

is simply more complex than that. The critical thinker will accept that while one idea may be true, those generally placed alongside it are not necessarily also true. Instead, the critical thinker will want it demonstrated that two ideas fit together for a particular reason that is more persuasive than that they sound good or originate from the same source.

Assess the Appropriateness of Evidence Used in Supporting a Particular Case

Pieces of evidence are commonly offered to prove something that is, in reality, unrelated; one season's weather tells us nothing one way or the other about climate change, for example. That evidence says something about a particular subject does not mean that it demonstrates what the speaker hopes or believes it does. This is particularly true of statistics. For example, higher grades in schools are routinely used as evidence that exams are getting easier, although there's no reason to assume this. Higher grades may well prove that students are working harder or that teachers are getting better at their job. Statistical data is excellent at telling us what is happening; it is very poor at telling us why it is happening. For explanations, we need expert opinion or research that focuses on only one possible outcome. Questioning whether the evidence presented proves the specific claim being made is a useful habit to acquire.

Be Familiar with Common Errors in Reasoning and Logical Fallacies

As critical thinkers, debaters should be familiar with common logical fallacies frequently found in debate and elsewhere, including:

- *False dichotomy.* The assumption that if A is true, then B must be false. This is rarely the case, and such a claim should usually be questioned.
- *Correlation and causation.* The belief that because one thing happened after or at the same time as something else, it must have been caused by it. The two events may just have happened coincidentally; you should demand proof of the cause. This is probably the most common error debaters make.
- *Proof by repetition.* The notion that if something is said often enough—or by enough people—it must be true. This is probably the most common error made, period.
- *Fallacy of composition.* The assumption that if something is true of one part of the whole, it must be true of all of it. For example, if I leave the house early, I can beat the rush hour; therefore, if we all leave early, we can all beat the rush hour. Obviously, this doesn't work—if everyone left early, the rush hour would simply start earlier.