We said in Chapter 1 that we reason fallaciously when we fail to satisfy all three of the requirements of cogent reasoning. Accepting premises that we should doubt makes us guilty of the fallacy *questionable premise*; neglecting relevant evidence guilty of the fallacy *suppressed evidence*; and drawing conclusions not sufficiently supported by evidence guilty of the fallacy *invalid inference*.

Of course, we must remember that the arguments encountered in daily life tend to be vague, or ambiguous, and premises, and even conclusions, sometimes are omitted as understood. As a result, everyday arguments often can be construed in different ways. Consider the following key line in a TV beer commercial:

> More people in America drink Budweiser than any other beer.

Taken literally, this isn't an argument, but it clearly implies that the listener also should drink Bud. So its import might be put this way:

1. More people in America drink Budweiser than any other beer. (premise)

\[\therefore 2. \text{ You, too, should drink Budweiser. (implied conclusion)}\]

Construed in this way, the ad does contain an argument, but the argument is defective because it contains an invalid inference. That a beer is the most popular does not imply you should drink it. The most popular beer may not be the best beer, and, anyway,
perhaps you should drink a cheaper beer and save money or not drink any beer at all. We could, however, just as well restate the argument this way:

1. More people in America drink Budweiser than any other beer. (premise)
2. The most popular beer is the best beer. (implied premise)
3. You should drink the best beer. (implied premise)
∴ 4. You should drink Budweiser. (implied conclusion)

Now the argument is valid but contains at least two questionable premises—that the most popular beer is the best beer and that you should drink the best beer.

Like the Budweiser example, most fallacious arguments can be stated in more ways than one. So there often isn’t a single “right” label to apply to fallacious reasoning. This doesn’t mean that there aren’t plenty of wrong labels to apply, and it surely doesn’t mean that merely applying a plausible label is sufficient. The point is to understand why an argument is fallacious and why a particular label can be shown to be right. In the case of the Budweiser ad, for instance, it’s important to see that being the most popular beer is not by itself sufficient reason for most people to conclude that they should go out and buy it. Labeling just helps us to see that an argument is fallacious (if it is!) and helps us to understand why it is fallacious.

Notice, by the way, that in calling the argument itself fallacious, rather than reasoners who may have been taken in by it, we have employed the shortcut way of talking mentioned in Chapter 1. To be precise, we should have said, for example, that anyone who was persuaded by it would be guilty of fallacious reasoning.

Although all fallacious reasoning falls into one or more of the three broad categories just mentioned, over the years a number of other, narrower fallacy species have been identified that crosscut the three basic types. These labels have come into common use because experience has shown them to be helpful in spotting fallacious reasoning.

Let’s now discuss some of the more important of these common fallacy categories and also add some comments concerning the broad fallacy category questionable premise.

1. **Appeal to Authority**

One of the most serious errors in reasoning is to accept the word of someone, in particular an alleged authority, when we should be suspicious. We all have to appeal to experts for information or advice—only fools don’t do so with some regularity. In this technological age we all are nonexperts in most fields. Accepting the word of an authority, alleged or genuine, when we shouldn’t makes us guilty of the fallacy called appeal to authority.

But which appeals are proper and which fallacious? Clearly, it isn’t a good idea to believe that an authority is reliable without having good reason for doing so. Some alleged
authorities don’t have the expertise they claim; others can’t be relied on to tell it to us straight rather than feed us something more self-serving. Anyway, in some cases we need to do some of our own thinking and research.

So when seeking expert advice, three basic questions need to be addressed if we want to avoid committing the fallacy of appeal to authority:

1. Is the source likely to have the information or good judgment we need?
2. If so, can we trust the authority to tell it to us straight?
3. Do we have the time, desire, and ability to reason the matter out for ourselves (or to understand the expert’s reasoning, so that we don’t have to rely merely on the authority’s word)?

We usually know right away whether we have the needed time and inclination, but the other questions often are rather difficult to answer. However, a few rules of thumb should prove helpful.

Some Authorities Are More Trustworthy than Others

Individuals who are regarded as authorities or experts are not created equal. Some are smart, others stupid; some are well trained in their field, some not; some are more or less honest (a completely honest person being a rarity in any case), others pretty much untrustworthy.

Characters who are less than completely ethical are found in every profession, but some fields attract this type more than others. The fields of law, financial advising, and politics, for instance, notoriously attract sharp operators, but even the ministry is not without its Elmer Gantrys, and doctors who prescribe unneeded surgery are not unknown in the history of medicine.

Anyway, the personal interests of experts are bound now and then to conflict with their duties to clients. Professionals are human, after all, just like the rest of us. Politicians elected to the U.S. Congress are bound to savor the perks, fame, power, and excitement that goes along with their jobs (who wouldn’t?), making it rather difficult for them to refuse the fat cat “campaign contributions” (bribes?) needed to gain reelection, and thus more difficult still for them to tell voters the straight truth on important issues. (Remember, though, that politics is the art of compromise and, in particular, that candidates do need to get elected to do good work, so they often need at least to shade the truth for that purpose. See the section in Chapter 10 on political rhetoric for more on this point.)

So when considering expert reasoning or pronouncements, we always need to make a judgment about believability. Does the authority have an axe to grind, a personal interest that might be furthered? Lawyers who speak out against no-fault auto insurance, as they usually do, have to be looked at with a jaundiced eye precisely because the point of no-fault insurance is to reduce legal costs. When members of Congress vote against gun laws, in spite of strong public sentiment favoring gun control in the wake of the tragedies at Virginia Tech and elsewhere, we aren’t being overly skeptical if we wonder whether their judgment has been warped by campaign contributions from interested parties or by narrow constituent interests.

The advice of military experts can be equally suspect if their judgment is skewed by conflicts of interest. During the Iraq War, television newscasts were swamped by
interviews with high-ranking retired military officers who assured us for years that the war was justified, the insurgents were under control, the suicide bombings weren’t so bad, the surge was working, and so on. It turned out that many of these military experts were recruited by the Pentagon to help sell the war in exchange for access to power and the perks that went along with it—including lucrative business affiliations. So much for expert opinion. (See more on this in Chapter 11.)

On the other hand, we should be inclined, other things being equal, to accept the word of dentists who urge their patients to brush and floss regularly and of doctors who exhort us to quit smoking cigarettes, precisely because dentists make money when patients get cavities, and doctors profit when people get cancer, have heart attacks, or come down with emphysema. (Sad but true.) Advice to brush regularly or to quit smoking thus is more likely to be motivated by a professional intent to serve the interests of clients rather than by a desire to further selfish interests.

