

Name _____

Date _____

Exercises for Tutorial 37. Logical Fallacies

Notes

Instructions: Write notes to answer the following questions. *Type or write in the answer boxes.*

1. What is a logical fallacy?

2. Where do logical fallacies come from?

3. How do you identify what is wrong with a fallacious argument?

4. What is a straw man fallacy?

5. What is a false dilemma fallacy?

6. What is a false cause fallacy?

7. What is a begging the question fallacy?

8. What is a poisoning the well fallacy?

9. What is a loaded question fallacy?

10. What is a slippery slope fallacy?

11. What is an ad hominem fallacy?

12. What is an appeal to authority fallacy?

13. What is an equivocation fallacy?

14. What is a false analogy fallacy?

15. What is an appeal to feelings fallacy?

Exercise 1

Instructions: Decide which fallacy each statement contains, and what is wrong with it. *Click on a checkbox to make your choice; then explain your selection in the answer box.* After completing the exercise, check the "Answer Key".

1. Do actors lead immoral lives because of their ridiculously high earnings?

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> straw man | <input type="checkbox"/> poisoning the well | <input type="checkbox"/> appeal to authority |
| <input type="checkbox"/> false dilemma | <input type="checkbox"/> loaded question | <input type="checkbox"/> equivocation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> false cause | <input type="checkbox"/> slippery slope | <input type="checkbox"/> false analogy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> begging the question | <input type="checkbox"/> ad hominem | <input type="checkbox"/> appeal to feelings |

2. Of course we shouldn't give condoms to teenagers; we wouldn't give them alcohol or drugs, which are also dangerous, so it would be equally irresponsible to hand out condoms.

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> straw man | <input type="checkbox"/> poisoning the well | <input type="checkbox"/> appeal to authority |
| <input type="checkbox"/> false dilemma | <input type="checkbox"/> loaded question | <input type="checkbox"/> equivocation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> false cause | <input type="checkbox"/> slippery slope | <input type="checkbox"/> false analogy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> begging the question | <input type="checkbox"/> ad hominem | <input type="checkbox"/> appeal to feelings |

3. We are told not to take drugs like heroin and LSD because they are bad for us. But caffeine is a drug, and no one objects to that; on the contrary, you can buy it anywhere. And what about the many drugs that save lives? Shouldn't these be illegal too?

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> straw man | <input type="checkbox"/> poisoning the well | <input type="checkbox"/> appeal to authority |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> begging the question | <input type="checkbox"/> ad hominem | <input type="checkbox"/> appeal to feelings |

4. According to the actor George Clooney, who plays pediatric surgeon Doug Ross on the popular TV show E.R., the new breakthroughs in gene therapy offer very exciting possibilities for treating congenital diseases in children.

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> straw man | <input type="checkbox"/> poisoning the well | <input type="checkbox"/> appeal to authority |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> begging the question | <input type="checkbox"/> ad hominem | <input type="checkbox"/> appeal to feelings |

5. What the Democrats want is to raise taxes on everyone's income to bail out people who can't be bothered to get a job. And here's why I think this isn't a good idea.

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> straw man | <input type="checkbox"/> poisoning the well | <input type="checkbox"/> appeal to authority |
| <input type="checkbox"/> false dilemma | <input type="checkbox"/> loaded question | <input type="checkbox"/> equivocation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> false cause | <input type="checkbox"/> slippery slope | <input type="checkbox"/> false analogy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> begging the question | <input type="checkbox"/> ad hominem | <input type="checkbox"/> appeal to feelings |

6. Pollution is slowly killing our planet, and unless you want to watch your grandchildren drown in melting ice-caps or die slowly of diseases caused by a thinning ozone layer, you had better start thinking about how to prevent it.

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> straw man | <input type="checkbox"/> poisoning the well | <input type="checkbox"/> appeal to authority |
| <input type="checkbox"/> false dilemma | <input type="checkbox"/> loaded question | <input type="checkbox"/> equivocation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> false cause | <input type="checkbox"/> slippery slope | <input type="checkbox"/> false analogy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> begging the question | <input type="checkbox"/> ad hominem | <input type="checkbox"/> appeal to feelings |

7. If you don't trust me with a choice, how can you trust me with a child?

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> straw man | <input type="checkbox"/> poisoning the well | <input type="checkbox"/> appeal to authority |
| <input type="checkbox"/> false dilemma | <input type="checkbox"/> loaded question | <input type="checkbox"/> equivocation |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> begging the question | <input type="checkbox"/> ad hominem | <input type="checkbox"/> appeal to feelings |

8. Capital punishment is clearly an effective deterrent. Look at Saudi Arabia: they behead people there, and their crime rate is very low.

