

Section **F**

Techniques of Maneuver

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1. Diversion

Game Book Definition

“To divert is to get off the subject. With the original issue left unresolved, one of the disputants begins to talk of something which has no apparent evidential value for his thesis. The diversion is full (instead of merely partial) when the second party to the argument ‘accepts’ the diversion and joins in discussion or argument over the new issue.”

From *Thinking Straighter*

“Sometimes Diversion is deliberate, more often innocent. When deliberate, the diverter realizes the shakiness of his position on the original issue and revives his ego by diverting to another issue on which he can take the better or stronger side. He may even hope to leave the impressions with any hearers or readers that he has won the original argument.”

Expanded Definition

- Most often (but not all the time), a Diversion example takes the form of a dialog.
- A speaker can divert himself or herself by straying off the subject.

Examples of Diversion

- a. Doe: “Larnis should be playing more. He played only one quarter in the loss to Richton.”
Roe: “You’re wrong. We won the Richton game by one point in the last second.”
Doe: “No, that’s the Mealville game YOU are thinking of.”
- b. Reporter at a presidential news conference: “Mr. President, did you make a mistake in authorizing arms to be sent secretly to Iran?”
President: “Mr. Jones, congratulations on your award as Journalist of the Year. Also I liked your recent article on the economy.” The president then calls on another reporter.

Example of Self-Diversion

- c. I’m sure that you will agree with me that Women’s Liberation has a great future. Why a great future? Well, it certainly doesn’t have a past. I say, Let the past be forgotten. Forgive and forget, I say. You and I have had our differences, but we don’t let them stand between us today.

Comment: The speaker starts out talking about the future but then digresses into a discussion of past differences.

The booklet definition quoted above recognizes “partial diversion” when the listener refuses to “take the bait” and get off the subject. However, the other speaker did make an attempt and therefore Diversion is still the answer.

Example of Partial Diversion

- d. Father: “Son, you came home after midnight last night. I want an explanation.”

Son: “Did you see that Notre Dame game on TV last night, Dad? I watched it at Tom’s house. Wasn’t that a great finish?”

Father: “Yeh, I saw it. I thought they should have gone for the field goal. But I’m still waiting for a good reason why you were late. The game was over by 11 o’clock.”

If there is a compelling reason to move to another subject, the answer is No Technique.

Example of No Technique rather than Diversion

- e. Boss to her chief assistant: “I know we had this meeting set up to go over the new budget and see where we may have to set new priorities. But a crisis has come up with one of our employees. We have to shift gears this morning. Now, here is what I need you to do.”

Your Notes for Diversion

2. Disproving a Minor Point

Game Book Definition

“When you have, say, two or more pieces of evidence of varying degree of importance, your opponent takes one of the less weighty of your arguments (perhaps a rather trivial point) and discredits that. He then acts as if (or attempts to create the impression that) he has disproved your whole case.”

From *Thinking Straighter*

- “A discussant bringing forward a large number of facts in support of a contention may very well bring forward one, at least, that is incorrect. The incorrectness of that piece of evidence is not enough to undermine his conclusion, but an opponent who fastens on that one fact and proves its wrongness or its inapplicability and passes over the rest of his opponent’s reasons as if they had never been mentioned can easily create the impression that the whole position of the other party has been discredited.”
- “This fallacy is apt to be more successful when the objection is given a touch of humor, perhaps satire. Then the other party is in danger of appearing somewhat ridiculous in his efforts to refocus the audience’s attention on the rest of his evidence.”

Expanded Definition

- Examples of this technique are usually dialogs. The first speaker presents at least three reasons to justify a conclusion. The second speaker disagrees with one of the reasons and thereby claims – or at least implies – that the conclusion is false.
- In some cases, the example consists of one speaker’s response to what someone else has said.

Example of Disproving a Minor Point

- a. Smith: “Computer prices are falling. I checked the ads in this morning’s paper and HP, Gateway, Apple, and Dell machines are all cheaper than they were last year.”