**Authorities in One Field Aren’t Necessarily Experts in Another**

Famous athletes and movie stars who endorse all sorts of products in television commercials are good examples of professionals speaking outside their fields of expertise. There’s no reason to suppose that someone who knows how to act, or to hit home runs, knows any more about washing machines, or shaving cream, than anyone else. The fact that Brad Pitt was paid to endorse Pringles or Tiger Woods to tout Nike products proves nothing about the quality of these products, nor is there any reason to suppose that Panasonic takes better pictures of Shakira than Leicas or Nikons. Yet most of us, irrationally, are suckers when it comes to celebrity TV commercials, unless, maybe, the celebrity is an obvious mismatch with the product. Who would believe that Tiger Woods was dying to drive a Buick, the car he pitched in General Motors’ ads for eight years? Since he is half the age of the average Buick owner, GM finally figured out the disconnect and pulled him off the ads. Nonetheless, probably plenty of 60-year-olds bought into the very young, very cool image of the golf star. Age does not preclude gullibility!

**Learn How Best to Appeal to Authorities**

It generally is easy to know which sorts of experts to appeal to. Sick people need to consult doctors; someone sued for divorce, a lawyer. It’s a lot more difficult to find experts in a particular profession who know their stuff and can be relied on. But even after finding them, we need to become adept at picking their brains. Experts often throw up roadblocks to understanding, especially by overwhelming us with professional lingo. They frequently find it tedious to explain complicated matters to laypeople, and, anyway, they may not want to spend the time and effort necessary to do so.

It also is true that laypeople often are unable to follow the complicated reasonings of trained professionals, medical specialists being a case in point. But it usually is possible to get at least a rough idea of what authorities are up to if we are persistent and if we insist that they translate their professional lingo into ordinary discourse. It’s hard not to be intimidated by professional jargon or by an authoritarian aura, but it is well worth the effort to resist that sort of intimidation.
Understand What Authorities Can Be Expected to Know

All experts definitely are not created equal. It isn't just that some alleged authorities, as we mentioned before, don't know what they claim to know, or that some aren't completely on the up-and-up. It's also that a good deal more is known about some topics than about others and that some information is much more expensive to obtain than others. True experts in some fields thus are more reliable than those in others.

We all are forced by the nature of modern life to seek advice and expert performance from doctors, lawyers, auto mechanics, and other kinds of trained (and often licensed) professionals. But we can't expect the same sorts of definitive answers to our questions or solutions to our problems when consulting these authorities as we can, say, when consulting physicists or chemists. Medicine, for example, while based on biological theory, still is an art: Doctors cannot always be sure of their diagnoses or of how to treat an ailment; the best of them are bound to be mistaken in their judgments now and then. Lawyers cannot be sure how jurors or judges will respond to evidence. Ministers do not have direct lines to a higher authority.

Become Your Own Expert on Important Controversial Topics

When authorities disagree on a topic of importance, the rest of us need to become our own experts, turning to authorities for evidence, reasons, and arguments, but not conclusions. This is especially true with respect to social and political matters, because experts themselves disagree so much on these issues and because we have to watch out for the intrusion of self-interest into their stated judgments and opinions. Politicians, for example, may be beholden to special interests (as we noted before) or simply be going along with a misguided tide of public opinion. Conservative commentators generally see things differently than do those who are liberal.²

But politics is not by any means the only topic where the reasons and reasonings of experts should count for much more than their conclusions. Judges and juries, for example, too often uncritically accept the opinions of psychologists concerning the sanity of those charged with crimes, rather than delving into the reasons behind those opinions. After all, different opinions often can be obtained just by consulting other psychologists.³ This holds true even in fields like medicine, where we tend to trust the opinions of experts. For instance, a woman who is advised to have a hysterectomy might be wise to seek a second opinion from another physician. (Women with relevant background information know that many unnecessary hysterectomies are performed for conditions that can be treated by less invasive means.)

One way to gauge the judgment of alleged experts is to check their past records. Professional sports has a saying that when in doubt, you should go with a winner. Similarly,

²Although labels such as “conservative,” “libertarian,” “liberal,” “right wing,” and “left wing” tend to be vague and ambiguous, they still have some content: Those labeled by these terms do tend to differ in their viewpoints, and critical reasoners need to take these differences into account.

³This observation conforms to B. Duggan's Law of Expert Testimony: “For every Ph.D. there is an equal and opposite Ph.D.”
when expert advice is needed, it makes sense to go with a winner—someone whose track record is good. Those who have been right in the past are more likely than others to be right in the future, other things being equal. Remember, however, that other things are not always equal. Auto mechanics may get out of touch with the latest technology, lawyers who have made their pile may become lazy, and textbook writers (with at least two obvious exceptions!) may eventually go over the hill.

Note, by the way, that most fallacious appeals to authority fall under the broader category questionable premise, because underlying the acceptance of the word of an authority is the implicit premise that it is wise to do so. In other words, the fallacy appeal to authority is committed by acceptance of expert advice or information when it isn’t wise to do so, perhaps because the authority isn’t likely to have the information we desire or may have a serious conflict of interest.

Before going on to a discussion of other fallacies, perhaps notice should be taken of the flip side of the fallacy of appeal to authority—namely, failure to take the word of authorities when we should. After all, salespeople frequently do give us the relevant facts straight; TV news programs do provide us with a good deal of useful information, even if they don’t provide us with “the whole truth, nothing but the truth”; politicians sometimes do put aside self-interest and speak out against powerful interests. Being careful when evaluating information sources does not mean becoming completely cynical.

2. Inconsistency

We commit the fallacy of inconsistency when we are persuaded to accept the conclusion of an argument that contains self-contradictory statements or statements that contradict each other. Obviously, if two statements are contradictory, then one of them must be false.

Consider, for example, the ways in which inconsistencies intrude into campaign rhetoric. (Campaign rhetoric: The pronouncements of most politicians most of the time.) Candidates for public office do not explicitly say A and then immediately assert not-A. Instead, the contradictory nature of their pronouncements is concealed in one way or another. For instance, in the same speech, a candidate may assure voters that various government services or payments will significantly be increased (to curry the favor of voters who will profit from them), promise large tax reductions (to gain the support of those burdened by high taxes), and favor a huge reduction in the national debt (to appeal to voter beliefs about the virtues of governmental thrift).