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> straw man | <input type="checkbox"/> poisoning the well | <input type="checkbox"/> appeal to authority |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> begging the question | <input type="checkbox"/> ad hominem | <input type="checkbox"/> appeal to feelings |

9. This movie is dull because it's got nothing interesting in it.

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> straw man | <input type="checkbox"/> poisoning the well | <input type="checkbox"/> appeal to authority |
| <input type="checkbox"/> false dilemma | <input type="checkbox"/> loaded question | <input type="checkbox"/> equivocation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> false cause | <input type="checkbox"/> slippery slope | <input type="checkbox"/> false analogy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> begging the question | <input type="checkbox"/> ad hominem | <input type="checkbox"/> appeal to feelings |

10. Don't listen to the doctor's arguments against smoking--they're worthless, because what he doesn't tell you is that he himself is a smoker!

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> straw man | <input type="checkbox"/> poisoning the well | <input type="checkbox"/> appeal to authority |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> begging the question | <input type="checkbox"/> ad hominem | <input type="checkbox"/> appeal to feelings |

11. My son says I should let him go to the Eminem concert on Friday night. But if I start letting him go to concerts and staying out late, he'll start to cut school in the morning; next thing you know, he'll be a dropout, pushed into hanging with the wrong crowd, probably taking drugs with the rest of his buddies. I don't think a concert is worth throwing the rest of his future away for.

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> straw man | <input type="checkbox"/> poisoning the well | <input type="checkbox"/> appeal to authority |
| <input type="checkbox"/> false dilemma | <input type="checkbox"/> loaded question | <input type="checkbox"/> equivocation |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> begging the question | <input type="checkbox"/> ad hominem | <input type="checkbox"/> appeal to feelings |

12. All patriotic Americans will put a flag in their window.

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> straw man | <input type="checkbox"/> poisoning the well | <input type="checkbox"/> appeal to authority |
| <input type="checkbox"/> false dilemma | <input type="checkbox"/> loaded question | <input type="checkbox"/> equivocation |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> begging the question | <input type="checkbox"/> ad hominem | <input type="checkbox"/> appeal to feelings |

Answer Key

1. *Do actors lead immoral lives because of their ridiculously high earnings?*

Loaded Question. The questioner buries two assumptions in the question: first, actors do lead immoral lives; second, actors' earnings are ridiculously high. You can't answer the question (whether the earnings cause immorality) without accepting these assumptions.

2. *Of course we shouldn't give condoms to teenagers; we wouldn't give them alcohol or drugs, which are also dangerous, so it would be equally irresponsible to hand out condoms.*

False analogy. Condoms are not like alcohol and drugs, and what may be true for one is not necessarily true for the other. Condoms are supposed to protect people from the consequences of their actions. Alcohol and drugs do not offer any protection at all.

You might have thought this was equivocation, because the speaker is pretending that all three things (alcohol, drugs and condoms) are comparable. But equivocation would involve the speaker playing on the associations of a single word, and pretending that because two different things share a word, they must be the same thing. There isn't a single word here; the speaker is saying that what is true for alcohol and drugs is also true for condoms. However, equivocation would have been a reasonable answer, and you probably would have seen the essential logical flaw.

3. *We are told not to take drugs like heroin and LSD because they are bad for us. But caffeine is a drug, and no one objects to that; on the contrary, you can buy it anywhere. And what about the many drugs that save lives? Shouldn't these be illegal too?*

Equivocation. Just because we can use the same word for LSD, caffeine and aspirin doesn't mean that these are actually the same things. The speaker is playing on the use of the word "drug" to pretend that very different things are the same, and should be treated the same.

You might have thought this was a false analogy. But the speaker isn't saying that caffeine is like LSD; he's saying that caffeine and LSD are both the same kind of thing--"drugs"--so it's not an analogy. However, this would have been a reasonable answer. False analogy is very similar, and you probably picked up on the nub of the problem.

4. *According to the actor George Clooney, who plays pediatric surgeon Doug Ross on the popular TV show E.R., the new breakthroughs in gene therapy offer very exciting possibilities for treating congenital diseases in children.*

Appeal to authority. George Clooney played a doctor on television, but he isn't a doctor. So he's not a useful authority to cite when discussing new treatments for children. And by the way--we made this up. Clooney has never, to our knowledge, offered an opinion about pediatric care!