Jones: “You had better check those ads again. Dell’s prices have actually *increased* by 3%. Inflation is hitting the computer field just like every other area.”

Example of Disproving a Minor Point that is not a dialog

- b. You said that Lykeisha had limited experience as a cheerleader, very poor jumping ability, and did not smile a lot during her routines. So you don’t want her on the cheer squad. But Lykeisha was a member of her cheer squad in both 7th and 8th grades. She belongs on the squad here at Bonaparte High.

If the respondent contradicts every point made by a previous speaker, the answer is No Technique. [However, see the reference to this matter in the booklet discussion of Appeal to Ignorance below.]

Example of No Technique rather than Disproving a Minor Point

- c.** Chester: “Hanley should be reelected as mayor. He has a plan to revitalize the central city, plus he has reduced crime and trimmed the budget.”
- d.** Arthur: “Hanley claimed to have a plan to revitalize the central city when he was elected four years ago and yet he hasn’t done anything to implement the plan. As for crime, some types of crime, such as break-ins, are down but overall it has actually risen during his term. And he may have trimmed the budget but he hasn’t stayed within it. The city has overspent its income every year he’s been in office. No, I’m not voting to reelect Hanley.”

Your Notes for Disproving a Minor Point

3. Ad Hominem

Game Book Definition

“Instead of attacking your proposition, your opponent directs his argument against you as a person. Although a person’s past record is something one should take into consideration, it should *not* be one’s sole basis for judging an argument.

“The Ad Hominem attack often takes the form of discounting a proposition by attributing prejudice or bias to its supporters. But what motivates us to believe as we do, say what we say, is one thing. The truth or falsity, validity or invalidity, of what we say is another. It is possible to be prejudiced but right.

“Another form of Ad Hominem is charging your opponent with the inconsistency of not living up to what he advocates.”

From *Thinking Straighter*

“‘Consider the source’ is a popular device for closing off argument. It might be considered the opposite of the status appeal. Here you make use of your opponent’s ill fame or notoriety. Now it is true that if we are to evaluate a mere statement made without supporting evidence, the past reputation for reliability of the speaker is relevant. As a person Hitler has come to have a bad reputation. But is every proposition ever uttered by Hitler false, *no matter what evidence he offered*? Even when the Ad Hominem is not a trick, even when you sincerely loathe your opponent, you have the first obligation to consider the force of his argument, not of his person. What really counts, logically at least, is the truth of the statement or, if evidence is presented for a proposition, whether the conclusion is valid.”

Expanded Definition

Ad Hominem is a specific type of diversion because the opponent does not attack the argument head on but rather raises an irrelevant issue concerning the person presenting the argument.

This technique tries to get us to transfer our feelings about the person who is speaking to what the person is saying.

Example of Ad Hominem

- a. Judge Ginsbork says he will represent us well as a conservative Supreme Court Judge. This comes from the same man who smoked pot during his years at Harvard.

Comment: The judge’s past *behavior* is made an issue. If the behavior were recent, it might be relevant. However, if youthful indiscretions were brought up against every applicant, no one would qualify for the position.

- b. Congress shouldn’t bother to consult the Joint Chiefs of Staff about military appropriations. As members of the armed forces, they will naturally want as much money for military purposes as they think they can get.

Comment: Here the *motives* of the Joint Chiefs are questioned. Congress should take into account that military leaders will want as much as possible for their services (as do the heads of all other departments). However, this doesn’t justify ignoring the Chiefs entirely.

If the personal traits cited are relevant to the issue at hand, the answer becomes No Technique.

Example of No Technique rather than Ad Hominem

- c. I can't hire you as a bus driver. You've been convicted of drunk driving three times.

Comment: The applicant's drunk driving record is certainly relevant to the decision not to hire him as a driver.

Your Notes for Ad Hominem

4. Appeal to Ignorance

Game Book Definition

“A proposition (1) is said to be true because it has not been disproved or (2) is said to be untrue because it has not been proved.

