves. 19. Appeal to Ignorance The appeal to ignorance occurs when one claims that something is true because no one has proved that it is not true. Let's look at an infamous example. Student #1: God exists. Student #2: No one has proved that God exists. Student #1: Well, no one has proved that God does not exist. Just because there is no proof that something is not the case does not mean that it actually is the case. This next example might help us see the fallacy. Student #1: There is a little invisible Gremlin who dances in my stomach all day long and sings the most beautiful Irish tune. Student #2: You can't prove that. Student #1: Well you can't prove that there isn't! 16 English 122: Composition II Ancillary Materials It is evident that just because we can't prove that there is not an invisible Gremlin in my stomach does not mean that there is an invisible Gremlin in my stomach. The appeal to ignorance is the stronghold of the conspiracy theorist. Conspiracies often revolve around the idea that one cannot prove that this theory is not the case (usually because there is no concrete evidence). Therefore, the theory must be the case. Crazy guy on the street: " Secret organizations are watching our every move. The fact that we know nothing about them shows how powerful they actually are. " 20. Begging the Question Begging the question occurs when one asks the audience to accept reasons for a debatable argument that are just as debatable as the conclusion itself. This often involves a form of circular reasoning. Worker: " God exists and God loves you. " Co-worker: " How do you know God exists? " Worker: " Because the Bible says so. " Co-worker: " How do you know that what the Bible says is true? " Worker: " Because it is the inspired word of God. " Notice here that the reasons for believing that God exists rest on a document that is

presumed to exist because of the existence of God. If the Bible is the inspired word of God, then that means that God exists. However, our reason here assumes the very thing that we are trying to prove. When we beg the question, we use a premise that is the exact same statement that we are trying to prove. Here are two more examples. See if you can see the begging. Example: " We must support the poor people of New York City because they deserve our support. " Example: " Aristotle is an extremely important philosopher because of his philosophical significance. " 21. Appeal to Inadequate Authority In this form of fallacy, the arguer cites someone as an authority, when the person cited does not have the knowledge or position to be called an authority. For example, let's say I was arguing with you about economic legislation and told you that we should pursue more oil well drilling in the Gulf of Mexico because my uncle Earnest told me that it would be a good idea. I would be committing the fallacy of appeal to authority because my uncle is in fact a used car salesman. In our society, it has become common to listen to celebrity opinions on political and economic issues. Now, just 17 English 122: Composition II Ancillary Materials because someone is a celebrity does not automatically disqualify that person as being an expert. However, before we start referencing Brad Pitt in relation to child labor in Indonesia, we should stop and think, " Are there any people who know more about this than Brad Pitt? " If there are then we should probably leave Benjamin Button behind and read something written by an Indonesian economist or a lobbyist for human rights who has been working on liberating children from this form of labor (probably both and even more). 22. Hasty Generalization In a hasty generalization, one makes a general statement about a group from analysis of a smaller group that is probably not

representative of the larger group of individuals (either due to its size or lack of randomness). Although sometimes the fallacy lies in the size of the group, there are generalizations that one can make based on only a few instances or a small sample. Let's say I have a wife named Carla, and the first time I picked her up for a date, I had to wait in my car for 15 minutes before she came down. Then I went to pick her up from work a week later, and I had to wait for 15 minutes in my car while she closed up the shop. Then I was supposed to meet her to take her to a business meeting and she was 15 minutes late arriving at the meeting place. From these few instances I would probably assume that she is a person who runs a little late. This would not be too much of a hasty generalization and I would hone my knowledge of this behavior as I had more interactions with Carla. However, if I make a claim like, " All people on welfare are lazy, " or " All people in that part of town can't be trusted, " then I am committing a hasty generalization. Some of you might be snickering in your head thinking, " well all people on welfare ARE lazy. " If you are thinking this then you are still giving into a hasty generalization and you are thinking uncritically. Not all people on welfare are lazy, nor is there a really objective way to measure laziness or lack of laziness. For example: There are thousands of single mothers on welfare who use it to feed their children. They have jobs. They work hard, and they look forward to a better day where they will be able to provide for their kids without using government aid. However, at this time they need monetary help. They will get off welfare once life gets better for them and they will be thankful for living in a country that does not leave its citizens to the severity of existence when times get tough. Hasty generalizations breed simple answers that people love. However, these answers do not represent the

complexity that is always inherent in the totality of specific individuals that comprise a group. There are people whose lives are better because of other's tax dollars. On the opposite side, what would our society be like if we had no social aid? It all goes back to Aristotle (as most things do). The virtue of a leader is to create a society in which all can maximize their potential to flourish, to live the eudaimonic life. It is impossible for the fabric of a society to not be rent asunder when we do not care for those who suffer. Society falls apart when the government does not care for providing the best possible life to ALL of its citizens...(I now step off my soap box). 23. Post Hoc

18 English 122: Composition II Ancillary Materials Post hoc is a fallacy that involves claiming that an unrelated event caused another event. The post hoc fallacy is the foundation for superstition. In its full Latin form it states, "Post hoc ergo propter hoc" which means, "after this, therefore because of this." In this fallacy we claim that because an event followed another event that the first event caused the second event. Let's look at some examples.

Rebecca: "George, why are you wearing that tiny Britney Spears t-shirt at this sports bar? Your belly is hanging out of the bottom of the shirt. Gross!"

George: "I always wear my Britney shirt when the Chargers are playing. Last year I wore it as a joke and they won the division." It is evident that George's Britney t-shirt has nothing to do with the Chargers winning football games. The reason why the Chargers win football games is due to the work and effort put in by the players and coaches and the thousands of hours of planning and preparation that go into the sport. Although we know this to be the case, humans are still extremely susceptible to this type of thinking. We think that black cats crossing our paths are signs of impending doom. We think that walking under ladders or looking into broken mirrors brings

negative outcomes. However, my walking under a ladder has absolutely no causal connection to anything that happens at a different time from that event. One famous and funny example of the post hoc fallacy goes like this: Tanya: " Alessia, why are you whistling? " Alessia: " To keep the elephants away. " Tanya: " But there are no elephants in San Diego. " Alessia: " See, it's working. " . Credits: Fallacies compiled and explained by Dr. Justin Harrison, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, College of Liberal Arts, Ashford University, 2012. 19