

# Fallacies 101

## ACTIVITY 3.11

### Learning Targets

- Analyze the effects of logical fallacies on the way a text is read and understood.
- Use logical fallacies and refute the fallacies of others in a debate.

### Preview

In this activity, you will analyze news articles to test your knowledge of the logical fallacies that you learned about in Unit 2. As you spot these fallacies, you will determine their likely effect on the reader.

### Learning Strategies

- Discussion Groups
- Graphic Organizer
- Questioning the Text
- Quickwrite
- Rereading
- Self-Editing

### My Notes

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### Identifying Fallacies

- You will be given a set of card manipulatives, some of which will contain the names of specific types of fallacies and others of which will contain the definitions. In your small group, you will need to match the fallacies with their definitions.
- Next, read through the following informational text and check your answers.

### Types of Fallacies

Fallacies are commonplace in advertising, political discourse, and everyday conversations—and they will continue to be as long as they successfully persuade.

By learning to recognize them when you see them, you can strip away their power. There are many different ways to categorize fallacies, and many different names for the various types. The following eleven fallacies (adapted from Brooke Noel Moore and Richard Parker’s *Critical Thinking*, 8th ed., 2007) are divided into the different types of offense they represent. Learn these, and you’ll be ready to see through many of the rhetorical scams that come your way each day.

#### A. Logical Fallacies: Errors in Reasoning

- Hasty generalization:** This is the leap to a generalized conclusion based on only a few instances. For example, on a trip to Paris you meet several rude Parisians, leading you to conclude that French people are rude.
- Post hoc:** Literally meaning “after this,” this is a causal fallacy in which a person assumes one thing caused another simply because it happened prior to the other. For instance, the high school soccer team loses an important game the day after they start wearing new uniforms. The coach blames the loss on the new uniforms.

#### B. Emotive Fallacies: Replacing Logic with Emotional Manipulation

- Ad populum:** Literally meaning “appeal to the people,” this type argues that something is true because other people think so. It refers to a variety of appeals that play on the association of a person or subject with values that are held by members of a target group (think of images of the flag in ads playing on patriotism) or the suggestion that “everybody knows” that something is true (as with bandwagoning).

## ACTIVITY 3.11

### PLAN

**Materials:** index cards with fallacy terms and definitions, internet access  
**Suggested Pacing:** 1 50-minute class period

### TEACH

- Before class, create one set of twenty-two index cards for each of the student groups that will participate in this activity. Eleven of the cards in each set should contain each of the eleven fallacy names. The other eleven cards should each contain a definition of one of the fallacies. Shuffle each set separately for group work.
- Read the Learning Targets and Preview section with students. Tell them that they will review what they learned in Unit 2 about logical fallacies and that they will use that understanding to analyze news articles for credibility, bias, and accuracy.
- Read aloud the text of the Identifying Fallacies and Types of Fallacies sections. (Note that the Types of Fallacies section continues on the next page.) Read aloud the text about each fallacy, or have volunteers do so. Ask and answer questions and clarify information as necessary.
- Divide students into groups and hand out the prepared fallacy index card sets. Have students match the terms with the definitions. When they have completed the matching, have them confirm their choices by consulting the Types of Fallacies section on this and the next page.



## TEXAS ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

### Focus Standards:

E3.5(F) Respond using acquired content and academic vocabulary as appropriate.

E3.8(G) Analyze the effects of rhetorical devices and logical fallacies on the way the text is read and understood.

### Additional Standards Addressed:

E3.1(A), E3.2(A), E3.2(C), E3.5(A), E3.9(C), E3.11(G)(ii)

5 At the end of the matching activity, provide time for students to review the Types of Fallacies section in full to assure they have familiarized themselves with each type and the examples provided.

6 Highlight the Word Connections box about foreign words and stress the fact that Latin forms the basis for much of English. Tell students that the area of logic is somewhat unique in that many Latin terms have entered our language while maintaining their original spellings.

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## WORD CONNECTIONS

### Foreign Words

Although the study of logic began in ancient Greece, most terms used today for logical fallacies derive from the Latin. Two terms frequently used in the names of logical fallacies are **post** (“after”) and **ad** (“for” or “to”). *Ad* is far more common and often combined with other Latin words to classify errors in logic. For example:  
antiquitatem = tradition  
baculum = club (weapon)  
hoc = this  
hominem = person  
ignorantium = ignorance  
misericordiam = pity  
populum = the people  
ridiculum = ridicule  
Because Latin forms the basis of so much of our own language, you can sometimes guess the English meanings of terms such as *populum*, *antiquitatem*, *ignorantium*, and *ridiculum* simply by looking at them closely.

### My Notes

Handwriting practice lines consisting of ten horizontal blue lines.

- **“Argument” from outrage:** Aristotle said that if you understand what makes a person angry, then you can use that anger to persuade him or her to accept a position without critically evaluating it. This fallacy is the backbone of talk radio and of political rhetoric on both extremes of the political spectrum. It often employs loaded language and labels. It also includes scapegoating—blaming a certain group of people or even a single person.
- **Ad misericordiam, or appeal to pity:** If you have ever asked a teacher to give you a better grade or a second chance because things have been tough recently or because you worked SO hard, you’re guilty of this one! It refers to an attempt to use compassion or pity to replace a logical argument.
- **Ad baculum, or scare tactics:** This appeals to fear in place of logic. If a candidate for office says, “Electing my opponent will open the door for new terrorist attacks,” it represents an attempt to scare people into rejecting the person, despite providing no evidence to justify the claim.

### C. Rhetorical Fallacies: Sidestepping Logic with Language

- **Straw man:** This is the distorted or exaggerated representation of a position that is easily refuted. For example, Schroth says, “But, you say, if high schools drop football it will deprive colleges and the pros of their feeder system,” an argument that is, of course, a ridiculous attempt to justify high school football—and one that is thus easy to refute.
- **Ad hominem/genetic fallacy:** Literally meaning “to the man,” ad hominem refers to attacks against a person him- or herself rather than the ideas the person presents. This is a dominant feature in political campaigns, where sound-bite 30-second advertisements attack a candidate’s character, often with mere innuendo, instead of his or her policy positions. When this extends to criticizing or rejecting a general type of something simply because it belongs to or was generated by that type, it is a genetic fallacy. For example, to say an idea comes from the “media elite” makes it sound like it should be rejected—but who are the media elite?
- **Red herring/smokescreen:** This is when someone answers the question by changing the subject. For example, when pulled over for speeding, a person might respond to the officer’s question, “Why were you speeding?” by saying, “The school no longer offers driver’s education classes.”
- **Slippery slope:** Half appeal to fear and half a causal fallacy, a person uses a slippery slope when he or she suggests that one action will lead to an inevitable and undesirable outcome. To say legalizing voluntary euthanasia paves the way for forced euthanasia is a slippery slope argument.
- **Either/or (or false dilemma):** This is a conclusion that oversimplifies the argument by suggesting that there are only two possible sides or choices. It is very common in debates of policy, where issues are always complex but politicians reduce them to simplistic binaries (either/or) for rhetorical purposes.

### 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\(F\)](#)