That is how the vast majority of candidates for high office, including President Clinton in 1992 and 1996, President Bush in 2000 and 2004, and both major presidential candidates in 2008, have played the game. But government services and benefits cost money, and a majority of government expenses are fixed (most notably interest payments on previously contracted debts), so that a package of increased services and benefits, coupled

\[\text{Recall the discussion in Chapter 2 about tautologies, contradictions, and contingent statements.}\]

\[\text{Their argument thus can be put this way: If elected, I won't destroy the government services and payments you want, I will significantly reduce taxes, and I will reduce the national debt. Therefore, you should vote for me.}\]
with significant tax and public debt reductions, can be regarded as inconsistent in the absence of a plausible explanation as to how this trick is going to be performed. (In recent times, extremely high military expenditures and huge financial bailouts have made this trick even more difficult than it otherwise would be.) Adding up the figures is one way of determining whether candidates are being consistent, and hence believable, when they promise us the moon.

One reason that politicians get away with inconsistent claims or arguments so often is that voters, being human, tend to see political issues from the point of view of their own self-interest, just as they see personal problems and conflicts with friends and family. Self-interest tends to make us more blind than usual both to fair play and to cogent reasoning. Lots of cigarette smokers, for example, argue against a ban on the sale of cigarettes, on the grounds that we all have a right to ingest harmful substances if we are so inclined, but most of them also, inconsistently, argue against the legalization of heroin because it is harmful to health. Extremist African Americans who get on their high horses about prejudice against blacks have been known at the same time to inconsistently preach hatred of whites.

But when evaluating the various kinds of rhetoric encountered in everyday life, it is important that we don’t misjudge deliberately equivocal, ironic, or humorous rhetoric. It won’t do, for example, to brand the literally contradictory bumper sticker that says “Good enough isn’t good enough” as contradictory, since it isn’t intended to be taken literally. It says, in a humorous way, that we should do better than merely minimally well.
There are ways to be guilty of the fallacy of inconsistency in addition to the obvious one of being inconsistent within a single argument or statement. The example above about politicians who, in the same speech, promise lots of government services, lower taxes, and a reduction in the national debt is a case in point. So are the cigarette smokers, also just mentioned, who are against making cigarettes illegal while at the same time are against legalizing the use of heroin.

Another way to be inconsistent is to **argue one way at a given time and another way at some other time, or when talking to one person and then to another.** Of course, there is nothing wrong with changing one's mind—of believing A at one time and not-A at another. That, after all, is the point of learning from experience. It is when we continue to hang on both to A and to not-A, trotting out one for use when reasoning about one thing and the other when reasoning about something else, that we are guilty of being inconsistent.

In politics, being inconsistent over time or from audience to audience is called “blowing with the wind.” What is popular with constituents in one place or at one time may not be in another. Circumstances thus push politicians into being inconsistent in order to...
keep up with the latest trends in public opinion or to placate particular audiences. Candidates for office try as much as they can to tell people what they want to hear, and different people want to hear different things. So candidates sometimes switch sides on certain issues to win voter support. John McCain voted twice against President Bush’s tax cuts, saying “I cannot in good conscience support a tax cut in which so many of the benefits go to the most fortunate among us . . .” But during the campaign he switched sides and repeatedly said he wanted to make those tax cuts permanent rather than let them expire. He shifted ground on abortion laws as well. Although he has long been against abortion, he has said, “I would not support repeal of Roe v. Wade, which would then force x number of women in America [to have] illegal abortions.” But he changed his position during the campaign. “I do not support Roe v. Wade—it should be overturned,” he said during the primaries in South Carolina (a state with a large conservative base).

To some extent, we all engage in this sort of inconsistency—politicians are just better at it than most of the rest of us. Occasionally, we do so deliberately, with conscious intent. But often we are trying to fool not just or even the other guy but rather ourselves. Virtually all of us, for instance, are against cheating others, yet at one time or another we can’t resist the temptation to do so to our advantage while providing reasons (excuses) to justify what we have done; for example, the excuse that most other people do it, so it’s not wrong for us to do so. (This point is discussed at greater length in Chapter 6, where impediments to cogent reasoning are the subject.)

It also needs to be noticed that large organizations have an interesting way to be inconsistent that tends to be rather hard to notice: They have one representative speak out of one side of the mouth while another speaks from the other side. Let’s call this sort of chicanery organizational inconsistency, thinking of a large organization as a kind of artificial person. (In regarding this as a fallacy, we are, of course, stretching that concept a bit, but for a good purpose, namely, to call attention to this threat to consistent reasoning.)

Another kind of organizational inconsistency occurs when it seems expedient to ignore company policy. For instance, a few days before the Olympiad’s opening ceremonies in the 1998 Nagano games, Nike swooshes were seen everywhere on CBS—not just on athletes in Nike ads, but on the hats, jackets, gloves, and snow boots of CBS network correspondents in their pregame coverage. Yet the CBS ethical handbook clearly prohibits advertiser identification during a broadcast outside of the time devoted to billboards or commercial messages. As an example, “. . . a request for permission to include an advertising logo on the desk of a broadcaster must continue to be, rejected” (CBS News Standards, p. 2). When substantial sums of money are at stake, it is clearly more expedient for CBS’s practice to be inconsistent with its stated policy. (For more on this and related matters, see The Nation, November 30, 1998.)

The CBS chicanery just mentioned also illustrates another way to be inconsistent, namely, by saying one thing while doing another. (Calling this a fallacy again stretches that concept to serve everyday purposes. Strictly speaking, saying one thing and doing another does not make one guilty of a fallacy, because it does not involve an inconsistency

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between one claim, idea, or argument and another. We include this discussion here to call attention to those who engage in this sort of behavior.

Al Gore was charged with this type of inconsistency when the media revealed that his private consumption of energy was at odds with his praiseworthy public campaign to reduce global warming. The day after he received an Oscar for the best documentary feature, *An Inconvenient Truth*, in which he urged Americans to curb their energy consumption, the Tennessee Center for Policy Research had this to say about Gore’s personal energy use: “Gore’s mansion . . . consumes more electricity every month than the average household uses in an entire year, according to the Nashville Electric Service . . . more than 20 times the national average. . . . In total Gore paid nearly $30,000 in combined electricity and natural gas bills for his Nashville estate in 2006.” Considering how admirable his efforts have been to curb global warming, he might be forgiven a little personal inconsistency. Nonetheless, it would have looked better if he had walked the walk as well as talked the talk.