“What is not disproved on a given occasion is not necessarily true. Is a scientific theory accepted as true because you cannot disprove it? Rather, the theory must be verified positively. Every person who presents a proposition in argument has the obligation to offer at least one reason in defense of it.

“Likewise, your opponent’s successful attack on all premises or reasons you advance does not in all strictness make his position right and yours wrong. All he has shown is that your position is not true for your reasons. Other people, now or later, may be able to produce better reasons. Similarly, your being able to show that your adversary in this defense has involved himself in contradiction is not sufficient to prove him wrong. Smith may be arguing that the taking of life is evil, but admits that he doesn’t object to killing animals for food. There is contradiction and confusion, but Smith may still be right that the taking of life is evil.”

From *Thinking Straighter*

“... Appeal to Ignorance amounts to a shifting of the burden of proof from one’s own shoulders to those of the opponent.”

Expanded Definition

This technique takes one of two forms: “You can’t prove your claim; therefore, your claim is false.” or “You can’t disprove what I say. Therefore, my claim is right.”

Appeal to Ignorance examples often present *speculation* that is impossible to verify or contradict, such as “We would have won the game if Smith hadn’t gotten hurt.” The speaker claims Victory by Default.

Examples of Appeal to Ignorance

- a. Sure there’s life on other planets. You can’t prove there isn’t.

Comment: The assertion deals with a matter that, at least at present, cannot be either proved or disproved. Obviously, finding life on *one* other planet is sufficient to verify the speaker’s claim. However, lack of such a discovery *thus far* does not mean the statement is false. The statement could be changed to its opposite (“There isn’t any life on other planets. You can’t prove there is.”) and still be Appeal to Ignorance.

- b. Benton High edged us out in the semifinals. Then they lost by 30 to Central in the finals. I guarantee we would have given Central a much better game than Benton did.

Comment: The speaker’s claim can never be tested. Even if his team plays Central next season, the makeup of the squads will be different.

Sometimes the person charged with Appeal of Ignorance commits the same fallacy in the rebuttal.

- c. Ken: “You Republicans tried to overturn the Georgia presidential election result because you lost the state. You wouldn’t have had any problem with the results if you had won.”

Ben: “And you Democrats would have challenged the result if you had lost.”

Comment: Ken and Ben are both guilty of Appeal to Ignorance.

If the speaker presents evidence for or against a proposition, the answer is No Technique.

Example of No Technique rather than Appeal to Ignorance

- d. Scientists have solid evidence to prove that there is another solar system.

If the person accused of Appeal to Ignorance agrees with the speaker’s claim, the answer is No Technique.

Example of No Technique rather than Appeal to Ignorance

- e. Ken: “You Republicans tried to overturn the Georgia presidential election result because you lost the state. You wouldn’t have had any problem with the results if you had won.”

Ben: “You’re right. We wouldn’t have challenged anything if we had won.”

Your Notes for Appeal to Ignorance

5. Leading Question

Game Book Definition

“(1) ‘It was early in the morning, wasn’t it?’

“(2) ‘Since when have you stopped drinking?’

“A leading question is one which (1) dictates or suggests an answer or (2) one which incriminates the answerer (or places him in an undesirable position) no matter how he answers. In the first example the answer ‘Yes’ is natural and is apt to be forthcoming, especially if the person to whom the question is addressed is highly suggestible and/or half awake. In the second example an answer in a form appropriate to the question (‘Since Tuesday,’ ‘Since a year ago’) would still be an admission that one did drink.

“Under the second form of Leading Question may be included any *question* which assumes as true that which is yet controversial and undecided. ‘Why is it that labor leaders are so much less concerned about the general welfare than are the leaders of business?’ The one to whom the question is addressed tends to ask himself, ‘Now why is that?’ or ‘What reason could I give for that?’ when he ought to immediately respond, ‘Wait a minute! Let’s settle first whether it is true that they are less concerned.’”

