

Synonym Errors in Reasoning

Definition: A synonym error occurs when the writer substitutes one term or idea for another in the argument, yet the terms or ideas are not same.

Example: Getting advice on major decisions is essential. Mary always asked her grandfather for advice. He has a lifetime of experiences to draw upon to counsel his granddaughter, and older men have valuable wisdom to impart if one but asks.

Explanation: In this line of argument wisdom has been treated as a synonym for experience. Not all experiences produce wisdom or lead to good advice.

Practice

Democracies have multiple political parties. The Republic of Xandra has only one political party with real power. This dictatorship has been in control of since 1919.

Explain the Synonym Error: _____

Application

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

Topic Sentence: _____

Evidence: _____

Analysis with Synonym Error: _____

Explain the Synonym Error: _____

Errors in Reasoning Practice Answers

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.”