

Seth Thatcher
Eng 509
Royar

Lesson Plan

Title: Identifying Logical Fallacies – Refutation Paper

Immediate Objective:

The immediate objective of this assignment will be that students understand what is meant by “logical fallacies” and to have a basic vocabulary to define the common ones (i.e. Students will know that “Non sequitur” refers to a logical fallacy that uses irrelevant evidence to support an argument).

Long-term expected outcomes:

Students should be able to identify logical fallacies within professional writing and their own. Students should use these skills in order to refute the arguments of others within their own papers.

Connections to course goals:

This assignment will address all of the essential goals to English 100.

One of the essential goals to English 100 is for students to have the ability to think and reason analytically. By being able to identify and refute logical fallacies students will have to exhibit a close reading of the text as well as a thorough understanding of its material.

Another essential goal to English 100 is for students to communicate accurately and effectively. This assignment will make students work together in groups and ask them to write one refutation paper in which they counter argue one professional writer’s claims.

The final essential goal of English 100 is to locate, select, organize, and present information efficiently. Students will have to do some reading that is outside of the assigned course reading. Students must be able to comprehend and summarize this information clearly.

Procedure:

Timeline

The estimated class time to go over this lesson will be approximately 2 weeks (5 class periods of 1 hour each).

Classroom Activities

Day 1 (Wednesday) – Students will have been assigned reading in textbooks (*Elements of Argument* pp. 291-301). Students will be quizzed over the 14 common fallacies described in the textbook (Quiz will consist of 14 questions of matching. Each student will be given a list of the common fallacies alongside 14 examples – students should match fallacy to the corresponding example). Quiz should take no longer than 10-15 minutes. After quiz, class discussion will commence over the reading. I do not expect students to be able to appropriately identify all examples from the quiz. This will be an

ungraded quiz used only to get students adapted to recognizing fallacies. It should be expected that students have trouble in properly attaching a name to each fallacy. The important aspect of the assignment will be that students are able to recognize a fallacy in an argument. Even if students are not able to place the proper name to the fallacy, they should be able to speak on what is wrong with the argument (i.e. Students should recognize that the argument “What can the priest tell us about marriage? He’s never been married himself,” is a logical fallacy (Rottenberg, 295). Whether they can ascribed the name Ad Hominem at this point is secondary). For more practice, students will go over exercises 1-32 in class on pages 319-321. Students will be assigned reading in textbook for the next class discussion – Ferenc Mate’s excerpts from “A Reasonable Life” pp. 301-06). It should be explained that this is all for the purpose of writing a refutation paper which will be due in a week and a half.

Day 2 (Monday) – Students should come to class prepared to discuss the Mate essay. Class discussion will cover some of the logical fallacies made in the essay. Students should begin to realize that common fallacies are made in every argument based on assumptions or warrants that the writer is betting the reader will buy into. If students are capable of finding logical fallacies in professional work then it should be that much easier to find them in their own. Class discussion over the reading should last for the first half of class time (30 minutes). If in the event it seems that students have not done the assigned reading, the instructor will begin the second half of the lesson early. For the second half of the lesson, the instructor will set aside a brief 10-minute period for students to read one essay in class (Adolph Hitler’s essay “On Nation and Race”). Afterwards, class discussion will continue concerning the essay and the logical fallacies found. Again, it is more important that students recognize that there are logical fallacies within the paper than it is for them to properly identify each one. At the end of class, students will be assigned to find one essay from their textbook (approximately 3 to 6 pages) with which they will write a refutation. Students should come to the next class having read the essay that they have chosen.

Day 3 (Wednesday) – Students will be given class time to begin writing their refutations. Students should begin by briefly summarizing the essay in their own words. It is important for the students to be able to identify the topic, thesis, and audience of their piece if they are going to write a proper refutation. If students are unable to understand their piece in these elements, they should try choosing another essay. Writing the summary should take no more than 10 minutes. A few students will be asked to share their summaries in order for the instructor to get an idea as to whether or not they have understood the essay. After there has been adequate discussion of student responses (15-20 minutes), students will be given another in-class writing assignment with which they should attempt to point out the logical fallacies within their essay (5-10 minutes). Afterwards, students will be asked to share what logical fallacies they discovered in their essay. These writing assignments are guided to allow students to begin outlining their refutation arguments that will be assigned for the next class period (rough draft – peer review).