From *Thinking Straighter*

- “The Leading Question, of both types, is apt to be more successful if preceded by a clever build-up.”
- “In selling, the first type of leading Question is often employed as a device to neutralize the prospect’s naturally negative attitude. ... Salesmen are trained not to say, ‘Do you want this?’ but ‘Shall I wrap it up?’”

Examples of Leading Question that suggests an answer

- a. This state needs honest, moderate Congressmen. You are going to vote for Evers, aren’t you?

Comment: If you answer “no,” you oppose honest, moderate representation. Answer “yes” just to get this speaker out of your face.

- b. Voter asking a political candidate a question at an open meeting: “I’d like to know how you feel about the school issue. As you know, there is a strong move to relocate the high school. But many of us feel just as strongly that the high school should stay just where it is. If it were moved, most of the people in this room would be unnecessarily inconvenienced, to say nothing about the added burden on our city taxes. Now, what is your position on that issue?”

Comment: This certainly qualifies as the “clever build-up” Dr. Moulds referred to in *Thinking Straighter*. The questioner has painted the candidate into a corner by presenting one side of the issue and indicating that it is the side that man people agree with.

Example of Leading Question where either answer incriminates

- c. Talk show host to accused child abuser: “Which of your children did you abuse first – your son or your daughter?”

Example of Leading Question which assumes as true what is undecided

- d. Husband: “I think that this summer we ought to stay home; we don’t have the money for a vacation trip.”
Wife: “Why do you insist on having your own way all the time?”
Comment: The wife’s question assumes the husband *does* want his way all the time. He will obviously answer, “I don’t insist on my way all the time.”

Ads often employ a Leading Question to get the audience’s attention.

Example of Leading Question in an ad

- e. Ad: “Do you love food? Whole Food Market now has job opportunities available in our new stores in this area. Find out why we’ve been rated one of the best companies to work for eight years in a row!”
Comment: Since the obvious answer is “Yes,” you’ll listen to or read the rest of the ad, which turns out *not* to be about eating good food.

If a question does not either suggest an answer, put the answerer on the “hot seat,” or assume as true what is in doubt, No Technique is the correct response.

Example of No Technique rather than Leading Question

- f. Senator, you have proposed an ambitious national health plan that is clearly comprehensive and fair. Your estimate that it will cost \$25 billion a year seems realistic. My only question is: How do you intend to fund this expensive plan?
Comment: The question is sensible and open-ended. The speaker gives the Senator the opportunity to explain an important aspect of the proposed plan.

Your Notes for Leading Question

6. Complex Question

Game Book Definition

“A series of questions are put and then the questioner demands that they be answered as a whole by either ‘yes’ or ‘no.’ Since there is always the possibility that the answerer needs to answer each of the questions separately and differently, the complex question puts the answerer in an unfair position.

“Although the questions contained in the series may each be a leading question, the complex question differs in that separate answers are not desired.”

From *Thinking Straighter*

- “The Complex Question has the effect of the Leading Question, and for that reason it is not admissible in court – if the attorney on the other side raises an objection. Although the question and any answer elicited may then be ordered to be stricken from the records of the trial, it is not likely that the answer would be erased from the mind of a juror.”
- “In the hands of clever people, the Complex Question becomes a device for discrediting the respondent, particularly one who is nervous under questioning.”

Expanded Definition

- The most explicit examples of Complex Question end with the questioner demanding a “yes” or “no” answer.
- Other examples of Complex Question *implicitly* require a single blanket answer to multiple questions.

Example of Complex Question with an explicit closing demand

- a. Didn't you run across campus Saturday night? Haven't you been on campus many nights before? Didn't you paint the flagpole lavender? Answer me, “yes” or “no.”

Examples of Complex Question without an explicit demand for “yes” or “no”

- b. Do you deny, Mrs. Jones, that you are or have been a habitual liar, a gossip, and a troublemaker?

Comment: Here three questions are combined into one sentence: “Are you a habitual liar? Are you a gossip? Are you a troublemaker?” In this way, the speaker tries to force Mrs. Jones to answer “yes” for the entire package. A response like “I admit I'm a gossip, but I'm not a liar or a troublemaker” is not allowed.