Of course, mention of the inconsistencies of these politicians should not blind us to the fact that they are not the only ones who are guilty of being inconsistent. The rest of us aren’t exactly paragons of virtue where consistency is concerned. Feminists who argue against different “roles” for males and females, yet who don’t reciprocate when given expensive engagement rings, or who always leave the driving to their husbands, along with the spanking of errant children, surely are inconsistent.⁷

Inconsistency often is connected in people’s minds with hypocrisy—with pretending to believe what one in fact does not, or to be what one is not. The vast majority of candidates for office in the United States during the past 40 years or so have run on platforms opposing legalization of drugs even though lots of them smoked dope or sniffed cocaine (including Al Gore and George W. Bush?). (Forget about the fact that virtually all of them also drank alcohol or smoked cigarettes.) Bill Clinton did own up to smoking marijuana but notoriously claimed that he did not inhale (ho, ho, ho). Should we say that those who were inconsistent in this way were guilty of the sin of hypocrisy? (At least Barack Obama admitted past drug use in his teens, but attitudes have changed over the years, and Americans seem more willing to accept youthful lapses than they did before.)

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⁷See the article by Cynthia Tucker, *Atlanta Constitution* editorial page editor, that ran in many newspapers on March 30, 1996.
Readers may note, when they have completed reading the three fallacy chapters in this text, that a good deal more time is spent on the first two fallacies in this chapter than on any of the others. The reason is that these two are very likely the most important. The importance of the fallacy of appeal to authority is obvious: We all are nonexperts about most of the things that matter in everyday life and therefore regularly have to appeal to authorities for information and advice. The importance of the fallacy of inconsistency also should be obvious: It lies in the crucial importance of consistency to cogent reasoning. *At least one of a set of inconsistent statements must be false!*

That is why trying to be consistent is very likely the best way to improve the quality of one’s stock of background beliefs (a point to be discussed again later). Having reasoned to a particular conclusion, consistency requires that we ask ourselves whether we would be willing to carry through that line of reasoning when it applies to other cases. If not, then we must give up that line of reasoning or admit to the intellectual crime of being *inconsistent.*

### 3. Straw Man

While the broad fallacy category *suppressed evidence* seldom is mentioned in traditional logic texts, several species of this genus are given great play. One of these is the fallacy *straw man,* which is committed when we misrepresent an opponent’s position, or a competitor’s product, or go after a weaker opponent or competitor while ignoring a stronger one.\(^8\)

Straw man has always been the stock-in-trade of advertisers and political smear campaigns. A group called Common Sense Issues made a million automated phone calls to voters in the 2008 South Carolina primaries claiming that John McCain “has voted to use unborn babies in medical research.” This was a gross distortion of his position to support research on stem cells gathered from embryos.

Political ads resort to straw man regularly. For example, the McCain campaign ran a 30-second TV spot in battleground states accusing Barack Obama of promoting “comprehensive sex education” for kindergarten children, then asking the provocative question, “Learning about sex before learning to read?” This was a deliberate distortion of a bill Obama voted for in the Illinois state legislature that called for “age and developmentally appropriate” sex education in schools. On a kindergarten level, the objective was simply to teach children how to defend themselves against sexual predators, not to provide comprehensive sex education. Nonetheless, McCain gave this his official consent in the ending line: “I'm John McCain, and I approve this message.”

### 4. False Dilemma and the Either-Or Fallacy

In traditional logic, a *dilemma* is an argument that presents two alternatives, both claimed to be bad for someone, or some position. (Dilemmas are discussed further in the appendix.)

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\(^8\)Note, however, that some cases of this fallacy do not fall into the category of *suppressed evidence.* Should we, by the way, replace the name “straw man” by, say, “straw person” or perhaps “false characterization”? 
CHAPTER 3

The general form of a dilemma can be put this way:

Either $P$ or $Q$.
If $P$ then $R$.
If $Q$ then $S$.

Therefore, either $R$ or $S$.

Sometimes the undesired outcomes $R$ and $S$ are identical, sometimes quite different. Here is an example in which they are not quite the same: “Either our fellow citizens are good or they’re bad. If they’re good, laws to deter crime aren’t needed. But if they’re bad, laws to deter crime won’t succeed. So laws to deter crime either are not needed or won’t succeed.”

A false dilemma is a dilemma that can be shown to be false. One way to do this is to demonstrate that the premise having the form “Either $P$ or $Q$” is false by showing that there is at least one other viable possibility. This is called “going between the horns” of the dilemma. In the case of the dilemma just mentioned, a viable alternative is that our fellow citizens may be both good (in some ways) and bad (in others).

Another way to defeat a dilemma is to challenge one or both of its other two premises. This is called “grasping the horns” of the dilemma. We might challenge the crime law dilemma, for example, by arguing that even if some citizens are bad, they still can be deterred by laws specifying harsh penalties.

False dilemmas usually are a species of the genus questionable premise because any set of statements that sets up a false dilemma needs to be questioned. (Note, by the way, that we can have false trilemmas, false quadrilemmas, and so on.)

The either-or fallacy (sometimes called the black-or-white fallacy) is very similar to that of false dilemma. We’re guilty of this fallacy when we mistakenly reason from two alternatives, one claimed to be bad (that is, to be avoided) so that we ought to choose the other alternative. The general form of the fallacy is this:

Either $P$ or $Q$.
Not $P$.
Therefore, $Q$.

where there is at least a third viable alternative, or it is questionable that $P$ is bad. For example, “You have to vote either for the Republican or for the Democratic candidate. But you shouldn’t vote for the Republican. So you should vote for the Democrat.” A third alternative in this case would be to vote, say, for the Green Party candidate (this is like going between the horns of a dilemma), and some people would challenge the claim that you shouldn’t vote for the Republican candidate (this would be like grasping a dilemma by its horns).

One notable example of the either-or fallacy was the second President Bush’s battle cry after September 11, “You are either with us or against us in the fight against terror.” There were, of course, plenty of options in between. This simplification of a complex situation was a rhetorical device rather than an appeal to reason. A more subtle example surfaced much later when he explained the rationale for the troop “surge” into Iraq to stem the increasing violence and incipient civil war. In his address to the nation (January 2007), Bush said, “Their [Congress’s] solution is to scale back America’s efforts in Baghdad or announce the phased withdrawal of our combat troops.” His solution was to send 21,500 additional troops to secure Baghdad and Anbar. Without
In a sense, all deductively valid arguments beg the question, because what is said by their conclusions already is said in their premises. In the typical case, part of an argument’s conclusion is said in one premise, part in another. That is the point of valid deduction; anyone who accepts the premises of a deductively valid argument and yet rejects its conclusion is guilty of being inconsistent. The difference in the case of the fallacy of begging the question is that the premises state the claim of the conclusion in a way that those who reject the conclusion also will reject the premises for being just as questionable as the conclusion.

5. Begging the Question

When arguing, either with ourselves or with others, we can’t provide reasons for every assertion and then reasons for the reasons, and so on. Some of what we assert must go unjustified, at least for the moment. But when we assume as a premise some form of the very point that is at issue—the very conclusion we intend to prove—we are guilty of the fallacy of begging the question. In this sense to beg means “to avoid.” When the premise simply states another version of the conclusion, the question of proof is avoided, or begged. (The fallacy of begging the question usually falls into the broad category questionable premise because a statement that is questionable as a conclusion is equally questionable as a premise.)

