Detecting Assumptions and Generalizations

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:≡ WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn how to identify and correct assumptions and generalizations when revising your research essay. Specifically, this lesson will focus on:

1. Assumptions and Generalizations in Writing

Large assumptions and over-generalizations are **logical fallacies**, or instances of flawed reasoning that often sound plausible despite their faulty base.

When looking for these in your writing, start by focusing on your introduction and conclusion. Are you making too many assumptions that aren't backed by strong evidence?

> ↗ EXAMPLE "All college students hate general education requirements."

An unfounded assumption may also be assuming readers agree with you on a debatable subject or that they are aware of a subject they might actually know very little about.

> ↗ EXAMPLE If you assume that readers are against the death penalty, people in favor of the death penalty are less likely to agree with you. Or, if you assume the reader knows about golf or Russian history, then people who don't know about those subjects will be lost in parts of the paper or could possibly misunderstand your entire argument.

📄 TERM TO KNOW

Logical Fallacy
In writing, an instance of flawed reasoning that often sounds plausible despite its faulty base.

1a. Fixing Assumptions

If you are discussing a subject that might be unfamiliar to parts of your audience, give a brief explanation of the concept/history/event and then explain its significance to your argument.

If you are assuming your readers agree with you on a debatable or controversial subject, you may have to explain why they should agree with you on that subject, or restructure your argument so that it doesn't use that assumption.

1b. Fixing Generalizations

One possibility is to be flexible in the number.

> ⤳ EXAMPLE "Some college students hate general education requirements," or "Many college students hate general education requirements."

You can also find statistics that confirm your belief.

> ⤳ EXAMPLE "I surveyed twenty people at random and fifteen said they hated general education requirements," or "A national survey found that 43% of college students felt that general education requirements were 'a waste of time.'"

☑ SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that it's important to identify **assumptions and generalizations** in writing because they will harm your essay's credibility. You also learned some tips for **fixing assumptions** and **fixing generalizations** during the revision process.

Best of luck in your learning!

Source: This content has been adapted from Lumen Learning's "Detecting Assumptions and Generalizations" tutorial.

📄 TERMS TO KNOW

Logical Fallacy
  In writing, an instance of flawed reasoning that often sounds plausible despite its faulty base.