



## Writing Centre

### AVOIDING COMMON ERRORS IN LOGIC AND REASONING

The goal of writers is to present original ideas and convince readers that these ideas are valid by presenting well-reasoned and organized arguments.

In order to convince a reader successfully, you must clearly present your *thesis*—the main idea that you want to explore or defend. Explain your *premises*—the reasons why you believe the main statement is true, and provide relevant *evidence* to demonstrate that each of your premises are reasonable.

When you break down the parts of a paper into these 3 things: **thesis, premises, and evidence**, creating an argument sounds deceptively easy. In practice, however, it can be difficult to judge whether you have communicated a logical defence of your ideas. Once you have been working on an essay for a while, you can get so caught up in the details that it becomes impossible to see the argument as a whole or recognize gaps or errors in your reasoning.

Here are some tips to avoid errors in logic and reasoning:

- Student writers frequently weaken their arguments when they rely on **unstated or invalid assumptions**. An assumption is a statement or idea that you accept as true without proof or demonstration. *Therefore, provide proof for all arguments.*
- Among these assumptions, stated and unstated, are those that are based on personal **prejudices or stereotypes**. *Avoid prejudices and stereotypes, no matter how popular or true you may think they are.*
- An error in reasoning, similar to making an unstated or invalid assumption occurs when a writer employs an **unsupported assertion** to support their idea. An assertion is a declaration stated positively, but with no support or proof.
- Student writers can make similar errors when they **suppress** or provide **incomplete evidence**. *Always support ideas with thorough evidence.*
- Another common logical error is **circular reasoning**. Student writers can fall into the trap of circular reasoning when their belief in their idea is both the starting point and the goal of



their argument. *Begin with an initial idea which is different than your main idea, but will also lead directly into supporting your main argument.*

- When student writers defend an opinion or a controversial thesis, they sometimes inappropriately try to persuade their readers by **appealing to emotions** instead of composing a careful, reasoned argument. *Avoid emotional persuasion.*
- Student writers also need to be careful to avoid **false or faulty analogies**. Analogies are comparisons, and writers can use them to illustrate points, but not to replace arguments. *Avoid excessive use of, or debatable analogies.*

Reference: Princeton University Writing Centre. (n.d.). Retrieved from [http://web.princeton.edu/sites/writing/Writing\\_Center/Handouts/logic&reason.pdf](http://web.princeton.edu/sites/writing/Writing_Center/Handouts/logic&reason.pdf)

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