In real life, of course, this fallacy rarely, if ever, has the form

A.
Therefore, A.

Few would be taken in by anything so obvious. Instead, a premise may state a conclusion in different but equivalent words, so that the conclusion is not so obviously begged. This is the way in which the question is begged in one of the classic textbook cases (from the nineteenth century—human gullibility tends to remain constant): “To allow every man unbounded freedom of speech must always be . . . advantageous to the state; for it is highly conducive to the interests of the community that each individual should enjoy a liberty, perfectly unlimited, of expressing his sentiments.”

Although the traditional fallacy of begging the question deals primarily with questions that are at issue, say, as in a debate, over time it has come to have a broader range so as to cover other sorts of questions. Thus, to take a textbook example, we can be said to be guilty of this fallacy when, having asked why chloroform renders people unconscious, we accept the answer that it does so because it is a soporific (a soporific being defined as something that induces sleep).

Doctors and other sorts of professionals are frequent perpetrators of this version of begging the question, but they aren’t by any means the only ones who set us up for it. Indeed, many times questions are begged quite innocently. Here is an example taken

9In a sense, all deductively valid arguments beg the question, because what is said by their conclusions already is said in their premises. In the typical case, part of an argument’s conclusion is said in one premise, part in another. That is the point of valid deduction; anyone who accepts the premises of a deductively valid argument and yet rejects its conclusion is guilty of being inconsistent. The difference in the case of the fallacy of begging the question is that the premises state the claim of the conclusion in a way that those who reject the conclusion also will reject the premises for being just as questionable as the conclusion.

10Cited by Richard Whately in his excellent book Elements of Logic (London, 1826). Whately’s fallacy classification is more like the one used in this text than are those of any other text in use today.
from an article on exclusive men's clubs in San Francisco. In explaining why these clubs have such long waiting lists, Paul B. “Red” Fay, Jr. (on the roster of three of the clubs) said, “The reason there’s such a big demand is because everyone wants to get in them.”11 In other words, there is a big demand because there is a big demand. Fay inadvertently (we hope) gave another version of the conclusion in the premise and thus avoided the question of proof.

Note that the fallacy begging the question also has been broadened over time so as to cover cases in which a premise is different from the conclusion of an argument but is controversial or questionable for the same reasons that typically might lead someone to question the conclusion.

**Evading the Issue**

One effective way to beg the question at issue is simply to avoid it entirely. Doing this makes one guilty of the fallacy **evading the issue**. This approach succeeds when those taken in fail to notice that the issue has been evaded. Perhaps the best way to hoodwink an opponent or dodge a barbed question is to make it appear that the issue or question is indeed being addressed. Politicians frequently evade an issue concerning a complicated problem (the homeless, the national debt, whatever) by speaking instead about the pressing need to solve it. Savvy citizens are not taken in by this sort of chicanery.

For example, at a White House news conference on July 17, 2003, a reporter asked the second President Bush if he took personal responsibility for including in his State of the Union address earlier that year the disputed claim that Saddam Hussein had tried to buy uranium oxide in Niger, Africa. Bush replied, “I take responsibility for putting our troops in action. And I made that decision because Saddam Hussein was a threat to our security and a threat to the security of other nations. . . . I take responsibility for making the decision, the tough decision to put together a coalition to remove Saddam Hussein.” But he didn’t take responsibility for including the disputed claim in his address. In fact, he evaded the issue entirely.

Presidential hopeful Mike Huckabee managed a clever evasion in the 2007 YouTube/CNN debate for Republican candidates. When Huckabee, a minister and politician, was asked whether Jesus would support the death penalty, he quipped, “Jesus was too smart to run for public office.” And thus he neatly ducked a question suggesting that his Christian scruples were inconsistent with his pro-death penalty stance as governor of Arkansas.

Politicians are masters at evading the issue. When they are asked hard questions in interviews, they skirt the subject with responses like “That’s a complex issue . . .” and then shift into the message they want to give. Or they claim the question isn’t relevant, which clears the way for topics they do think are relevant. Or they say things like “That’s a good question, but before going into that I want to discuss . . .” and then go on to spin their own point of view. Evading the issue is so important to politicians that many of them hire media trainers to help them perfect the art.12

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12For more on this see a fascinating article on media training, “Answer the &%$$#* Question” in *Columbia Review of Journalism*, January/February, 2004.
6. Questionable Premise—Questionable Statement

As we noted earlier, most examples of the fallacies discussed so far fall into the broader category of questionable premise. But not all species of questionable premise have received specific names in the literature. So when a premise that is not believable is spotted in an argument and none of these more specific labels apply, we have to fall back on the general term questionable premise. That is what we did earlier when we pointed out that a statement in a Budweiser commercial constituted a questionable premise.

Knowing for a fact that a statement is false obviously is a very good reason for questioning it—indeed, for dismissing it. Thus, when a colleague was alleged to be incompetent on grounds that she was an alcoholic, one of the authors of this text rejected the charge on the basis of personal knowledge that the allegation was false. But often we ought to question a statement just because we have no good reason to think it true, even though we also don't have any reason to doubt it. For instance, at one of the debates in the 2007 run-up to the presidential primaries, Rudy Giuliani said, “It’s unthinkable that you would leave Saddam Hussein in charge of Iraq and be able to fight the war on terror.” Was it? You have to ask the question why it was unthinkable to fight the war on terror if Hussein were still in power. When evidence is lacking, reason requires holding judgment in abeyance.

Remember, though, that hearing something from a trustworthy expert often counts as a reason for believing it to be true. For example, the fact that the overwhelming majority of scientists believe the burning of fossil fuels, such as oil and coal, is polluting the air and causing a rise in worldwide temperatures ought to constitute good reason for believing that there very likely is a greenhouse effect resulting from the use of these fuels.

Finally, it is worth remembering here that in everyday life statements generally do not come labeled as premises or conclusions and also that not all persuasive discourse is put into argumentative form. So there is a good deal of merit in expanding the fallacy of questionable premise so that it becomes, say, questionable statement.

7. Suppressed (Overlooked) Evidence

The general fallacy category suppressed evidence, introduced earlier along with questionable premise and invalid inference, has not received much attention in the fallacy literature, perhaps because theorists tend to see the suppression of evidence as an error in reasoning but not as a fallacy (as they define that concept). Whether thought of as a fallacy or not, however, it is important that we learn how to bring relevant evidence to bear on an argument and learn how to avoid being taken in by others when they suppress evidence.

