**Read each statement below. What is wrong with each line of reasoning? How is the writer trying to manipulate you, or how does the author want you to feel?**

1. As everyone knows, leaders are born, not made.
2. Students could focus on their courses in their major if all these useless English courses were cancelled.
3. Either we raise taxes or Social Security fund will go bankrupt.
4. Providing nuclear plants to some countries is too dangerous: what if the plutonium falls into the wrong hands? You can say “bye bye” to “El B”
5. If I can balance my checkbook, why can’t the Congress balance the budget
6. Playing sports makes people more aggressive. Look at all those fights at the bowling alley
7. I should be getting an A in writing class – I got an A in 7th grade
8. The more breaks an employee takes, the less productive she will be.
9. Don’t vote for Mary Williams – she used to hit the bottle pretty hard.
10. There have been no terror attacks on American soil since the Department of Homeland Security was created. It’s doing its job.
11. U.S. gun controls need to be tighter: every year, hundreds of people are killed in armed robberies.
12. If we let the government ban assault rifles, the next thing you know we’ll be Nazi Germany. Thanks, Obama.

**Logical Fallacies**

No matter what kind of document you produce, the message should be logically sound. All your statements, arguments and assertions should be supported by evidence. You also need to determine if your sources are logically sound, because citing a source that contains flawed logic will also weaken your position. The skill of testing the soundness of a document, then, is an essential writing skill. Below are some examples of logical fallacies.

**Dumbing it Down – Fallacies of oversimplification**

**Hasty generalization** is offering weak or inadequate evidence to support a conclusion.

* *Playing sports makes people more aggressive. Look at all those fights at hockey and basketball games!* The writer suggests that the incidences which have happened indicate a general trend, and one that is true of all sports.

**Non sequiturs** are conclusions based on irrelevant evidence.

* *I should be getting an A in writing class – I got an A in my anatomy class last winter* There is, of course, no relationship between a grade earned in a math class last year and a writing course.

**Oversimplification** means giving easy answers to complicated questions, often accompanied by emotional appeals instead of logic.

* *The more breaks an employee takes, the less productive she will be.* While this may be true for *some* employees, the writer is oversimplifying the matter by assuming that it is true for *all* employees. Furthermore, this argument assumes employees are less productive because they take breaks and ignores dozens of other factors that influence productivity.

**Slippery slope** arguments attempt to convince readers that if one thing is allowed, it will lead to horrible consequences.

* *If we let the government ban assault rifles, the next thing you know they’ll be taking all of our guns away.* The writer implies that the position she opposes will lead to terrifying consequences.

**Either/ Or Fallacy** Either/or reasoning claims that there are only two sides to a question.

* *Either we raise taxes or Social Security fund will go bankrupt.* Might there be other solutions to this problem – such as trimming government overspending?

**False analogies**  are comparisons between things that are not actually similar.

* *If I can balance my checkbook, why can’t the Congress balance the budget?* A false analogy occurs when the writer assumes that his/her household budget is comparable to the national budget..

**Post hoc fallacy** is assuming that because one event happens after another, the first must have caused the second.

* *There have been no terror attacks on American soil since the Department of Homeland Security was created. It must be doing its job!* The reasons for this could be far more complex—the writer offers no real evidence to support this claim.

**Smoke and Mirrors: Fallacies of Misdirection**

**Begging the question** is treating an opinion as if it were a plain truth.

* *Students could focus on courses in their major if all these useless English courses were cancelled.* The writer labels English courses as useless without offering evidence.

**Red herring** is dragging in a side issue that’s not relevant to the debate.

* *Governor Huphenfraughen is the man to lead us – he’s won the Mr. Universe contest three times!* The uses the Governor’s success as a weight lifter to imply that he’ll be a strong leader – unfortunately, those are different kinds of “strong.”

**Straw man** arguments attribute an unreasonable position to our opponents, then counter argue that, rather than their real arguments.

* *People who don’t support tuition hikes don’t care about our children’s education.* The writer assigns an unreasonable – and clearly wrong – motive to his opponents.

**Personal attacks (Ad hominem fallacy)** on people do not prove their views are wrong.

* *Don’t vote for Mary Williams – she used to hit the bottle pretty hard.* The goal is to discredit Williams as a person, without addressing her positions on issues or qualifications for office.

**Bandwagon arguments** presume that an assertion is true by claiming everyone accepts it.

* *As everyone knows, leaders are born, not made.* Where’s the evidence, and who is “everyone”?

**Emotional appeals** try to persuade by appealing to the audience’s feelings.

* *Providing nuclear plants to some countries is too dangerous: what if the plutonium falls into the wrong hands? There’ll be A-bombs in Central Park!* The writer is trying to frighten his readers into supporting his claims.

**Slanting** an argument is selecting evidence that only supports your claim and concealing or playing down other evidence.

* *U.S. gun controls need to be tighter: every year, hundreds of people are killed in armed robberies.* This argument omits the fact that many guns used in robberies are illegally obtained, and hence would not be affected by gun control laws.

## Exercise

# Identify any logical fallacies

1. Last year’s decrease in profits proves restructuring marketing was a disaster.
2. As a caring parent, you are concerned about your children’s future.
3. Simpson’s proposal to crack down on employees making personal calls is absurd. He himself is the biggest offender.
4. The entire school agrees with me that the rule should be changed.
5. I recommend cutting the advertising budget by 25%. The list below indicates 10 recent advertisements that were unsuccessful.
6. The Chinese leader addressed the NYSE and the next thing you know Wall Street crashes.
7. Stop going out Friday nights or you’ll fail your classes.
8. Capital punishment loses its appeal when you realize that man cannot destroy what he cannot create.
9. If I am young enough to run two miles every day, then I’m young enough to run this company.
10. The fewer people a company has, the more efficient it is.