Day 4 (Friday 1/2) – Students will come to class with the first draft of their refutation. Students will conduct a peer review of each other’s work (groups of 2, no more than 3). Students will be given a handout that discusses what they should be looking for in each other’s papers. Each handout will consist of two parts: 1) Writer’s comments – These

questions should address the author's opinion of the strengths and weaknesses of his/her paper, expectations for improvement, and maintaining voice (the third section about maintaining voice is critical – students may have a tendency to rewrite the original author's argument for him/her). 2) Reviewer's comments – These questions should address the reviewer's opinion on the introduction, organization, strength and weaknesses of refutation, and conclusion. Students should be encouraged to write as much as possible concerning each question (use back of paper if necessary). Also, after students have read and responded to one another's arguments, students should spend the rest of the class period orally discussing with one another what they wrote on the peer review sheet in order to explain any comments that might not be clear. The instructor should stress the importance of the peer review and make sure students take advantage of class time. Final drafts of refutations are due next class period

Day 5 (Monday) – Students should hand in refutation papers. Students will be graded on whether or not they were able to properly summarize the original author's argument (identify thesis), whether or not they were able to identify logical fallacies within the original author's argument, how well they refute those arguments, and whether or not they properly conclude their paper in a clear fashion. Begin discussion on next writing assignment – the research project and the importance of conducting good research. This should serve as a good segue from identifying good arguments from bad ones when students are finding articles for their research topics.

Evaluation:

Students will be graded on the Refutation Paper as follows:

Students who receive an **E** for the assignment will exhibit no understanding of the assignment or fail to hand in a paper.

Students who receive a **D** for the assignment will exhibit a mild understanding of the assignment by being able to summarize the author's essay but makes no attempt at refuting the argument. Papers do not adhere to length requirements.

Students who receive a **C** for the assignment will exhibit some understanding of the assignment by being able to summarize the author's essay and to identify at least one logical fallacy within the paper correctly. Papers meet the standard length requirement.

Students who receive a **B** for the assignment will exhibit an understanding of the assignment by being able to summarize the author's essay and correctly identify two or more logical fallacies within the paper. Papers meet the standard length requirement.

Students who receive an **A** for the assignment will exhibit a thorough understanding of the assignment by being able to summarize the author's essay and correctly identify two or more logical fallacies within the paper. Students will also exhibit proper structure and organization of the paper and include a suitable conclusion. Papers meet the standard length requirement.

The range of the grades will be based on readability, voice, and overall progress from first to second draft. Excessive grammatical mistakes and/or loss of voice, or failure to improve upon first draft will effect on what end of the scale students finish with their respective grade (i.e. + or -).

Theoretical Rationale:

Over the past semester (Spring 2004) I have been exposed to and graded three types of student papers in English 100 (basic argument [review], summary and response, and refutation). By far, the refutation paper was the most difficult for these particular students to write. The students had a tendency to be able to identify what was wrong with an essay but failed to supply sufficient counter evidence/proof/argumentation to refute their claims. It is suspected that these students encountered trouble due to the fact that they did not equip themselves with an adequate strategy for making a refutation. As Sondra Perl examined in her study of “unskilled” college writers, “Since the written products of basic writers often look arbitrary, observers commonly assume that the students’ approach is also arbitrary” (Perl, 52). This lesson plan tries to establish a basic set-up, or process, in order to get students thinking about how they should strategize a paper (Students should first become familiar with their topics – then outline an approach for whatever their purpose might be – and finally spend sufficient time in revising those arguments). Over the past semester, I have become increasingly influenced by the “writing as process” theories. This lesson plan covers some of those same basic theoretical ideas and strategies that have been examined by experts within the classroom. I suspect when covering these ideas to my students that will have trouble in properly naming logical fallacies, but hopefully will be able to recognize weaknesses within other writers’ (and their own) work.

