**Evaluating arguments:**

* **Logical fallacies :**

Besides the deceptive appeals you saw in the preceding section, an argument may contain logical fallacies, errors in reasoning that can make the argument invalid or false.

It should be noted that, unlike appeals to emotion and slanted language, not all fallacies are purposely or consciously intended to dupe the unwary reader. Many writers lapse into them from ignorance or as a result of sloppy thinking.

* **Ad hominem argument :**

From Latin, ad hominem means "to the man." The ad hominem fallacy can take two forms: either attacking the character of the person rather than the principles he or she stands for or attacking the character and reputation of a position's supporters. In either case, the argument ignores the person's deeds or character

**Example :**

I'm certainly not going to vote for Proposition 16 in the next election. I just looked at the election pamphlet and discovered that the big oil companies are in favor of it. There must be something in it for them.

* **Cause and effect fallacies :**

The false cause fallacy results when the cause cited is either irrelevant to the effect or is so remote. During the 1992 election, President George Bush took credit for playing a decisive role in the breakup of the Soviet Union. His opponent, Bill Clinton, responded, "Mr. Bush's taking credit for the breakup of the Soviet Union is like the rooster's taking credit for the dawn." **Here is another example :**

It is obvious that Sam Anderson would grow up to be an ex murderer. According to an interview I read, he was subjected to a rigid toilet training regime when he was a toddler.

* **Begging the question :**

When a writer begs the question, he or she presents a proposition and assumes that it has been proved when it has not. A simpler way of understanding the begging-the-question fallacy is this: The writer essentially is arguing in a circle, assuming that a point is true without proof and drawing a conclusion based on it.

Example : Teenagers should be prevented from having abortions. After all, a girl wouldn't get pregnant in the first place if she wasn't allowed to terminate her mistake.

In this example, the writer replaces one debatable assumption with another equally debatable one: The option of having an abortion leads to unwanted pregnancies. Therefore, the writer assumes but does not address the idea that removing abortion as an option will solve the teenage pregnancy problem.

Another problem with cause and effect reasoning is that a writer may identify a single reason to explain a complex situation-whether good or bad-when, in fact, other reasons may be accountable. We call this the questionable cause fallacy. For example, many studies have found that college students who attend class regularly receive better grades than those who attend sporadically. One explanation is that regular attendance ensures that students are exposed to ideas in the classroom, but this may not wholly account for higher grades. They may result from better study habits and discipline; further, it is likely that better-disciplined students are also likely to be disciplined enough to get up in time to make their classes. Thus, the statement that exposure to ideas causes higher grades can be termed a questionable cause because other factors may affect one's academic achievement.

* **Either- or fallacy :**

Sometimes called false dilemma, the either-or fallacy occurs when the writer reduces a complicated issue to only two choices, thereby ignoring other possibilities or alternatives.

A married woman should stay home and devote herself to raising her children. If she wants a career, she should forget about having children. (Dr. Laura Schlessinger, call-in radio advice giver, often uses this argument, although to be fair, she does suggest that a husband could work part time to take over the child care duties if his wife wants to work a few hours a week)

* **Evasion :**

Evasion is a fallacy that occurs when a speaker or writer evades or ignores the question altogether by talking about something else. For example, when asked how he plans to solve the community's homeless problem, a mayor would be guilty of evading the question if he talked at length about the importance of finding a solution to homelessness without ever proposing how to go about doing it.

* **Oversimplification :**

The fallacy of oversimplification can involve either reducing a complicated issue to overly simple terms or suppressing information that would strengthen the argument.

**Example :**

The way to stop drug abuse in this country is to increase dramatically the number of drug enforcement agents and to punish severely anyone caught possessing illegal drugs.

This was the argument used by proponents of the Bush and Reagan Administrations' War on Drugs. Some critics of the War on Drugs program, however, charged that this approach was too simplistic and, in fact, hadn't worked despite the billions of dollars poured into the program. They argued that the only effective approach to fighting drug abuse was in attacking the causes of drug abuse, rather than simply putting more money into law enforcement.