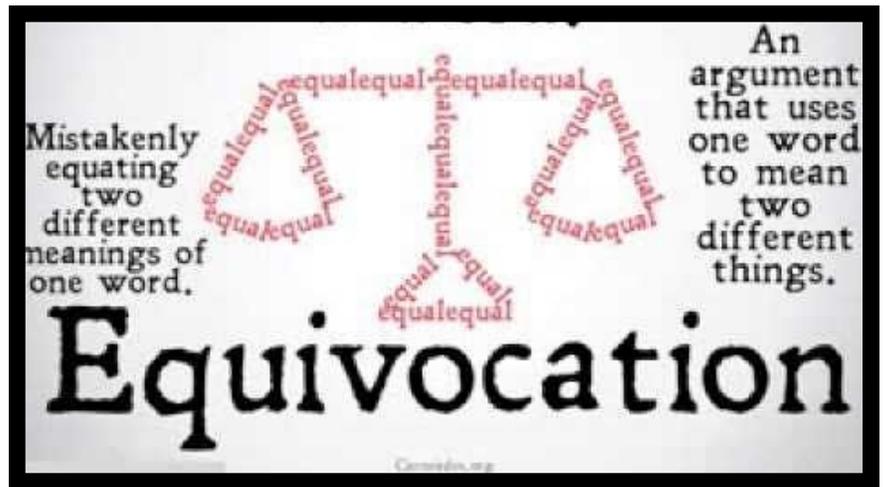


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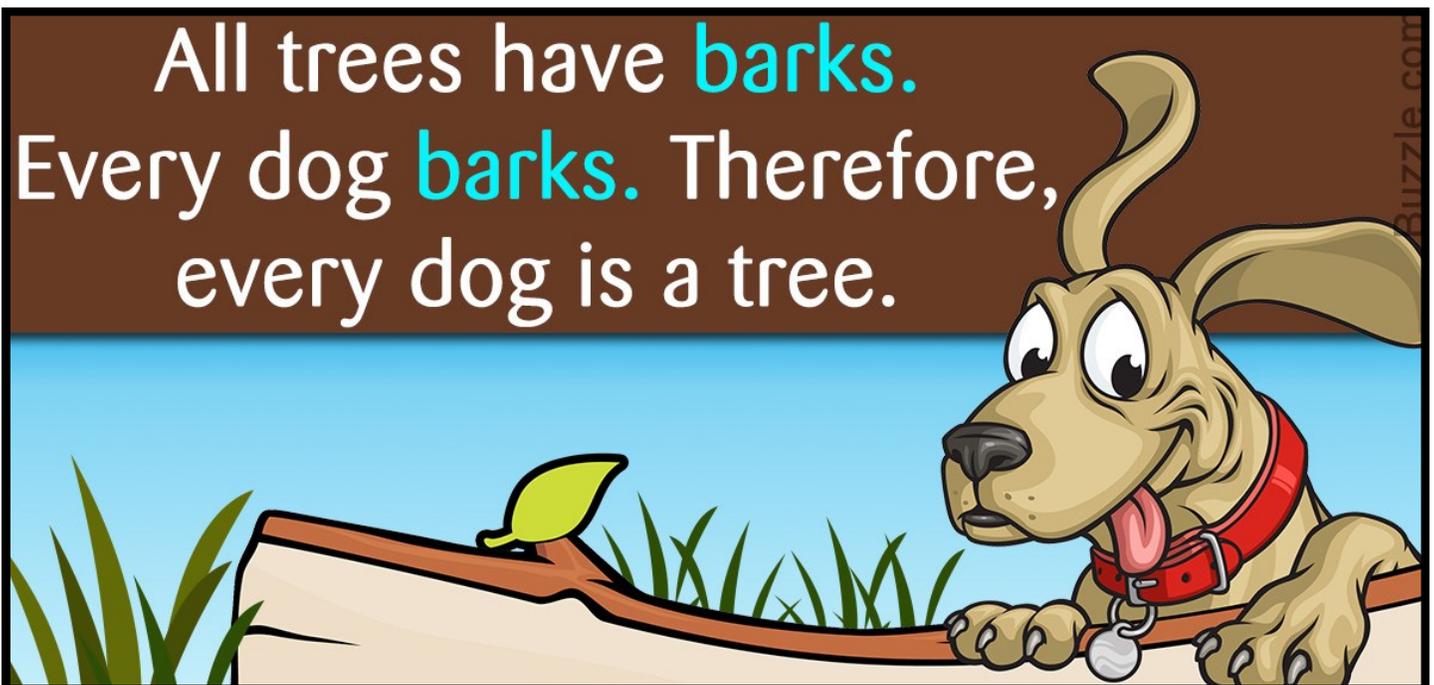
—LESSON FOUR—