- c. Superintendent, they said that you hid money in your budget so that the teachers couldn't find it for their raises, and you made racial remarks about your administrators and did not evaluate your legal staff properly. Is this true?

Comment: The phrase “Is *this* true?” attempts to force the Superintendent to give one answer rather than deal with each accusation separately. The points listed in the first sentence are implicit questions: “Didn't you hide

money in your budget? Didn't you make racial remarks? Didn't you fail to evaluate your legal staff properly?"

Ads sometimes start with a series of questions.

Example of Complex Question in an ad

- d. Ad: "Moving?"
- e. Don't want to drive a rental truck? Want a better way to move long distance? Then Movex is the company for you."

Comment: Movex wants you to answer "yes" to all three questions.

Complex Question can sometimes be difficult to distinguish from Leading Question. Complex Question requires a "yes" or "no" answer. If a series of leading questions is posed which imply an answer other than "yes" or "no" (such as the name of a product or political candidate), Leading Question is the correct answer.

Example of Leading Question rather than Complex Question

- f. Ad: "What comforts at once when a child has a cold? What helps open her nose, soothe her throat or congestion fast? And what helps her breathe easy for eight hours? What do those who use Vicks Vapo-Rub say gives them relief? There's only one answer; you know what it is."

Comment: The answer to each question is, of course, "Vicks Vapo-Rub."

Example of Complex Question rather than Leading Question

- g. Have you ever seen such a smooth coat on a horse? Can't you just see those legs powering him to victory after victory? Won't you look gorgeous in the winner's circle with him? Don't you just want him with your whole being?

Comment: The speaker tries to lure a "yes" answer to each question.

If a speaker poses several questions but does not require a blanket answer, No Technique is the correct answer.

Example of No Technique rather than Complex Question

- h. Senator addressing the Secretary of Defense at a hearing: "Mr. Secretary, I have three areas of concern. Have we wasted money on obsolete weapons, have you updated training methods, and is our force on the ground in Iraq getting the support it needs to do the job? Please address each of these points."

Your Notes for Complex Question

Junior/
Senior
Only

7. Inconsequent Argument

Game Book Definition

“Prosecuting attorney: ‘The defendant is charged with assault and attempted robbery. There can be no doubt of this man’s guilt. In the past ten years he has been convicted thirteen times on different charges of forgery, theft, and rape. (The prosecutor then goes into each of these cases in detail. He passes to the jurors documents which support what he has said about the defendant’s record.) The sickening record that I have exhibited speaks for itself. Gentlemen, I ask for a verdict of “guilty”.’

“The arguer proves or establishes something, but not what he said he would prove.

“In the example given above, surely proof of a previous bad record is a far cry from proof of guilt in the offenses charged. Proof of a bad record is ‘inconsequential’ – of no consequence. If bad record proves guilt, then for every crime there are millions of guilty people.

“Inconsequent Argument differs from Diversion in that in the latter nothing is proved, whereas in the former something has been proven, though not what the arguer was expected to prove.”

From *Thinking Straighter*

“This fallacy depends upon failure to notice the substitution of the irrelevant conclusion (and its supporting evidence) for the proof needed in support of the original contention. When it does occur, it is apt to be in the course of an extended argument concerning a complex issue.”

Expanded Definition

- The speaker gives an argument. However, the conclusion drawn is not a consequence of that argument.
- The speaker proves something other than what he thinks he proved.
- The speaker is guilty of, in effect, diverting his own argument.

Examples of Inconsequent Argument

- a. Ad: “University proves Grandmother’s Oats the best of all 14 leading cereals! Yes, we have the evidence. In a study of 14 nationally-known breakfast cereals, Grandmother’s Oats was first in protein. (See page 163 of the March-April issue of *Food Research*, an official publication of the Institute of Food Technologists.)”

Comment: It is quite a jump from being declared “first in protein” to claiming that Grandmother’s Oats is the “best of all 14 leading cereals.”

