Logical Fallacies
for the writer of critical essays on literature

Logical fallacies are arguments that are built upon faulty premises. We call them “logical” because they seem logical, but are actually fallacious in nature. A premise is a statement on which another statement is inferred or based. Fallacious reasoning is problematic because conclusions reached as a result of this type of thinking are inaccurate. Therefore, no one can use logical fallacies as standards of proof when effectively arguing a point. Be aware that many fallacies overlap or lead to one another. Logical fallacies may, or may not, be intentionally used. However, by identifying common types of logical fallacies you can avoid using them in your own thinking/writing and identify them when you are evaluating research. Being able to identify logical fallacies in another person’s argument will help you dig out the hidden assumptions and will therefore enable you to better evaluate that argument. Below are a list of fallacies and fallacious strategies.

Amoeba Vocabula: using vague expressions to avoid committing to a statement (i.e. “sort of” “kind of” “a certain tone”).

False Analogy: comparing two things as though they are actually alike when they have key features which are different (i.e. comparing needlepoint to brain surgery).

Begging the Question (Circular Logic): providing the initial claim as a reason for the conclusion, offering no actual support for the claim while appearing to do so by reusing the premise (i.e. Young people like rap because it is the most enjoyable music to listen to).

Equivocation: when the same word is used twice but without acknowledging a shift in context, the reader is manipulated into thinking the word means the same thing both times, but does not (i.e. This affair is none of your affair).

Fallacy of Composition: claiming that something in one medium (either fictional, artistic in representation or in real life) cannot be valid, worthy for another medium (i.e. a sexually explicit scene in a porno is the same thing as a sexual act in the bedroom).

Tempus E Locus Peculiaris: making the assumption that any difference between two or more things is only a result of time and place without proof of that assumption (i.e. Teen pregnancy is more frequent today than it was in the 1950’s because the 1950’s were a more innocent time).

False Cause Fallacy: assuming causal relationships between two events based solely on the two events happening close in time, or “after this, therefore because of this” (i.e. “I joined the Confederacy for two weeks. Then I deserted. The Confederacy fell” – Mark Twain).

Slippery Slope: “domino theory” and “ripple effect,” aka one thing leads to another (i.e. If we legalize marijuana, all teenagers will become drug addicts).

Ad Hominem (Personal Attack): attacking someone personally while criticizing them in a totally different arena (i.e. Edna St. Vincent Millay was rumored to be bisexual or lesbian. We can assume this is why she is so aggressive toward men in her work.)

False Authority (the opposite of Ad Hominem): giving a person authority based on their reputation rather than the merits of their argument/writing or focusing on and judging the quality of the writing rather than analyzing the content, meaning, and composition.

Poisoning the Well: dismissing another person’s ideas and insights because of that person’s assumed prejudiced, self-interested, negative motivations (i.e. Edgar Allan Poe married his first cousin, who was only 13 years old at the time of their union, which makes him a pervert and his writings the scribblings of a pedophile.)