

## Poisoning the Well Errors in Reasoning

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**Definition:** A poisoning the well error means that an argument is weakened by a criticism in the argument itself.

**Example:** The man had been accused of the crime although he wasn't convicted. And now he wants your vote to become the county sheriff? I guess people can vote for just about anyone.

**Explanation:** Although the candidate for sheriff was not convicted, support for him is weakened by the accusation of wrongdoing.

### Practice

A new tax reduction bill is needed to stimulate the economy. The president plans to reduce taxes in order to encourage taxpayers to spend more money to help business. The plan has been harshly criticized as "unworkable" by all leading economists.

**Explain the Poisoning the Well Error:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Application

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

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

\_\_\_\_\_

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

\_\_\_\_\_

**Analysis with Poisoning the Well Error:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Explain the Poisoning the Well 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.”