Of course, people who suppress evidence often do so inadvertently, one reason that a more all-encompassing label for the fallacy might be overlooked evidence, or perhaps slighted evidence. It’s easy, when strongly committed to a particular side of an issue, to pass over arguments and reasons on the other side. In recent years, advocates on both sides of issues such as capital punishment, abortion, the legalization of marijuana, the depiction of violence on TV, and the legalization of prostitution frequently have been guilty of slighting evidence damning to their side of the issue. Those opposed to “three strikes and you’re out” legislation, for instance, tend to neglect the ways in which this
kind of law might protect society from repeat offenders; those in favor don’t like to talk about the high costs associated with keeping people in jail long past the age at which the vast majority of criminals have ceased to commit violent crimes, or about the fact that a great many of those sentenced under these laws have not committed violent or even serious crimes.

We all, of course, sometimes are motivated by more crass considerations than mere overzealousness. Self-interest is a powerful motivator of deliberately shady reasoning. Take, for instance, the way drug companies manipulated data on drug trials that tested the effectiveness of antidepressants like Prozac and Paxil. The published trials showed that these drugs provided significant relief for 60 percent of people on the drugs, compared to only 40 percent for those on placebos. This evidence was convincing enough to persuade doctors and patients that the drugs were effective. But in January 2008, the Journal of the American Medical Association ran a report of a new analysis reviewing data from both the published and unpublished trials of the antidepressants. This analysis revealed that 94 percent of the positive trials were published but only 14 percent of the unconvincing ones were. In effect, the drug companies were suppressing the negative data to win over the government and get FDA approval. Once the unpublished trials were taken into account, the antidepressants had only a slim edge over the placebos. No wonder physicians were puzzled that the drugs didn’t seem to work as well on their patients as they did in the published trials.

The point of becoming familiar with the fallacy of suppressed evidence is to sharpen one’s ability to spot cases in which relevant evidence is being passed over, whether by others or by ourselves. We need, in particular, to learn how to carry through reasoning so as to see whether all likely relevant information has been considered.

Take, for instance, the tax rebates issued in 2008 as part of a stimulus package to invigorate the sinking economy. The theory was that the government would circulate money for consumers to spend in order to stimulate the economy and forestall a recession. The rational was loosely (and erroneously) based on economist John Maynard Keynes theory that spending is the driving force of the economy, no matter who does it—governments, businesses, or consumers. Circulating money through tax rebates, however, was not the answer. Twice in the past 40 years (1975 and 2001) Congress

Shall I tell you what it is to know? It is to say you know when you know, and to say that you do not know when you do not know; that is knowledge.

—Attributed to Confucius (which means that we do not know for sure that he said it)

We don’t want to be too hasty, or too picky, in leveling a charge of begging the question. Although what Confucius is quoted as saying is literally question begging, it is very likely that what he meant to say (if he actually said it) is that a large part of wisdom is to know what you do and what you don’t have good reason to believe and, by implication, not to believe what you do not have good reason to believe. Excellent advice, indeed.
Many people have trouble distinguishing between having no evidence or proof for a claim and having evidence or proof that the claim is false. But having no evidence, say, that vitamin C helps us fight the common cold is quite different from having evidence that it does not do so. Similarly, a lack of clinical proof that marijuana has certain medicinal benefits is much different from having clinical proof that it does not. Lack of \textit{clinical proof}, by the way, is also quite different from having no good evidence whatsoever concerning marijuana’s medicinal benefits. In fact, there is a good deal of such “anecdotal” evidence.

\footnote{For a more complete analysis, see “Feel-Good Economics,” by Bruce Artlett, \textit{Wall Street Journal}, January 19, 2008.}
In the Italian film *Il Postino (The Postman)*, the big politician promises, again, that pipes will be built so that the people can have indoor running water, and he actually has construction begin before the election. People again vote him into office, and—surprise—construction immediately stops. Voters have again been suckered by a token gesture and only wake up to that fact when it is too late to make a difference.

8. **Tokenism**

**Tokenism**—mistaking a token gesture for the real thing, or accepting a token gesture in lieu of something more concrete—is another common fallacy.

As might be expected, tokenism is one of the politician's best friends. In 2008, as gas prices soared and voters complained, both Hillary Clinton and John McCain endorsed a plan to suspend the federal excise tax on gasoline (18.4 cents a gallon) for the summer travel season. But this was just a token gesture, a short-term fix that would save consumers little in the long run. In the fiercely competitive election campaign, the proposal was a ploy to win over middle-class voters, hard-hit by the recession and the escalating costs of gas and food.

Another example: When, in June 2000, George W. Bush, then governor of Texas, stayed the execution of a convicted felon so as to leave time for DNA tests, his action was taken by some observers to rebut the claim that Bush denied the convicted all of their political rights by failing to use his power of granting 30-day stays of execution. But his action in this case was obviously a token gesture, since, with the one exception of his pardon of a dramatically innocent person, he had failed to act in 131 cases of people on death row, including several in which those convicted were generally held to be clearly innocent or had not been fairly tried.

Actually, his token gesture was a variation on a related ploy—namely, behaving or speaking one way when the heat is on and another when it isn’t sufficiently hot to force change. For as long as possible, Bush satisfied those of his Texas constituents and his financial supporters who favored being “tough on criminals,” changing when a wider constituency was being wooed during his presidential campaign, much as Texan Lyndon Johnson did on race way back in the 1960s.

**Summary of Chapter 3**

All fallacious reasoning falls into one or more of the three broad categories of *questionable premise, suppressed evidence,* and *invalid inference.* But other fallacy categories, crosscutting these broad ones, have come into common use.

1. **Appeal to authority:** Accepting the word of alleged authorities when there is not sufficient reason to believe that they have the information we seek or that they can be trusted to provide it to us (for example, when they have a vested interest), or doing so when we ought to figure the matter out for ourselves. *Example:* Taking the word of power industry executives that nuclear plants are safe.

When appeals must be made to authorities, we should remember that some are more trustworthy than others, and in particular, we should be wary of experts
who have an axe to grind. We also should pay attention to the track records of alleged authorities.

2. **Inconsistency**: Accepting the conclusion of an argument that has self-contradictory statements or statements that contradict each other. These contradictory assertions may be made (1) by one person at one time and place, (2) by one person at different times or places (without explaining the contradiction as a change of mind based on reasons), or (3) by different representatives of one institution. While not, strictly speaking, a fallacy, we need to note when there is a contradiction between what someone says and what that person does. *Example*: Al Gore’s verbal support of energy conservation compared to his own excessive energy consumption to run his household.

