

RECOGNIZING AND AVOIDING LOGICAL FALLACIES IN PARAGRAPH WRITING

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Rezumat

Deficiențele în exprimarea scrisă sunt numite erori logice. Acest articol abordează tema recunoașterii și evitării erorilor logice în procesul de scriere a unui paragraf. În articol sunt evidențiate tehnici primare și modalități de evitare a erorilor logice care pot apărea pe parcursul procesului de scriere. La fel, sunt menționate posibilele probleme și cauzele apariției lor. Scopul principal fiind dezvoltarea abilității de prelucrare a informațiilor, care urmărește dezvoltarea competențelor de scriere la studenți.

When you know how sentences are formed, you have one tool for understanding the art of writing. The sentence has several definitions each of which views it from a different perspective. On its most mechanical level, a sentence starts with a capital letter and finishes with a period, question mark, or exclamation point [3, p. 104]. A sentence can be defined according to its purpose. Most sentences are **declarative**; they make a statement: *Sky diving is dangerous*. Some sentences are **interrogative**; they ask a question: *Is sky diving dangerous?* Some sentences are **imperative**; they give a command: *Be careful*. Some sentences are **exclamatory**: *How I love sky diving!* Grammatically, a sentence contains an independent clause, a group of words that can stand alone as an independent unit: *Sky diving is dangerous*. An infinite variety of sentences can be composed, but all sentences share a common structural foundation. These are common rules known by all writers and people who are engaged in the process of writing. As to the problem of how to write correctly, especially from the point of view of meaning (semantic) and comprehension, is quite a laborious process that needs much effort, skill and understanding.

Flaws in reasoning that lead to illogical statements are called **logical fallacies** [3, p. 121]. Logical fallacies tend to occur most often when ideas are being argued, although they can be found in all types of writing. Most logical fallacies masquerade as reasonable statements, but they are in fact attempts to manipulate readers by reaching their emotions instead of their intellects, their hearts rather than their heads. Most logical fallacies are known by labels. Each indicates a way that thinking has gone wrong during the reasoning process.

A **hasty generalization** occurs when someone generalizes from inadequate evidence. Supporting the following statement with only two examples creates a hasty generalization: “*My hometown is the best place in the state to live.*” **Stereotyping** is a type of hasty generalization that occurs when someone makes prejudiced, sweeping claims about all of the members of a particular religious, ethnic, racial, or political group: “*Everyone from country X is dishonest.*” **Sexism** occurs when someone discriminates against people on the basis of sex [2, p. 94].

A **false analogy** is a comparison in which the differences outweigh the similarities, or the similarities are irrelevant to the claim that the analogy is intended to support. Homespun analogies often seem to have an air of wisdom about them, but just as often they fall apart when examined closely: *Old Joe Smith would never make a good President of the United States because an old dog cannot learn new tricks*. Learning how to be a good President of the United States is hardly comparable to a dog’s learning new tricks.

A **circular argument**, sometimes called a *circular definition*, is an assertion merely restated in slightly different term: *Boxing is a dangerous sport because it is unsafe*. Here, „unsafe” conveys the same idea as „dangerous” rather than adding something new. This „**begs the question**” because the conclusion is the same as the premise.

Self-contradiction occurs when two premises are used that cannot simultaneously be true: *Only when nuclear weapons have finally destroyed us will we be convinced of the need to control them*. This statement is self-contradictory in that no one will be around to be convinced after everyone has been

destroyed.

A **red herring**, sometimes referred to as *ignoring the question*, sidetracks an issue by bringing up a totally unrelated issue: *Why worry about pandas becoming extinct when we should be concerned about the plight of the homeless?* Someone who introduces an irrelevant issue hopes to distract the audience, as a red herring might distract bloodhounds from a scent [4, p. 78].

An **appeal to the person**, also known as *ad hominem*, attacks the appearance, personal habits, or character of the person involved instead of dealing with the merits of the issue: *We could take her plea for money for the homeless seriously, if she were not so nasty to the children who live next door to her.*

The **bandwagon approach**, also known as *going along with the crowd*, implies that something is right because everything is doing it. Truth, however, cannot be determined by majority vote: *Smoking is not bad for people because millions of people smoke.*

Using **false or irrelevant authority**, sometimes called *ad verecundiam*, means citing the opinion of an „expert” who has no claim to expertise about the subject. This fallacy attempts to transfer prestige from one area to another. Many television commercials rely on this fallacy — a famous tennis player praising a brand of motor oil or a popular movie star lauding a brand of cheese.

Card-stacking, also known as *special pleading*, ignores evidence on the other side of a question. From all the available facts, the person arguing selects only those facts that will build the best (or worst) possible case. Many television commercials use this strategy. When three slim, happy consumers praise a new diet plan, they do not mention (1) the plan does not work for everyone and (2) other plans work better for some people. The makers of the commercial selected evidence that helps their cause, ignoring any evidence that does not.

The either-or fallacy, also known as *false dilemma*, offers only two alternatives when more exist. Such fallacies often touch on emotional issues and can therefore seem accurate at first [5, p.56]. When people reflect, however, they come to realize that more alternatives are available. Here is a typical example of an either-or fallacy: *Either go to college or forget about getting a job.* This statement implies that a college education is a prerequisite for all jobs, which is not true.

Taking something out of context separates an idea or fact from the material surrounding it, thus distorting it for special purposes.

Appeal to ignorance assumes that an argument is valid simply because there is no evidence on the other side of the issue [4, p. 234]. Something is not true merely because it cannot be shown to be false. Conversely, something is not false simply because it cannot be shown to be true. Appeals to ignorance can be very persuasive because they prey on people’s superstitions or lack of knowledge. Here is a typical example of such flawed reasoning. *Since no one has proven that mental depression does not cause cancer, we can assume that it does.* The absence of opposing evidence proves nothing. Writing is an ongoing process of considering alternatives and choosing the best variant. When one better understands the writing process then better one is to write and the more he or she will enjoy this fascinating process.

Bibliography

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