Students should become familiar with the process of identifying logical fallacies by first becoming accustomed to what it means to make logical fallacies within an argument. It is understood that by this time students are introduced to this subject, they will have an understanding of “warrants” or underlying assumptions within an argument. By going over the works of other professional writers and identifying the logical fallacies within their work students should become more analytical readers. Above all else, students should gain an understanding of what it means to read closely and what it means to write without making outlandish fallacies. I suspect that although most students will recognize a fallacy when they come across one, they may not be able to counter it with sufficient backup. In most papers that I’ve read, students countered arguments with assumptions of their own. Rather than trying to explain what was wrong with the original argument, they had a tendency to make a worse claim in the refutation. This is why I feel that planning the refutation in such a way will give students an opportunity to address what they perceive the subject of the author’s claim and the best way to go about refuting that claim.

It should be mentioned that for the purposes of this assignment, limited time will be spent in addressing an outline for the refutation paper. It has been proven in the past that good, effective writing does not always conform to a certain structure. The purpose of the in-class writing assignments is only to begin the students in their writing. As Mike Rose shows in his article concerning student writers’ block, “students who experienced blocking were all operating either with writing rules or with planning strategies that

impeded rather than enhanced the composing process...[while other] students who were not hampered by writer's block also utilized rules, but they were less rigid ones, and thus more appropriate to a complex process like writing" (Perl, 86). These activities should be used in order to get students started with their writing by thinking about it critically (much in the same way they approached the reading assignment). If students are able to regurgitate a useful summary and identify a logical fallacy within the text, then it can be said with some certainty that they have read the essay closely. I suspect that not all students will be able to do this with a fundamental ease; however, this is why I have chosen to do this portion of the assignment in-class. Having this section devoted to class time will allow me to supervise student writing and address any problems they may be having with the assignment. It has been my experienced that the most troubling place for a student when writing is at the beginning. If they are provided with the help they need to get started then they might be able to dive into the writing assignment with minimal difficulty.

Finally, the idea behind the peer review is to give students an idea of the questions they should ask while making revisions in their own work. These questions are based on ideas that are far more important than grammatical revisions. In one sense, the type of revisions that the peer review is striving for is "global" (rather than "local" - grammatical). The global revision refers to the overall understanding of the text and whether or not there seems to be clarity throughout the piece. As Nancy Sommers points out, most "revision strategies...are consistent with the students' understanding of the revision process as requiring lexical changes but not semantic changes" (Perl, 79). I do not want this to be the case in my classroom. Students should familiarize themselves with both types of revision early on in their academic careers before they are asked to write more extensive, longer essays in which the revision processes become more difficult. I suspect that most students will use the peer review time wisely and discuss their papers throughout the class period. I may, however, only use a peer review for this assignment due to those students who do not seem to get anything out of the peer review.

In the end, I hope that my expectations for this assignment will be met (but only time will tell). In the event that my students do not meet the expectations that I have given them I will try to adhere to the problems that occurred. For example, if students continue to misdiagnose the logical fallacies within their assigned reading, I may do away with the terminology and definitions section of the lesson plan. Instead, I could spend more time on simply identifying gaps and weaknesses in professional writing with students without having to give a name to it. Also, for those students who seem to struggle with in-class writing assignments, I may be able to dedicate that class period to reading strategies. One essay that I plan on using some time through the semester will be Mortimer Adler's essay on how to read critically entitled "How to Mark a Book." Adler provides useful strategies for students who have not up to this point in their academic careers learned how to read analytically.

In my observation of English 100 this semester I have seen the difficulty that this section of the course gives to both students and teachers. I am hopeful that the philosophies I have learned along the course of this semester will help me create an effective way of teaching my students the importance of identifying logical fallacies when reading arguments and writing their own.

Works Cited

Perl, Sondra. *Landmark Essays on Writing Process*. Davis, CA: Hermagoras, 1994.

Rottenberg, Annette T. *Elements of Argument* 7th ed. Boston/New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003.