3. **Straw man**: Misrepresenting an opponent’s position or a competitor’s product to make it easier to attack them or to tout one’s own product as superior, or attacking a weaker opponent while ignoring a stronger one. *Example*: Ads accusing John McCain of voting to use unborn babies in medical research.

4. **False dilemma**: A dilemma that can be shown to be false either by “going between the horns” of the dilemma or by “grasping its horns.” *Example*: Refuting the dilemma about the futility of laws to deter crime by pointing out that there is a third alternative—namely, that many citizens are both good and bad.

   The *either-or* (*black-or-white*) variation occurs when an argument is based on the assumption that there are just two viable alternatives, one of which is bad (so the other has to be chosen), although there is at least one other viable alternative. *Example*: Refuting the argument that you should vote for Barack Obama because the only alternative is John McCain by pointing to a third possibility, say, voting for Ralph Nader.

5. **Begging the question**: Assuming without proof the question, or a significant part of the question, that is at issue, or answering a question by rephrasing it as a statement. *Example*: In explaining why exclusive men’s clubs have such long wait lists, “Red” Fay said, “The reason there is such a demand is because everyone wants to get in them.” One way to beg the question is to avoid it entirely and thus evade the issue. *Example*: An elected official who skirts hard questions by shifting into a message he or she wants to give.

6. **Questionable premise—questionable statement**: Accepting a less than believable premise or other statement. *Example*: Accepting the claim that Budweiser is the best beer as a reason for deciding to switch to Bud. (Note that the five fallacies just described are variations of this broader fallacy but that not all species of questionable premise have special names.)

7. **Suppressed (overlooked) evidence**: Failing to bring relevant evidence to bear on an argument. *Example*: Advocates on both sides of the debates about the merits of “three strikes and you’re out” laws who slight sensible arguments and objections of their opponents.

8. **Tokenism**: Accepting a token gesture in lieu of the real thing. *Example*: Being satisfied with campaign rhetoric when there is little likelihood of serious intent to carry through.
EXERCISE 3-1

Determine which fallacies (if any) occur in the following passages and state reasons for your answers. Note: Some items may contain more than one fallacy.

Example

Passage: Heard in a debate concerning capital punishment: “Capital punishment is morally wrong. After all, murder is just as wrong when committed by a government as it is when done by an individual person.”

Evaluation: The speaker begged the question at issue. To say that capital punishment is murder is to say that it is a morally wrong killing (note that only wrongful killings are considered to be murder). But the issue was whether capital punishment—governmental killing—is murder, so to assume without argument that it is begs the question.

*1. Overheard in a laundry: “What makes me think abortion is murder? When my pediatrician refused to perform an abortion for me, she said she wouldn’t be a party to murder. Babies and childbirth are her business, you know.”

*2. When Hillary Clinton was asked in a Bloomberg television interview in 2006 how she thought the Bush administration should try to prevent Iran from building up its nuclear program, she said, “I would certainly take nuclear weapons off the table.” A year later, in a discussion about the use of nuclear weapons in the war on terror, she criticized Barack Obama for saying that if he were president, he would rule out using nuclear weapons to get rid of terrorists in Afghanistan or Pakistan. Senator Clinton’s response was, “I don’t believe any president should make any blanket statements with respect to the use or non-use of nuclear weapons.”

3. An item from the New York Times Service, March 2000: In 1988 Maureen Dowd, New York Times reporter, asked President Bush (the father of George W.) how he could justify claiming that he was a good candidate for blacks when he did nothing to influence the Reagan administration against watering down civil rights laws during his eight years as vice president. Bush replied, “But I helped found the Yale chapter of the United Negro College Fund.”

4. Joe Morgan, announcing a Giants–Marlins baseball game and commenting on the Marlins pitcher: “He’s been a little erratic, which explains why he hasn’t been consistent.”

5. Comment by gossip columnist Liz Smith a week after the attack on the World Trade Center, when the stock market was falling fast: “The most important thing for citizens of any age—for themselves and for their Uncle Sam and as a tribute to the thousands who likely died—should be to call a broker and buy stock in American companies this week, and next week and the next.”

6. Excerpt from the second President Bush’s 2004 State of the Union address: “A strong America must also value the institution of marriage. . . . Congress has already taken a stand on this issue by passing the Defense of Marriage Act signed in 1996 by President Clinton. That statute protects marriage under federal law as the union of a man and a woman, and declares that one state may not
redefine marriage for other states. Activist judges, however, have begun redefining marriage by court order, without regard for the will of the people and their elected representatives. On an issue of such great consequence, the people’s voice must be heard. If judges insist on forcing their arbitrary will upon the people, the only alternative left to the people would be the constitutional process. Our nation must defend the sanctity of marriage.”

7. Eric Jubler, in an article in which he argued that America should “open up” its wilderness areas: “The purist [conservationist] is, generally speaking, against everything . . . the purist believes that those who do not agree with him desire to ‘rape the land.’”

8. A *New York Times* article on Rudy Giuliani (March 23, 2007) noted that he championed national standards for enforcing gun laws as mayor of New York City, lobbied Congress to outlaw most assault weapons, and complained that gun laws in the South were lax. “He praised President Clinton on gun control, endorsed the Brady Bill . . . and advocated federal laws for semiautomatic weapons.” As presidential candidate in 2007, he said, “There can be reasonable restrictions, and they largely should be done by state and by, and then you know, done by legislatures.”

9. Calvin Coolidge is alleged to have been the first to say this: “We must keep people working—with jobs—because when many people are out of work, unemployment results.”

10. In an interview with Sarah, Duchess of York, Larry King asked whether she was friends with Prince Charles. She replied, “Well, Larry, the important thing is that I have great respect for the royal family.”

11. Argument in a student essay: “Prostitution should not be legalized because it encourages the breakdown of the family. Nevada, where prostitution is legal in ten counties, has the highest divorce rate in the nation, almost twice as high as the national average.”

12. Notice from the Hyatt Regency Hotel in New Orleans: “We are pleased to confirm your reservation. It will be held on a space-available basis.”

13. It is reported that when Socrates was condemned to death his wife cried out, “Those wretched judges have condemned him to death unjustly!” To which Socrates is said to have replied, “Would you really prefer that I were justly condemned?”

14. An article on Nike’s Asian factories (*Time*, March 30, 1998) addressed a question asked by an anti–sweat shop activist: “Can’t they find more money to pay the workers?” (Labor activist Jeff Ballinger estimated that Vietnamese workers were paid 57 cents per pair of shoes, typically selling for $90—see *Extra! Update*, June 1998). *Time*’s response to the question was “The short answer is no. Corporations pay the going rate for labor wherever they are.”