- b. U.S. President: “Capitalism is the superior economic system in the world today.”

Russian Premier: “You can’t prove that.”

President: “Yes, I can. Look at Japan. They have one of the highest standards of living and best literacy rates that exist today.”

Comment: This is similar to Selected Instances (Section E). The president shows that one capitalist country has a high standard of living. This does not mean that capitalism is the best economic system. (It may be but that is not the point. The example cited does not justify the conclusion the president tries to make.)

Diversion can resemble Inconsequent Argument. However, Diversion ends with nothing being proved. Inconsequent Argument proves something but not what the arguer thought he proved.

Example of Diversion rather than Inconsequent Argument

- c. Reporter: "How many troops has Russia sent into Afghanistan?"
Russian spokesman: "We send troops wherever we think they are needed. The United States has done the same thing many times. How many troops did the U.S. ship to Vietnam?"

Comment: The Russian spokesman diverts the discussion from Russian troops in Afghanistan to U.S. troops in Vietnam.

Example of Inconsequent Argument rather than Diversion

- d. Accused of sending troops into Afghanistan, the Russian government replied, "We always help underdeveloped countries. We've sent food, machinery, and trained engineers into Afghanistan for years."

Comment: The Russian spokesman sidesteps the question. However, he does present examples of how his government has helped an underdeveloped country. So something is "proved" relative to the issue at hand, which means this is not Diversion. However, the evidence cited does not show that the Russians have not sent troops into Afghanistan.

When Inconsequent Argument involves a person, it has aspects of Ad Hominem. Ad Hominem cites irrelevant facts from the past to discredit someone. Inconsequent Argument proves something about the person but not what the speaker thinks he is proving.

Example of Ad Hominem rather than Inconsequent Argument

- e. Frick: "I can't believe we're hiring Ann Winberg as our new principal."
Frack: "Why?"
Frick: "She was once the president of the Teachers Union."

Comment: Why does being president of the Teachers Union disqualify Ann from consideration as principal?

Example of Inconsequent Argument rather than Ad Hominem

- f. Frick: "Boy, our new principal isn't going to last very long."
Frack: "Why not?"
Frick: "Well, he wears those funny-looking ties, and his voice is too wimpy."

Comment: OK, the principal is a lousy dresser and doesn't have a strong voice. That doesn't prove he'll be a failure. Ad Hominem would attack the principal's policy based on something from his past, such as his own difficul-

ties as a student. Here inconsequential reasons are given to support a prediction of failure.

If the speaker gives an argument that *does* support the point being made, answer No Technique.

Example of No Technique rather than Inconsequent Argument

g. U.S. President: "Capitalism is the superior economic system in the world today."

Russian Premier: "You can't prove that."

President: "Yes, I can. The standard of living in capitalist countries is twice that of Communist countries on average. Also, of the top 25 nations in standard of living, 23 have some form of capitalism."

Comment: The president cites statistics comparing *all* capitalist nations to all Communist nations. So the general conclusion that capitalism is superior is supported.

Your Notes for Inconsequent Argument

8. Attacking a Straw Man

Game Book Definition

“Your opponent either (1) restates your position falsely or (2) exaggerates the consequences that may follow from your position.”

From *Thinking Straighter*

“This fallacy is called Attacking a Straw Man because the perpetrator of the fallacy attacks ... a scarecrow or a stuffed man, something easy to demolish but not having the strength of the real position. The fallacy is particularly effective where you lack opportunity to correct the misrepresentation of your position.”

Expanded Definition

When the opponent restates your argument, he does so in a way that makes it ridiculous. He tries to “put words in your mouth.”

Example of Attacking a Straw Man in which the opponent restates the position falsely

- a. Jones: “I believe that the inmates of our prisons should learn democracy while in confinement and that to this end there should be some form of prisoner self-government.” (Jones then states his reasons.)
Smith: “Let us now consider my opponent’s argument. He is saying that hardened criminals can be made perfect overnight.”