5. *What the Democrats want is to raise taxes on everyone's income to bail out people who can't be bothered to get a job. And here's why I think this isn't a good idea.*

Straw man. Perhaps the speaker feels that this is the Democrat agenda, but this is not how the Democrats have described their policies. And this is a policy that virtually no one would support. While most of us are sympathetic to those who can't find work, few of us would be very sympathetic to those who can't be bothered to work. So this speaker has picked an easy target, and will now have a very easy time defeating an enemy of his or her own creation.

6. *Pollution is slowly killing our planet, and unless you want to watch your grandchildren drown in melting ice-caps or die slowly of cancers caused by a thinning ozone layer, you had better start thinking about how to prevent it.*

Appeal to fear. The speaker uses an image of drowning children to motivate the listeners.

You might also have thought this was a slippery slope. In a way, it is; a slippery slope version of this might go something like "If you don't think about the ozone layer, the next thing you know we will all

be drowning in melting ice-caps." It's really a difference of phrasing. In both cases, the speaker is drawing a dramatic conclusion from the present.

Another possible choice is false dilemma. The speaker does seem to suggest that we have only two options here: to care, or to watch the inevitable destruction.

7. *If you don't trust me with a choice, how can you trust me with a child?*

False dilemma. This familiar bumper sticker prompted one person to remark, "Who says I trust you with either?" The question implies that we must trust the questioner with one or the other. But there is a third alternative.

You might also have seen this as a loaded question. That would be a reasonable guess, because this is certainly a question. It isn't quite the same kind of form as a typical loaded question; there are no loaded terms, like "immoral lives" or "ridiculously high earnings" in the opening example. But it is a question based on an assumption.

8. *Capital punishment is clearly an effective deterrent. Look at Saudi Arabia: they behead people there, and their crime rate is very low.*

False cause. Saudi Arabia does occasionally behead people, and they also have a much lower crime rate than we do. However, the speaker offers nothing to suggest that the beheading causes the low crime rate. Just because they happen in the same place doesn't mean that one causes the other. Indeed, we can point to the reverse just as easily: European countries don't execute people, yet their crime rates are typically lower than those of the U.S.

You might have thought this was appeal to authority, since the speaker refers to Saudi Arabia as an example of successful deterrence. But an appeal to authority usually involves quoting someone's opinion, rather than pointing to an example.

You might also have thought this was a false analogy because the speaker compares the U.S. to Saudi Arabia. That is not a bad choice, since the problem with the logic does lie partly in the comparison. However, it's reasonable to compare one country to another; and if it were true that capital punishment did deter crime, then it would be true everywhere in the world.

9. *This movie is dull because it's got nothing interesting in it.*

Begging the question. The definition of a "dull" thing is that it lacks interest. The speaker doesn't tell us why the movie is dull, but instead just rephrases the adjective.

10. *Don't listen to the doctor's arguments against smoking--they're worthless, because what he doesn't tell you is that he himself is a smoker!*

Personal attack (ad hominem). The speaker tells us that this doctor's anti-smoking arguments are worthless, because the doctor is a smoker. But that doesn't discredit his evidence. It only tells us that he hasn't managed to take his own findings seriously enough to quit, or that he isn't strong-willed enough. In short, it tells us about the doctor himself, not his findings.

You might have thought this was begging the question, because the speaker looks, as though he is going to give a reason but doesn't. However, this speaker doesn't avoid giving reasons by restating his opening comments. Instead, he deflects the argument to the person.

11. *My son says I should let him go to the Eminem concert on Friday night. But if I start letting him go to concerts and staying out late, he'll start to cut school in the morning; next thing you know, he'll be a*

dropout, hanging with the wrong crowd, probably taking drugs with the rest of his buddies. I don't think a concert is worth throwing the rest of his future away for.

Slippery slope. The speaker speculates on the consequences of her poor son going to a concert, moving effortlessly from a night out to a vision of his ruined life.

You might also have seen this as an appeal to fear. This is a reasonable guess, since the speaker is certainly frightening herself, and preparing to frighten her son into staying home.

12. *All patriotic Americans will put a flag in their window.*

Poisoning the well. The speaker has already decided that anyone who doesn't agree with him about putting a flag in the window is not patriotic. So anyone arguing with this person would have to first defend herself before explaining why she doesn't have a flag in the window. It's a bullying tactic that puts the opponent on the defensive and is make him or her look evasive.

[Click here to return to the exercise.](#)