15. In a segment of *60 Minutes* on April 21, 2007, Leslie Stahl questioned Lou Dobbs about a report aired on his program by one of his correspondents that there had been about 900 cases of leprosy in this country over a 40-year period,
but 7,000 cases over the past three years. The report was part of a segment on his April 14, 2005, program in which he claimed that “the invasion of illegal aliens is threatening the health of many Americans.” When Leslie Stahl said there didn’t seem to be much evidence to support these statistics, he replied, “Well, I can tell you this. If we report it, it’s a fact.”

16. Question to artist’s model: “Why did he paint you so often?” Answer: “Because I’m his model.”

17. From a Dr. Joyce Brothers newspaper column: “Question: You should be more fearful of rape at home because rapes occur more frequently in private homes than in back alleys. Answer: TRUE. Studies indicate that more rapes are committed in the victim’s home than in any other place. Almost half took place in either the victim’s home or the assailant’s; one fourth occurred in open spaces; one fifth in automobiles; one twelfth in other indoor locations.”

18. From Slander, by Ann Coulter, on the attitudes of liberals: “The liberal catechism includes hatred of Christians, guns, the profit motive, and political speech, and an infatuation with abortion, the environment, and race discrimination (or in the favored parlance of liberals, ‘affirmative action’).”

19. From a New Republic review of the James Michener book Iberia: “Michener leads off his chapter on bullfights with an argument between your quintessential American and Spaniard about brutal sports—which the Spaniard wins by pointing out that more young men get killed and maimed every year playing American football than in the bullring.”

20. After the tsunami struck Southeast Asia in 2004 and devastated some of the world’s poorest countries, the secretary of state at the time, Colin Powell, announced that the United States would contribute $15 million to the recovery effort—less than half the amount that the Republicans intended to spend on President Bush’s second inaugural celebrations. (Faced with widespread criticism, the administration later upped the financial aid considerably.)

21. A Washington Monthly article on celebrity chefs (July/August, 2001) quoted Evan Kleinman, chef of Angeli Café in Los Angeles, as saying, “Basically when it comes to food and food supply, I find it frightening that something so fundamental to life has been left to people whose only concern is profit. . . . I mean as far as I can see, because of that, there are only two kinds of people putting food in their mouths—the ones who have lost the notion that food is something made by human hands and then there are the others . . . for whom there’s still some link with food as a culture of nurturance.”

22. Paraphrase of part of a letter to the editor (Washington Post National Weekly Edition, March 13–19, 1989): “It’s true that the Ayatollah Khomeini has gone too far with his death sentence for author Salman Rushdie [because of his “outrageous” book The Satanic Verses], but Rushdie also has gone too far by offending all Moslems. I am a strong believer in the freedom of speech. However, books like Rushdie’s only create hatred and division and weaken the ties of people to each other. Therefore, his book and others like it should be abolished.”
23. When Calvin Klein was asked what the secret of his success was, he answered, “I make clothes women want to wear.”

24. *Extra!* (September/October, 2007) quoted a *Washington Post* article (June 10, 2007) arguing that immigrants are “drawn by the great magnet of the American Economy to fill jobs that most Americans won’t do.”

*25. Sociologist James Q. Wilson: “I am not about to argue [as some sociobiologists do] that there is a ‘sympathy gene.’ But there must be some heritable disposition that helps us explain why sympathy is so common.”

26. The second President Bush in a televised interview with Diane Sawyer (December 16, 2003), explaining why he doesn’t read the newspapers: “I get my news from people [in his administration] who don’t editorialize. . . . They give me the actual news, and it makes it easier to digest, on a daily basis, the facts.”

27. In attacking a proposed equal rights amendment to the state constitution of Iowa, Pat Robertson argued that the proposal was part of a “feminist agenda . . . a socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism, and become lesbians.”

28. A commercial aired in the 1998 election campaign that uses President Clinton’s sex scandal as the theme. The announcer asks, “Should we reward Democratic plans for more big government? More big spending? Should we reward their opposition to more welfare reform? And should we reward not telling the truth?”

“That is the question of this election. Reward Bill Clinton. Or, vote Republican.”

29. The day after the Mitchell report was released detailing the widespread use of anabolic steroids in baseball, a fan made this comment on sfgate.com, the *San Francisco Chronicle*’s website (December 18, 2007): “This will send a shock wave through baseball and steroid usage will stop.”

30. In a 2007 debate with other contenders for the Republican presidential nomination, John McCain said, “I am prepared [to be president]. I am prepared. I need no on-the-job training. I wasn’t a mayor for a short period of time. I wasn’t a governor for a short period of time.”

In August 2008 McCain was asked if his running mate, Sarah Palin, was ready to step in as president if necessary; he answered with a resounding yes, touting her “executive experience” as governor of Alaska (for 21 months), as mayor of Wasilla, Alaska (population 7,000), and as president of the PTA.


*Time*: Why did you praise Hitler’s employment policies?

*Haider*: I think it was only one sentence out of a big debate. My opponents took out one sentence and made a campaign against me, and it was not possible for me to explain myself.
32. Ad for an International Correspondence School journalism course: “Every successful writer started that first story or article with no previous experience. William Shakespeare, Alexander Dumas, Harold Robbins, Danielle Steel, Barbara Cartland—any famous writer you can name started just like you.”

33. Extra! Update (April 2003) included two quotes on religion by Bill O’Reilly on The O’Reilly Factor.

   March 11, 2003: Both sides of the debate [on whether to invade Iraq] are saying God is on their side. . . . I think both sides are wrong. Nobody knows for sure what the absolute right thing to do is. We can only have opinions. Thus, it’s intellectually dishonest to be claiming God is on your side when only God knows for sure what the right thing to do is.”

   December 4, 2002: “I’m telling you, I’m telling you that President Bush is doing what Jesus would have done.”

34. Walter Burns, in an article in which he argues for capital punishment: “When abolitionists speak of the barbarity of capital punishment . . . they ought to be reminded that men whose moral sensitivity they would not question have supported [it]. Lincoln, for example, albeit with a befitting reluctance, authorized the execution of 267 persons during his presidency . . . and it was Shakespeare’s sensitivity to the moral issues that required him to have Macbeth killed.”

35. Phyllis Schlafley, an outspoken opponent of the women’s liberation movement, in her book The Power of Positive Women: “The second dogma of the women’s liberationists is that, of all the injustices perpetrated upon women through the centuries, the most oppressive is the cruel fact that women have babies and men do not. Within the confines of women’s liberationist ideology, the abolition of this overriding inequality becomes the primary goal.”