Lesson Study in English Composition: Identifying Logical Fallacies

Part I: Background

Lesson Title: Teaching Logical Fallacies in the English Composition Classroom

Discipline or Field: English

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Course Name: Investigating Ideas: Reading, Writing, and the Disciplines

Course Description

Investigating Ideas: Reading, Writing, and the Disciplines is the second course in a required two-semester sequence offered by the English Department. In this general education course, students learn to recognize, analyze, and construct academic arguments. The prerequisite is Academic Reading and Writing. Student population includes many first year students in their second semester, but the course allows for sophomore, junior, or even senior registration, since these students can benefit greatly from the opportunity to build on their critical reading, thinking, and writing skills as they pursue upper-level research in their majors.

For our lesson study, we taught the first iteration to a group of 25 students in Dr. Schneider-Rebozo’s 9:30-10:45 a.m. section of the course. After reviewing our findings and making extensive changes to the lesson, the second iteration was taught two weeks later to Dr. Schneider-Rebozo’s 12:30-1:45 p.m. section of the course together with Dr. Tiedeman’s 12:30-1:45 p.m. section, for a total of 50 students. To physically accommodate the space requirements of the combined sections, we reserved a larger classroom in another building and directed students to meet us there on a one-time basis; we then returned to our regular classrooms for the rest of the semester. The classes met for 75 minutes twice a week for fourteen weeks. All regular class meetings as well as the lesson study class meetings were held in technology-enhanced rooms that included networked computers for the instructor and LCD projectors.

Our lesson study on logical fallacies is designed to be presented prior to student submission of the final draft of the first major essay project, a project which is comprised of a series of sequenced essay assignments that require a classical academic argument structure. The first iteration of the lesson study occurred at the end of the fourth week of the fourteen week term; this is, in our view, the optimal time for the lesson in Investigating Ideas: Reading, Writing, and the Disciplines.
The second iteration of the lesson study occurred at the end of the sixth week of the term; this timing coincided with the second course unit and allowed students in these two sections to recognize fallacious logic and flawed support in all drafts of their second essay project.

**Executive Summary**

Sound argumentation is the foundation of rigorous critical thinking and ethical writing. This lesson study analyzes ways to improve student awareness and understanding of logical fallacies, and makes explicit the connection between logic and argumentation. Our lesson study team had two main goals in mind: first, to provide students with the critical thinking tools to support them in identifying logical fallacies when they encounter them and, second, to foster student sensitivity in their own rhetoric and writing to the distinction between sound logic and fallacious logic, valid arguments and invalid arguments. The final lesson design incorporated team findings to make substantive changes to virtually every aspect of the lesson. The lesson in its final version includes four parts: a brief introduction including a two-minute comic video clip of the Monty Python skit known as “The Argument Clinic,” a small-group analysis of a short student-authored argumentative reading containing multiple fallacies (the “Death” essay, which discusses the death penalty), an interactive PowerPoint to alternate between small- and large-group discussion of five common logical fallacies, and a final individual or small-group worksheet that asks students to label examples of logical fallacies. Our team felt that the logical fallacies lesson study was enormously successful; by the end of the second iteration of the lesson, we all felt that student learning was significantly improved. While students of the first iteration responded courteously and expressed positive feelings about the lesson in post-lesson free-write responses, they also revealed a notable amount of confusion about lesson content and purpose. In the second iteration, students demonstrated greater clarity about the underlying purpose of the lesson, and exhibited greater engagement and a higher rate of success in identifying the commonalities and articulating the logical disjunctions in the examples included in the lesson. Overall, students responded much more positively to the second iteration of the lesson, and we attribute this change to improved content, formatting, and delivery.
PART II: THE LESSON (final version)

This lesson requires a brief pre-lesson preparation on the part of the instructor and students and the application of the lesson itself during class. For a 50-minute class, use only parts A, B, and C. For a 75-minute class, add part D.