Comment: Jones did not say prisoners would be made perfect, just better. Jones also did not claim that improvement would occur overnight.

Example of Attacking a Straw Man in which consequences are exaggerated

- b. Joshua, you can’t be serious about allowing those kids to use our back lot to play ball. Next thing you know, they will be messing around in our back yard and pestering us about drinks and bathroom privileges. How can you allow such intrusions?

Leading Question can have aspects of Attacking a Straw Man in that the question implies a ridiculous outcome if the answer is not what the speaker expects. On the other hand, Attacking a Straw Man takes what the opponent says and twists it to make it ridiculous.

Example of Leading Question rather than Attacking a Straw Man

- c. Should peace abroad and prosperity at home be kept in the proven hands of the president – or should it be turned over to the extremists and hip shooters?

Example of Attacking a Straw Man rather than Leading Question

- d. Franklin: “I just can’t vote for the president’s reelection.”
Delano: “So you want to turn the presidency over to the extremists and hip shooters.”

If a speaker responds directly and relevantly to the points raised by an opponent, No Technique is the answer.

Example of No Technique rather than Attacking a Straw Man

- e. Jones: “I believe that the inmates of our prisons should learn democracy while in confinement and that to this end there should be some form of prisoner self-government.” (Jones then states his reasons.)
Smith: “You raise some good points. However, I’m concerned that we may spend a great deal of money without achieving positive results. Has your program been tried in any other states and, if so, what have been the results?”

Your Notes for Attacking a Straw Man

9. Victory by Definition

Game Book Definition

“Jones: ‘Communism cannot help but work.’

“Smith: ‘I disagree. Look at Russia; things are in a mess there.’

“Jones: ‘Oh, sure, but that’s not real communism.’

“Smith: Look at China; communism is not working there.”

“Jones: ‘They don’t have communism there either.’

“A position is defined in such a way as to exclude all negative cases or adverse evidence. Evidently Jones is *defining* ‘communism’ as ‘that political system which cannot help but work.’ This certainly does not accurately report how most people use the term. Instead of destroying Smith’s position by evidence, Jones leaves him no ground for an opposing position and so destroys the argument as a whole. The same effect would have been secured if Jones had started out saying, ‘True communism cannot help but work.’”

Expanded Definition

- Any time the opponent offers an example against what the speaker claimed, the speaker says that the example doesn’t apply.
- For a Victory by Definition, you should be able to identify the word or phrase that is “defined” by the speaker so as to preempt counterexamples.

Many Victory by Definition examples are dialogs.

Examples of Victory by Definition in dialog form

- a. Teel: “These students seem to have some school spirit.”

Beel: “Ah, yes, but when I said that students today don’t have any school spirit I was talking about genuine students, not these rah-rah boys.”

Comment: Beel rejects Teel’s example of students with school spirit. You suspect that whichever students Teel offers, Beel will say either they’re not true students or they don’t really have school spirit.

If the example quotes only one speaker, Victory by Definition may be more subtle.

Example of Victory by Definition without dialog

- b. The energy shortage will never be solved by the Department of Energy or the Federal Government. It will only be solved by using the dynamics of the free market system.

Comment: The speaker heads off objections by defining “solving the energy shortage” as “solving it using the free enterprise system.” If you offer a solution involving the Department of Energy, the speaker will reject it as not a “true” or “permanent” solution.

Ads sometime employ Victory by Definition.

Example of Victory by Definition in an ad

- c. Ad: “Denny’s serves more breakfasts than any other family restaurant.”

Comment: “Family restaurant” is the key phrase. If you claim false advertising by offering Shoney’s as a restaurant that serves more breakfasts, Denny’s will simply say, “Shoney’s isn’t a family restaurant.”

If the speaker defines a term in such a way that the hearer can distinguish between examples and non-examples of that term, answer No Technique.

Example of No Technique rather than Victory by Definition

- d. I said that only a true Democrat should be elected. Raymond Bills is a true Democrat, one who will share the tax burden among people of all incomes and one who will provide health services to all. That is what I mean by a true Democrat.

