

Zombie Fallacies (adapted from *Teaching Arguments*)

Purpose: To analyze and evaluate the effect of extreme modifiers and vague language in claims

Directions to Students: Write a claim in which you “resurrect” as many dead words as possible, using a minimum of four from the list below. The “dead words” include modifiers, or describing words, that suggest extreme or universal conditions (e.g., “always,” “totally,” and “never”). The list also includes indefinite pronouns that are broadly inclusive (e.g., “everyone,” “nobody,” and “all”). Indefinite pronouns don’t refer to specific people. Add some of the extreme modifiers and indefinite pronouns from the list to a claim you’re currently working on or one that you’ve already written. See what you notice.

After writing your “zombie” claim, identify the logical fallacies you’ve created. Then answer the following questions:

1. What kind of evidence do you need to reasonably make this claim?
2. What are the assumptions behind this claim?
3. Which words, if any, are undefined? How would you need to define these words in order to further develop and support this claim?
4. How many people are affected by this issue? What do you know about them?
5. What historical periods and geographical regions are relevant to this issue?
6. Under what circumstances would this claim not be true?



Example: Because Algebra has always caused graduation problems for everyone, it should never be an admission requirement for any college. (*logical fallacy*: sweeping generalization)

Dead Words (extreme modifiers and indefinite pronouns): Always, never, everyone, everybody, everywhere, all, none, good, bad, no one, everything, anything, perfect, nobody, obviously, totally, completely, no matter what, absolutely, any

Logical Fallacies (this is just a partial list):

Band Wagon: Appeal to the popular (e.g., “Everyone is doing it.”)

Sweeping Generalization: Making a broad claim that doesn’t account for variations and exceptions (e.g., “All women make good mothers.”)

Hasty Generalization: Drawing a conclusion without sufficient evidence and analysis (e.g., “I’m a boy who likes to play video games. My brother likes to play video games. Therefore, all boys like to play video games.”)

Appeal to Tradition: Basing an argument solely on long-standing practice (e.g., “We’ve always done things this way.”)

False Analogy: Claiming that something is like something else without sufficient grounds for the comparison (e.g., “Eating a French fry is totally like smoking a cigarette.”)