(Pre-Lesson)

Instructor Preparation

- Read the anonymous, student-authored “Death” essay (Seyler 146), (see Appendix A).
- Identify the fallacies in that one-page essay (suggested interpretations of the fallacies in the “Death” essay may be found in Appendix B).
- Review the PowerPoint presentation and class discussion notes (see Appendix C).
- Screen the brief Monty Python video clip, “Argument Clinic” (Chapman and Cleese).
- Examine the group activity sheet (see Appendix A) and instructor key (see Appendix B).
- Study the logical fallacies handout (see Appendix A).
- During the class period before the logical fallacies class session, assign and distribute the “Death” essay to students.

Student Preparation

- Read the “Death” essay. Identify and list any places in the essay where the argument looks problematic. Be prepared to discuss your findings with the class.

(Lesson)

Part A – Introduction: Monty Python Video Clip

- Introduce the topic of study, “Logical Fallacies,” to the students.
- Open and project the lesson PowerPoint.
- Play the “Argument Clinic” video clip (a link to this YouTube video clip is embedded in the opening slide of the PowerPoint presentation).
- Read aloud Chapman and Cleese’s definition of “argument” quoted from the comic video clip. This quote may be found on slide one of the PowerPoint: “An argument is a collective series of statements to establish a definite proposition...an intellectual process” (Chapman and Cleese).
- Briefly establish the comic disjunction between the legitimate definition and Chapman and Cleese’s satiric performance, and make explicit the essential connection between logic and argumentation.

Part B - The “Death” Essay: Small-Group Analysis

- Assign students to small peer groups of three or four.
- Invite each group to assign a note-taker and spokesperson.
• Ask the student group members to pool their findings on the “Death” essay that they read in preparation for class. (The note-taker keeps a formal record of their findings, which will be submitted to the instructor at the end of the lesson.) The instructor may take this opportunity to remind students that the anonymous, argumentative essay discussing the death penalty is student-authored, as this knowledge may help defuse prohibitions against challenging “authoritative” print texts. That being said, we chose not to emphasize this point, and our students proceeded with their analyses, moving from initially tentative responses to more committed critiques.

• In their small groups, students should remain focused on their responses to the following question (shown on slide two): How is the “Death” essay flawed in terms of argument? It is helpful to remind students that they are reporting on the places where the argument looks problematic, even if they are not clear about why the logic is flawed. It is also helpful to remind students that their findings about problematic argumentation in the “Death” essay are to be distinguished from their own personal opinions about the death penalty. They are looking at how the author supports his/her opinion, not at the opinion itself.

• Ask small groups to present their pooled findings to the class.

Part C – PowerPoint: Engaging With Some Common Logical Fallacies

• The PowerPoint presentation, which has been created in such a way as to encourage the class to alternate between small-group and large-group interaction, addresses a series of five logical fallacies for analysis. For each logical fallacy, the PowerPoint presentation offers three or four examples and then a label for the type of fallacy given in the examples. Our idea is to get students to see a common pattern of flaws in logic before labeling the fallacy. Instructors may want to review the lecture notes for each example so that if students don’t see the error in logic during the small-group or the large-group discussions, the instructor may point directly to the flaw in logic. The lecture notes offer a key to the flaws in each of the sample arguments (see Appendix C).

• Briefly introduce the concept of logical fallacies by explaining (with slide four) what a logical fallacy is (i.e., a statement that may sound reasonable or superficially true but is actually flawed or dishonest).

• Keep students in their small groups, and require groups to assign a new note-taker and a new spokesperson, thereby promoting active participation by all group members.

• Small groups spend a few minutes analyzing three or four examples of a logical fallacy. The instructor may want to read aloud the examples, providing support for auditory learners and unifying the class momentarily before inviting students to re-engage with small-group discussion.

• Then, require the small groups to present their findings to the class at large so that students can begin to see the commonalities within the examples. We think its best to make explicit an order of rotation, so that each group presents findings to the class at least once.