Your Notes for Victory by Definition

10. Begging the Question

Game Book Definition

“This technique involves assuming as true what has yet to be proved. Frequently the same proposition is used both as premise and as conclusion in a single argument. This may be done either (1) by the use of synonymous terms or (2) by circular argument, which involves the use of A to prove B and B to prove A.”

From *Thinking Straighter*

- “Not all cases of Begging the Question are so simple as ‘A is true because A is true.’ The more elusive cases involve at a minimum two different propositions and take the form, ‘C is true because B is true and B is true because (we would expect ‘A is true’ but on inspection we find) C is true.’ This is called Arguing in a Circle. Its persuasiveness is increased in proportion to the number of steps involved.”
- “... Arguing in a Circle is not necessarily a trick, and just as a man lost in a woods involuntarily travels in circles, so the reasoner may travel through a long circuit of ‘reasons for reasons’ and not perceive that he is back where he started.”

Expanded Definition

- Often the “evidence” presented for a proposal is nothing more than a restatement of the proposition.
- You should be able to “complete the circle” by linking the words or phrases that support each other. An arguer must instead “break out of the circle” and offer independent evidence for a proposition.

Example of Begging the Question of type (1) – use of synonymous terms

- a. The proposed law will certainly reduce juvenile delinquency, because it provides steps which will prevent crimes on the part of teenagers.

Comment: “Juvenile delinquency” and “crimes on the part of teenagers” are the same thing. *How* will the law prevent crimes by teenagers?

Example of Begging the Question of type (2) – circular reasoning

- b. Marge: “The rich Costins are sending their daughter to Vanderbilt University.”
Wanda: “How do you know the Costins are rich?”
Marge: “Of course, they are. How else could they afford Vanderbilt?”

Comment: Let Proposition A be: “The Costins are rich.” Let Proposition B be: “Their daughter is going to Vanderbilt.” Then the argument becomes “The Costins are rich because their daughter is going to Vanderbilt” and “their daughter is going to Vanderbilt because they’re rich.” A leads to B and B leads to A.

Sometimes Begging the Question can take the form of “self-fulfilling prophecy.”

Example of Begging the Question as self-fulfilling prophecy

- c. From the head of a stock brokerage: “Last year we urged our customers to buy stock in Ram Computer Company. They listened to us and the result was a 150% increase in the price of Ram stock. Our recommendations pay off.”

Comment: Price of a stock increases when there is a demand for it. The company created the demand by urging their customers to buy Ram stock. Now the brokerage brags that it can predict stock price increases.

Victory by Definition must be distinguished from one form of Begging the Question that involves using the word being defined in its own definition.

Example of Victory by Definition rather than Begging the Question

- d. Blay: “Hardened criminals can’t be changed. So retraining programs in prisons are a waste of money.”

Gray: “My next door neighbor went to prison in his early 20s. He learned a trade and hasn’t been in any trouble since he was released.”

Blay: “Obviously he wasn’t a hardened criminal. I stand by what I said.”

Comment: Blay defines “hardened criminal” as “someone who can’t be retrained.” Gray can produce as many examples of reformed convicts as he wants. Blay will dismiss all of them as not really “hardened.”

Example of Begging the Question rather than Victory by Definition

- e. Gray: “Why do you say that a criminal like Palmer can’t be turned from his evil ways?”

Blay: “Simply because he’s unchangeable, that’s why.”

Comment: Blay essentially says, “Palmer can’t be changed because he’s unchangeable.”

If the speaker gives an independent reason to support an assertion, the correct response is No Technique.

Example of No Technique rather than Begging the Question

- f. The volume of a gas decreases when it is cooled because the molecules move closer together.

Comment: A valid explanation of why the volume decreases is given. If the speaker said, “The volume of a gas decreases when it is cooled because it takes up less space,” the answer would be Begging the Question.

Your Notes for Begging the Question