MR. ZUBEK
DEBATE (ARGUMENTATION)
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EQUIVOCATION

An **equivocation** is an argument that gives a lie “an honest appearance.” In other words, an equivocation is a half-truth. Equivocations are usually juvenile tricks of language. Consider the plagiarist who copies a paper word-for-word from a source and then declares—honestly, she or he thinks—that “I wrote the entire paper myself.” Yes—that student physically copied the piece on her or his own. But the plagiarist is using the word “wrote” in a way that is equivocally—that is, in a limited sense, knowing that most people would understand “writing” as something more than merely copying words. Many public figures are fond of choosing their words carefully so that no certain, concrete meaning emerges.



NON SEQUITUR

A **non sequitur** is an argument in which claims, reasons, or warrants fail to connect logically; one point doesn't follow another. As with other fallacies, children are notably adept at framing non sequiturs. Consider this familiar form: "You don't love me, or you'd buy me that bike!" It might be evident to harassed parents that no connection exists between love and toys, especially if they were to consider the implied warrant:

Claim: You must not love me . . .

Rationale: . . . because you haven't bought me that bicycle . . .

Warrant: . . . because buying bicycles for children is essential to loving them . . .

A five-year-old might endorse that warrant. But no responsible, reasonable adult would, because love does not depend on buying things. Activities more logically related to love might include feeding and clothing a child; taking care of a child when she or he is sick; providing shelter and education; and so on. In effect, non sequiturs occur when debaters omit a step in an otherwise logical chain of reasoning, assuming that the audience agrees with what may be a highly contestable claim.

For example, it is a non sequitur to simply argue that the comparatively poor performance of American students on international mathematics examinations means that the country should spend more money on math education. Such a conclusion might be justified if a correlation were known or found to exist between mathematical ability and money spent on education. But the students' performance might be poor for reasons other than educational funding. A rhetor should first establish the nature of the problem before offering a solution.





THE STRAW MAN

Those who resort to **“the straw man fallacy”** attack an argument that really is not there—one that’s much weaker or more extreme than the argument that’s actually being made. By “setting up a straw man” in this way, the rhetor has an argument that’s easy to knock down, proceeds to do so, then claims victory.

Consider, for example, the controversy surrounding “teaching evolution” versus “teaching intelligent design” in science classrooms. Those arguing against intelligent design may say that “intelligent design advocates the claim that life was created by some white-haired figure in the sky.” Those arguing against evolution sometimes say that “evolutionists claim that evolution is all random chance, so the human eye just came into existence randomly.” In *both* instances, these rhetors refute arguments that go *beyond* the claims their opponents have actually made. At least in their public political or legal statements, supporters of intelligent design do not make any claims about whom or what “the intelligent designer” is. And supporters of evolution contend that the process is random only in the sense that it’s drive by random mutations in genes; organisms “evolve” only if such mutations make them better adapted to their environment (such as by increasing their ability to detect light) and thus more likely to reproduce.

Both sides are attacking weak arguments their opponents aren’t actually making. As a result, both sides are ignoring the tougher issues.



FAULTY ANALOGY

Comparisons give ideas greater presence or help clarify concepts. When comparisons are extended, they become analogies—ways of understanding unfamiliar ideas by comparing them with something that's largely known.

It's true that people understand the world around them largely through comparisons, metaphors and analogies. But useful as such comparisons are, they may prove quite false, either on their own or when pushed too far or taken too seriously. At this point, they become **faulty analogies**—inaccurate or inconsequential comparisons between objects or concepts.

The universe is like an intricate watch.

A watch must have been designed by a watchmaker.

Therefore, the universe must have been designed by some kind of creator.

This fallacy consists in assuming that because two things are alike in one or more respects, they are necessarily alike in some other respect. Analogies and metaphors can be very useful to explain things to people and often play an important part in learning. However, because of the prevalence of false analogies, they are much less useful in making arguments.

Faulty analogies are, in short, “comparing apples to oranges.”