• After the commonalities are discussed, the fallacy is defined and identified by name (e.g., red herring, slippery slope, hasty generalization). The definition and explanation of the label further reinforces the lesson, as students are now able to see the link between the name and the concept it describes.
• Continue to progress through the PowerPoint slide show interactively, moving between small-group and large-group interactions, with the groups reading and responding to the slides in sets of three or four. Here, our intention is to help students determine how each sample passage is flawed before moving on to the next sample. Prompt students to discover what is wrong with the text, not by labeling the fallacy, but rather by identifying in an informal way why the passage does not represent sound, logical argumentation.
• Again, before progressing to the slide that actually labels a fallacy, prompt students to see if they can locate patterns in the logical flaws in all three or four examples for each of the five fallacies covered in the lesson. Can students see commonality within the sample texts?
  • The PowerPoint slides 5, 6, and 7 offer three samples of the red herring logical fallacy. Slide 8 then offers a definition of the red herring, providing students with terminology they may use to label that particular type of error in logic.
  • The PowerPoint slides 9, 10, and 11 contain three samples of the hasty generalization logical fallacy. Slide 12 then provides a definition of hasty generalization.
  • The PowerPoint slides 13 and 14 reveal three samples of the equivocation logical fallacy. Slide 15 then offers a definition of equivocation.
  • The PowerPoint slides 16 and 17 give four samples of the circular reasoning logical fallacy. Slide 18 defines circular reasoning.
  • The PowerPoint slides 19 and 20 show three samples of the loaded language logical fallacy. Slide 21 then defines loaded language.

• We believe that making student learning goals explicit promotes student engagement in the learning process, so we recommend that instructors remind students that learning to identify these fallacies will help them to avoid being misled by logical fallacies when they encounter them (whether in print or other media texts, or during interactions with peers or figures of authority) and to avoid making these types of logical errors in their own academic writing. Thus, the lesson has immediate practical applications in terms of supporting strong, valid argumentation in their academic writing and reasoning, as well as an extended application in the broader context of their social roles as informed, responsible citizens.
• This lesson only covers a small set of logical fallacies; we have chosen to focus on five that we feel are especially prevalent in student writing. Thus, we view this lesson study as a foundational exercise. At the end of the lesson, we distribute the logical fallacies handout listing 19 common fallacies (see Appendix A), and remind students that there are many, many more.

Part D – Group Activity: Labeling Logical Fallacies
• After the PowerPoint discussion and distribution of the logical fallacies handout (see Appendix A), students continue to practice identifying fallacies and applying labels to those fallacies.
• Distribute the group activity worksheet (see Appendix A), and ask groups to review what they have learned by identifying and labeling the fallacies on the worksheet.
Collect written responses to the worksheet, along with small-group notes from the “Death” essay and the PowerPoint discussion.

**Student Learning Goals**

Sound argumentation is the foundation of rigorous critical thinking and ethical writing. Learning to identify the five logical fallacies emphasized in this lesson will help students to avoid being misled by logical fallacies when they encounter them (whether in print or other media texts, or during interactions with peers or figures of authority) and to avoid making these types of logical errors in their own academic writing. Thus, the lesson has immediate practical applications in terms of supporting strong, valid argumentation in their academic writing and reasoning, as well as an extended application in the broader context of their social roles as informed, responsible citizens.
PART III: THE STUDY

Approach

We first approached this lesson study by selecting a topic that students had shown some difficulty in learning and that instructors had expressed some difficulty in teaching. Our team met a couple of times before the initial iteration to plan out the lesson, gather materials together, and gain a group understanding of outcomes expected from the lesson. At the outset, the materials looked dynamic and potentially effective.

We applied the lesson materials to one of Dr. Schneider-Rebozo’s two sections of the class, with Dr. Moline teaching and Drs. Schneider-Rebozo and Tiedeman observing small-group and large-group interactions. At the end of the first iteration, we collected students’ group notes and worksheets. When Dr. Schneider-Rebozo’s class next met, she also had her students perform a free-write in which they reflected on the lesson study content. After the first iteration the team met several times to confer, share observations, and begin revising the lesson for the second iteration. As a result of these discussions, we substantially altered the approach to teaching the lesson.

