

Analyzing the Effects of Fallacies

Review the editorials you have read in this unit. On the chart below, list some logical fallacies from the editorials, the editorial in which you found each, and the fallacy's possible effect on the reader.

Editorial/Quote	Type of Logical Fallacy	Possible Effect
Potter: “[Sunstein’s] worry is that if the newspaper declines, so might democracy.”	straw man (nowhere in his editorial does Sunstein assert this) and slippery slope (decline of newspapers does not inevitably mean the decline of democracy)	The reader may be taken in by Potter’s refutation of his misstatement of Sunstein’s argument. By arguing how important newspapers are to democracy, the slippery slope may seem more likely.
Potter: “For decades, progressive critics have complained about the anti-democratic influence of the mass media.”	hasty generalization, ad hominem	The reader may assume all progressives hold the same opinions and that their position as stated by Potter indicates that their views should not be considered on this or any matter.
Schroth: The Times article quotes “Kelby Jasmon, a high school student in Springfield, Ill., walking around today with two concussions, who says there is ‘no chance’ he would tell the coach if he gets hit hard and symptoms return.”	hasty generalization	The reader may be led to believe that Jasmon’s viewpoint is common. No evidence is presented on how rare or common the opinion actually is.
O’Connell: “Students who take rigorous courses are also less likely to drop out, and they perform better in vocational and technical courses.”	post hoc	The reader may agree with O’Connell’s counterintuitive assumption that students who are given harder work are less likely to give up. He presents no evidence for this or any consideration that there might be other factors involved in why the students stay in school and perform better (if his claim is indeed true).

7 Read aloud the introductory text of the Analyzing the Effects of Fallacies section and focus students’ attention on the graphic organizer. Instruct them to fill out the organizer, modeling the text in the first row as an example.

ACTIVITY 3.11 continued

8 Conduct a **brainstorming** session for current, high-profile, controversial issues and then have the class vote on a favorite for the mock **debate** described in the Fallacy Face-Off section.

9 Split the class into two or more teams. Give the teams several minutes to come up with a fallacious appeal for each team member. You could have students draw a particular type of fallacy from a pile of their index cards, or you could let them choose their own.

10 Complete the student steps as directed in the section, Fallacy Face Off. As individual team members take turns presenting their fallacious appeals to the class, have members of the other teams identify and challenge the fallacy being used by the speakers.

11 Have teams discuss the questions in student step 7 among themselves to consolidate their understanding of the power of fallacies and the need to be wary of them in public discourse.

12 Give students time to respond to the writing prompt and revise their letters to the editor from Activity 3.10. Have student pairs share their revised letters, clearly marking the text for the added fallacy before turning in the revised draft.

ASSESS

Use students' responses to the writing prompt to assess their ability to identify and use fallacies. The skill of identifying fallacies is important as students prepare their Embedded Assessment.

ADAPT

If students have difficulty choosing a fallacy to use, have them list the central ideas or claims in their original letters. Tell them to ask themselves which fallacy can be used to make each of these ideas or claims false.

3.11

Fallacy Face-Off

- Now that you have been introduced to the concept of fallacious appeals, take up the challenge to use as many as possible in a Fallacy Face-Off. As a class, select a current, high-profile, controversial issue. Feel free to pull this topic from some of your recent newspaper readings. You will use this topic in a mock debate.
- Next, split into teams. Each team member will select or be assigned a fallacious appeal to use regarding the selected topic.
- When the teams are ready, they will use these fallacious appeals in a mock debate. Each team will take turns presenting their appeals to the class as if presenting at a public rally, televised debate, or other venue of the class's choosing.
- As other groups present their arguments, you will be responsible for identifying and challenging the nature of the fallacy being used by the speaker. All discourse and interaction will be conducted courteously and respectfully.
- After exploring these fallacies in class, discuss the following questions in your small group:
 - Why are fallacies so common in our political discourse? Which ones are most common, and why?
 - Why are fallacies so powerful—and so dangerous?
 - Why might you choose to use a fallacy—or rhetorical slanters—in a letter or speech? What would be the pros and cons of doing so?
 - How does the use of fallacies affect the ethos of a writer or speaker?
 - What is the relationship between considering your audience and deciding whether to use fallacious appeals or slanters?



Writing Prompt: Argumentative

Review the letter to the editor that you wrote in Activity 3.10 and revise it using at least one of the types of fallacy from this activity. Share your revision with a partner and ask him or her to identify the type of fallacy you used. Be sure to: [E3.10\(C\)](#)

- Revise your letter to clearly state your position, if needed. [E3.5\(A\)](#), [E3.9\(C\)](#)
- Incorporate at least one fallacy into your letter. [E3.8\(G\)](#), [E3.9\(C\)](#)
- Prepare your letter in final draft, checking that it is grammatically and technically accurate. As needed, consult references to ensure that you are spelling and using words correctly. [E3.2\(A\)](#), [E3.9\(C\)](#), [E3.5\(F\)](#)