

## Questionable Authority Errors in Reasoning

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**Definition:** A questionable authority error refers to a source that is not a specific expert on the idea or issue.

**Example:** My mother is well-known for her exquisite taste and style. She is so supportive and always remarks about how beautiful I am. I should be working as a supermodel.

**Explanation:** The mother may have a reputation for taste and style. However, the fact that she is her daughter's parent would make the mother prejudiced and a questionable authority.

### Practice

Guest speakers spoke on both energy and emotions. Experts say that the world will run out of oil in 20 years. A Harvard mathematician claims that love at first sight is impossible.

**Explain the Questionable Authority Error:** \_\_\_\_\_

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### Application

Write a topic sentence on a subject of your choice with supporting evidence and analysis which includes a questionable authority error in reasoning. Explain the questionable authority error.

**Topic Sentence:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Evidence:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Analysis with Questionable Authority Error:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Explain the Questionable Authority Error:** \_\_\_\_\_

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## Errors in Reasoning Practice Answers

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**Synonym Error:** The writer substitutes *dictatorship* for *undemocratic*. However, not all undemocratic forms of government are the same as dictatorships.

**Non Sequitur Error:** The conclusion that “the sky must be made of ocean water” does not follow logically from the facts presented.

**Red Herring Error:** The statement “the world has always had its share of poor people” attempts to distract the reader from the issue of poverty as the most important world problem.

**Unsupported Generalization Error:** The fact that specific children who have blonde hair are good athletes does not justify the broad generalization that “All blonde children excel at sports.”

**Poisoning the Well Error:** The president’s argument that reducing taxes will encourage taxpayers to spend more money is weakened by the comment that all leading economists have criticized the plan.

**Cause and Effect Errors:** Sneezing after a commercial is a matter of coincidence. Commercials do not cause sneezing. There is no logical cause-effect connection.

**Begging the Question Errors:** The statement assumes an advisory document requires homeowners to agree to the advice.

**Either-Or Errors:** The statement ignores other options that true Americans might choose.

**Comparison Errors:** The price of tea and gas are unrelated issues and cannot be compared.

**Questionable Authority Errors:** In the first example, the expert is non-specific. In the second example, a mathematician is not an expert in matters of love.

**Contradiction Errors:** Skateboard injuries contradict the claim that the sport is completely safe.

**Inconsistency Errors:** The arguments that children should be required to wear helmets while riding bicycles, but not while in-line skating, are not in agreement.

**Omission Errors:** The fact that the Folsom High School Band is the only band in the city has been omitted.

**Oversimplification Errors:** This oversimplification ignores the complicated components such as baseball strategy, substitutions, and statistical probability.

**Sampling Errors:** Only about 20 dentists were surveyed as part of the sample group—hardly enough people upon whom to base a conclusion that “three out of every four dentists recommend flossing three times per day.”