The second iteration took place in a large technology-enhanced classroom specially reserved for the occasion. Two groups of students were combined: Dr. Tiedeman’s section and a different section of Dr. Schneider-Rebozo’s. The reason for combining two sections was one of simple expediency – both Dr. Tiedeman and Dr. Schneider-Rebozo taught at the same hour, and neither felt comfortable canceling a class. It is useful to note that the lesson can work as well in a class of fifty as in a class of twenty-five students. As in the first iteration, Dr. Moline taught the lesson and Drs. Tiedeman and Schneider-Rebozo functioned as observers. At the end of the second iteration, we again collected students’ group notes and worksheets. When Dr. Schneider-Rebozo’s class met next, she had her students perform a free-write in which they reflected on the lesson study content, just as in the first iteration. The lesson study team met shortly after the second iteration in order to review their findings and to make their final recommendations for teaching the lesson. Dr. Tiedeman and Dr. Schneider-Rebozo shared notes from their observations of both iterations of the lesson, and the second iteration was videotaped.

Findings and Discussion

During the first iteration, the team intended to employ a dynamic, interactive opening laced with humor. We agreed that engaging the students by involving them actively in the lesson and by adopting a humorous tone would increase enthusiasm and encourage participation from the outset. To this end we selected a brief interactive worksheet that spoofed instructor grading practices. However, we found that students needed a clearer introduction to the lesson material before engaging productively in a critique of this material. Students also did not display a shared sense of humor with the team. The initial worksheet, which we abandoned for the second iteration, included fallacious statements about upcoming changes in the grading policy for the course. This content alienated students who initially took that material seriously. So, the lesson study team decided to retain the use of humor in the lesson’s opening moments, but we sought a
more inclusive, engaging, and relevant opening that would provide a legitimate introduction to the lesson content. The Monty Python video clip includes both the humor and the content we sought. The video clip worked extremely well during the second iteration of the lesson. After watching the video clip, students seemed more relaxed, and they exhibited a clear understanding of the connection between logic and argumentation.

As the first iteration of the lesson progressed, we encountered several more difficulties. We found that we tried to introduce too many fallacies (nearly 20) during the first iteration. The observers noted through body language and small- and large-group discussions that students appeared overwhelmed by too much content. These findings were confirmed by the post-lesson free writing performed by Dr Schneider-Rebozo’s students, who reported feeling confused about both lesson content and purpose. It was clear to us that too many examples were covered in the lesson, hence our decision to limit ourselves to five in the second iteration. During our meeting directly after the first iteration, we selected five common fallacies that team members had previously observed in student writings. We then carefully selected examples to illustrate these five fallacies.

Another difficulty encountered during the first iteration was that our group activity worksheet (which we substantially revised; see Appendix A for the final version) seemed too difficult. Many of the worksheet examples contained multiple types of logical fallacies. During group presentations based on that worksheet for the first iteration, students were unable to come to consensus about the location or the nature of the compound logical errors. So for the next iteration, we decided we needed to use passages that clearly focused on one particular type of error in logic. To achieve this goal, we carefully screened the passages; if multiple fallacies occurred in a given passage, we eliminated it from the worksheet. We found that this approach enabled the students to better identify flaws in logic.

During our follow-up team meetings, we also discussed a need to establish a foundation for the content in this lesson. As a preparatory reading, we decided to assign the “Death” essay, a brief student-authored text that our class could discuss in small groups at the outset of the lesson. Since the essay is rife with sensational errors in logic, this addition seemed an effective way to get students to think about logical fallacies before the lesson began, and it worked well for the second iteration.

The handout listing 19 logical fallacies (see Appendix A) was rather dramatically revised as well, adding clear, concise examples of logical fallacies for each category listed. These examples did not appear on the first draft of this handout. This revised handout was distributed to the students to emphasize the fact that many more fallacies exist than those five covered in the lesson, and to provide ongoing student support in the form of a quick reference guide as they learn to improve the validity of their own arguments.

We also changed our approach to using PowerPoint as a teaching tool. We switched from a lecture-oriented method to a much more interactive and student-centered style. Thus, instead of employing a “sage on the stage” approach, we used the PowerPoint slides primarily to offer examples for group discussion and analysis, dramatically limiting lecture time. We also increased the font size and changed the background color in the PowerPoint presentation. These
seemingly small formatting changes improved the visual contrast of the text, thereby increasing the readability of the PowerPoint and notably improving student interaction with that medium.

The difficulties remaining within this lesson include the fact that still too much information is covered. By the time students reached the worksheet activity (Part D of the final version of the lesson), both observers noted that they seemed mentally fatigued. This finding was supported by the post-lesson responses written by Dr. Schneider-Rebozo’s students. The team recommends further streamlining the lesson by stopping the lesson when students seem tired, which occurred at the end of the PowerPoint discussion (Part C) during the second iteration of this lesson study. Thus, an ideal structure would be to use Parts A, B, and C in a 50-minute class period, or, in a 75-minute class, to spend 50 minutes on the logical fallacies lesson and then transition into a different topic or activity. The worksheet in Part D may be utilized as a reinforcing homework assignment, or it may be reserved for a follow-up lesson on another day.

Our team felt that the logical fallacies lesson study was enormously successful; by the end of the second iteration of the lesson, we all felt that student learning significantly improved. Students demonstrated greater clarity about the underlying purpose of the lesson and exhibited greater engagement and a higher rate of success in identifying the commonalities and articulating the logical disjunctions in the examples. Overall, students responded much more positively to the second iteration of the lesson, and we attribute this change to improved content, formatting, and delivery.


<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=teMlY3ripSM>.


APPENDIX A: STUDENT HANDOUTS

“Death” Essay

Group Activity Worksheet

Logical Fallacies Handout
2. Analyze the logical fallacies in the following student essay. Make notes of specific problems to be prepared for class discussion.

DEATH

In the editorial section of the Washington Post I came across an article titled "New York on the Brink." The article is about New York thinking and trying to impose the death penalty. The editors are against the death sentence, and I disagree with them.

The death sentence is obviously a moral and political issue. But is it right to let killers just serve time and be released back into society after taking someone's life? The death penalty has been around as long as man. It is needed to get rid of the murderers and keep the innocent safe and secure.

The article says that President George Bush's speech in New York urging a mandatory federal death penalty for the killing of law enforcement officers is unfair. Why is that unfair? The police are out to protect the innocent. It is unfair not to serve justice on those individuals. If a criminal goes around killing the protectors of law and peace, who knows what they can and will do to the common citizens.

Another thing to think about is the overcrowding of prisons. There is very little room for prisoners these days. The author didn't even think of that. By ridding society of the killers, it will make room for other criminals to serve time. I wonder if the author is willing to pay extra taxes to build new prisons.

The author also argues that the death penalty doesn't prevent murders from happening. There have always been murderers throughout history, and there will always be murders. But I think that I would think twice about killing someone if I knew that I would die as well. But there will always be people who take the chance. The death penalty would just get rid of those who do them.

The author's final argument is that sanctioned killing is as abhorrent as murder. I think the author would have a change of heart if someone close to him or her was murdered. It is only fair that the murderer pay the same price as the victim.

It is time that people start to open their eyes and realize that it is a life and death world out there. And the only way to change the suffering of the law abiders is to get rid of the law breakers. The death penalty is the price a free society pays to stay free.
Group Activity Worksheet – Logical Fallacies

Group Member Names:

Select a group recorder to take notes on this page. Circle his or her name.
Select a group presenter to present your answers to the class. Underline his or her name.

Instructions: Identify the type of fallacy (or explain the flaw in logic) for each of the following statements.

1. If a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it fall, does it make a sound? Modern science says, “Yes, for there are vibrations in the air even if no humans are nearby.” But this is easily refuted. Sound is something heard. That’s really quite obvious when you think about it. So, if no one was there to hear the sound, there was no sound.

2. I fail to see why hunting should be considered cruel when it gives tremendous pleasure to many people and employment to even more.

3. A spirit of national masochism prevails, encouraged by an effete corps of impudent snobs who characterize themselves as intellectuals.

4. High retail prices are beneficial, for they stimulate employment, increase agricultural production, and stimulate the development of new products.

5. Free trade will be good for this country. The reason is patently clear. Isn’t it obvious that unrestricted commercial relations will bestow on all sections of this nation the benefits which result when there is an unimpeded flow of goods between countries?
## Logical Fallacies Handout

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>False Analogy</td>
<td>X has property Y. Z is like X. Z therefore has property Y.</td>
<td>Pens help you write. A drinking straw looks like a pen. Therefore, drinking straws can help you write.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evading Burden of Proof</td>
<td>The party whose standpoint has been questioned must prove that it is acceptable, but does not do so.</td>
<td>The youth of today are, by nature, lazy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simplification</td>
<td>The series of actual causes for an event are either reduced or multiplied to the point where there is no longer a genuine, causal connection between the alleged causes and the actual effect.</td>
<td>School violence has gone up and academic performance has gone down ever since kickball was banned at public schools. Therefore, kickball should be reintroduced, resulting in school improvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non Sequitur</td>
<td>It does not follow.</td>
<td>Steven Johnson grew up in poverty. Therefore, he will make a fine President of the United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Either-Or</td>
<td>The claim presents an artificial range of choices.</td>
<td>You're either with us, or you're against us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hasty Generalization</td>
<td>The scope of evidence is too small to support the conclusion.</td>
<td>Fred, the Australian, stole my wallet. Thus, all Australians are thieves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double Standard</td>
<td>A set of principles permits greater opportunity or liberty to one than to another.</td>
<td>These rules don’t apply to me since I am older than you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poisoning the Well</td>
<td>Discredit what a person might later claim by presenting unfavorable information about the person.</td>
<td>Before turning the floor over to my opponent, I ask you to remember that those who oppose my plans do not have the best wishes of the university at heart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>False Authority</td>
<td>Use a biased, suspicious, or incredible source to defend a conclusion.</td>
<td>Claim: “Aliens must have landed at Area 51 because the Mayor of Roswell says so.” Warrant: Whatever the Mayor says is true.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loaded Language</td>
<td>A word or phrase is “loaded” when it has a secondary, evaluative meaning in addition to its primary, descriptive meaning.</td>
<td>That beast of a penguin may just carelessly kill its offspring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Herring</td>
<td>Topic A is under discussion. Topic B is introduced under the guise of being relevant to topic A (when topic B is actually not relevant to topic A). Topic A is abandoned.</td>
<td>We admit that this measure is popular. But we also urge you to note that there are so many bond issues on this ballot that the whole thing is getting ridiculous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bandwagon Effect</td>
<td>A and B believe, so C need not test belief.</td>
<td>Others tolerate racism. Therefore, it’s okay for me to tolerate racism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circular Reasoning</td>
<td>The argument relies on a premise that says the same thing as the conclusion.</td>
<td>Active euthanasia is morally acceptable. It is a decent, ethical thing to help another human being escape suffering through death.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flattery</td>
<td>A person attempts to compliment or flatter another in order to get her to accept the truth of a proposition.</td>
<td>Your history seminar was the best class I had all semester, Professor Smith. I stopped by today in order to discuss my grade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slippery Slope</td>
<td>Event X has occurred (or will or might occur). Therefore, event Y will inevitably happen.</td>
<td>We've got to stop them from banning alcohol. Once they start banning one form of beverage, they will never stop. Next thing you know, they will be banning soft drinks too!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veiled Threat</td>
<td>Threaten an opponent if they don’t agree with you.</td>
<td>If you don’t believe we need curbside recycling in this city, you could mysteriously disappear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ad Hominem</td>
<td>Attack a person’s habits, personality, morals, or character.</td>
<td>His argument must be false because he swears and has bad breath.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faulty Causality</td>
<td>The assumption that because one event follows another, the second necessarily causes the first.</td>
<td>The administration closed the smoking court in our office at the end of last year, and layoffs have decreased this year; therefore, closing the smoking court caused a reduction in layoffs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straw Man</td>
<td>A person simply ignores a person’s actual position and substitutes a distorted, exaggerated or misrepresented version of that position.</td>
<td>Senator Jones says that we should not fund the attack submarine program. I disagree entirely. I can’t understand why he wants to leave us defenseless like that.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B: INSTRUCTOR MATERIALS

“Death” Essay Observations

Group Activity Worksheet Key
DEATH

In the editorial section of the Washington Post I came across an article titled "New York on the Brink." The article is about New York thinking and trying to impose the death penalty. The editors are against the death sentence and I disagree with them.

The death sentence is obviously a moral and political issue. But is it right to let killers just serve time and be released back into society after taking someone's life? The death penalty has been around as long as man. It is needed to get rid of the murderers and keep the innocent safe and secure.

The article says that President George Bush's speech in New York urging a mandatory federal death penalty for the killing of law enforcement officers is unfair. Why is that unfair? The police are out to protect the innocent. It is unfair not to serve justice on those individuals. [A criminal is around killing the protector of law and peace who knows what they can and will do to the common citizen.]

Another thing to think about is the overcrowding of prisons. There is very little room for prisoners these days. The author didn't even think of that. By ridding society of the killers, it will make room for other criminals to serve time. I wonder if the author is willing to pay extra taxes to build new prisons.

The author also argues that the death penalty doesn't prevent murderers from happening. There have always been murderers throughout history, and there will always be murderers. But I think that I would think twice about killing someone if I knew that I would die as well. But there will always be people who take the chance. The death penalty would just get rid of those who do them.

The author's final argument is that sanctioned killing is abhorrent as murder. I think the author would have a change of heart if someone close to him or her was murdered. It is only fair that the murderer pay the same price as the victim.

It is time that people start to open their eyes and realize that it is a life and death world out there. [And the only way to change the suffering of the law abiders is to get rid of the law breakers.] The death penalty is the price a free society pays to stay free.

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Group Activity – Logical Fallacies (Key)

Group Member Names:

Select a group recorder to take notes on this page. Circle his or her name.
Select a group presenter to present your answers to the class. Underline his or her name.

Instructions: Identify the type of fallacy (or explain the flaw in logic) for each of the following statements.

1. If a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it fall, does it make a sound? Modern science says, “Yes, for there are vibrations in the air even if no humans are nearby.” But this is easily refuted. Sound is something heard. That’s really quite obvious when you think about it. So, if no one was there to hear the sound, there was no sound.

   **Equivocation**

2. I fail to see why hunting should be considered cruel when it gives tremendous pleasure to many people and employment to even more.

   **Red Herring**

3. A spirit of national masochism prevails, encouraged by an effete corps of impudent snobs who characterize themselves as intellectuals.

   **Loaded Language**

4. High retail prices are beneficial, for they stimulate employment, increase agricultural production, and stimulate the development of new products.

   **Hasty Generalization**

5. Free trade will be good for this country. The reason is patently clear. Isn’t it obvious that unrestricted commercial relations will bestow on all sections of this nation the benefits which result when there is an unimpeded flow of goods between countries?

   **Circular Reasoning**
APPENDIX C: NOTES FOR THE POWERPOINT FALLACY PROMPTS
Notes for the PowerPoint Fallacy Prompts

Slide #5: “The issue is not whether playing outside on the street is harmful to children but whether watching TV is. To argue that watching TV keeps children occupied for hours and off the streets where they might be harmed is to divert attention from the main issue” (Engel 180).

Slide #6: “What is at issue here, and therefore the only thing to be considered, are the effects of marijuana, not alcohol. To maintain that marijuana, unlike alcohol, does not lead to barroom brawls (assuming this is so) is to divert attention from considering the other possible bad effects of using marijuana” (Engel 181).

Slide #7: “Whether any doctor could have resuscitated the baby is irrelevant to the question of whether Waddill should have attempted to save the fetus. Waddill’s defense is irrelevant for the further reason that the question here is not whether the fetus could have been saved but whether he deliberately hastened death” (Engel 183).

Slide #9: “Much more is involved in being ‘a great writer’ than simply the skill in constructing original plots. More important is what one is able to do with the story constructed – and here no one has surpassed Shakespeare (even if, as is true, he did not make up his own plots)” (Engel 177).

Slide #10: “When one considers how many doctors there are and how many diagnoses are made in the course of a month, three such faulty diagnoses hardly justify the general conclusion that all doctors are alike or that they do not know any more than we do” (Engel 177).

Slide #11: “The argument here is: Henry Ford and John Rockefeller, like you, were born poor and on a farm, yet they managed to achieve great wealth and fame; the same, therefore, can happen to you. But just because two poor boys succeeded ‘by honesty and industry’ in making it big does not mean that this is all that is needed for that to happen to others. As we know only too well, the American dream is not achieved that simply” (Engel 178).

Slide #13(first example): “Basing itself on the popular maxim that ‘old age is wiser than youth,’ the argument then goes on to conclude that we should therefore let ourselves be guided by ‘the decision of our ancestors’ (that is, those living in former ‘ages’). To argue so, however, is merely to equivocate with the term age: it may be wise indeed to listen to the opinion and advice of older people in our own age, who having lived longer and having had more experience can offer us sage advice. But those living in former ‘ages’ do not share the same context” (Engel 113).

Slide #13 (second example): “In the first premise end is used in the sense of ‘goal’ or ‘purpose,’ meaning the reason why we do a thing; in the second premise, end is used in the sense of ‘ending’ or ‘finish.’ It does not follow, therefore, that since death ends life, it is life’s goal” (Engel 113).

Slide #14: “Incompatible as used to refer to marriages means ‘being different temperamentally’; as used to refer to men and women (‘as such’), it mean ‘being biologically different, of different sexes.’ The argument is therefore unsound, for the fact that men and women are incompatible in being sexually different does not mean they are or will be similarly incompatible temperamentally, and thus never able to get along with one another” (Engel 114).

Slide #16 (first example): “Since the phrase hurried activity is merely another way of saying ‘haste,’ and careless activity another way of saying ‘waste,’ (since it must often be redone in order to be done correctly), the argument merely repeats itself, reasserting the conclusion in its premise instead of offering
proof for it. As a result, no acceptable proof is offered than haste is waste. (After all, some activities do require quickness in their performance)” (Engel 178).

Slide #16 (second example): “The argument is circular: A) Frank is a disreputable person because B) the people he associates with are disreputable. But how do we know that these people are disreputable? We know this because B) they hang around with A) someone as disreputable as Frank! The argument therefore has the following structure: A is so because of B, and B is so because of A” (Engel 180).

Slide #17 (first example): “A good rest would indeed be a sure cure for insomnia, but that is just the problem: How do you get the ability to rest? It is like saying a cure for sickness is to get well – which is to say nothing” (Engel 179).

Slide #17 (second example): “Merely to explain one’s terms (‘louder...[not] nearly as much noise’) is not to establish their truth. A different bell ringer may be at work on the same bell, putting more energy into it” (Engel 178).

Slide #19 (first example): “Until it has been proved that the defendants are truly ‘hoodlums,’ it is prejudging the case to label them so. Nor is the use of flattery (‘a person of your culture and upbringing’) very helpful here” (Engel 178).

Slide #19 (second example): “What evidence is there that there has been a ‘deterioration of governmental efficiency,’ that it is of ‘deplorable’ proportions – all this presumably caused by ‘widespread indifference’ on the part of the populace? Until evidence has been provided to confirm all these charges, we should not allow these labels to influence our attitude and judgment” (Engel 181).

Slide #20: “This is an example of the use of slanted language to affirm what has not yet been proved. Using such terms and phrases as conspirators, dastardly plot, behind locked doors, and heavily curtained windows is prejudicial in that it has not yet been proved that the defendants were in fact conspiring together in some nefarious ‘plot,’ doing so in great secrecy. If people get together in the privacy of an individual’s home to discuss, say, the political situation, that does not mean they are plotting the violent overthrow of the government – even if the discussion is highly critical of the government and its policies” (Engel 179).