GENERAL RULES FOR SHORT ARGUMENTS

1. **Distinguish between premises and conclusion**: "[T]he **conclusion** is the statement *for* which you are giving reasons. The statements which give your reasons are called '**premises**.'"

2. **Present your ideas in a natural order**: "Put the conclusion first, followed by your reasons, or set out your premises first and draw the conclusion at the end. In any case, set out your ideas in an order that unfolds your line of thought most naturally for the reader."

3. **Start from reliable premises**: "No matter how well you argue *from* premises to conclusion, your conclusion will be weak if your premises are weak. . . If you are not sure about the reliability of a premise, you may need to do some research, and/or give a short argument for the premise itself."

4. **Use definite, specific, concrete language**: "Write concretely: avoid abstract, vague, general terms. 'We hiked for hours in the sun' is a hundred times better than 'It was an extended period of laborious exertion.'"

5. **Avoid loaded language**: "Do not make your argument look good by caricaturing the opposing side. Generally people advocate a position for serious and sincere reasons. Try to figure out their view, even if you think they are dead wrong. . . In general, avoid language whose only function is to sway the emotions of your readers or hearers, either for or against the view you are discussing."

6. **Use consistent terms**: "Stick to a single set of terms for each idea. . . Consistent terms are especially important when your argument depends on the connections between the premises."

7. **Stick to one meaning for each term**: "The opposite temptation is to use a single word in more than one sense. This is the classical fallacy of 'equivocation.'

FALLACIES

<u>Ad hominem</u> – attacking or defending the person rather than the issue. ('We all know he's a liar.')

<u>Ad ignoratiam</u> – (appeal to ignorance), 'arguing that a claim is true just because it has not been shown to be false. A classic example is this statement by Senator Joseph McCarthy, when asked for evidence to back up his accusation that a certain person was a communist: '*I do not have much information on this except the general statement of the agency that there is nothing in the files to disprove his Communist connections.*'*

<u>Ad misericordiam</u> – an appeal to pity instead of logic. ('*I know I didn't show up for a single class all semester, but if I don't get a C, my parents won't buy me a new car. You have to give me a C!*')

<u>Ad populum</u> – (bandwagon fallacy) appealing to the emotions of a crowd, 'if it's popular it's right.' ('*This war is just because the majority of Americans support it.*')

<u>Ad verecumidam</u> – (argument or appeal to authority), trying to 'demonstrate the truth of a proposition by citing some person who agrees, even though that person may have no expertise in the given area.'** ('*The ACLU must be good because Samuel L. Jackson supports it.*')

<u>Hasty generalization</u> – using all or none. ('*All rich people are greedy.*')

<u>Post hoc ergo propter hoc</u> – fallacy where something that came before is assumed to have caused something that came after, even though there is no logical reason to assume that the first thing caused the second. ('*Those people moved into my neighborhood and then my bike disappeared. They must have stolen it.*')

<u>Non sequitur</u> – the fallacy of stating a conclusion that doesn't necessarily follow from the premise. *('Racism is wrong. Therefore, we need affirmative action.')***

<u>Circular reasoning</u> – instead of offering proof of a conclusion, the argument reasserts the conclusion in different form. (*Green Day is the best band in the United States. I know they're the best because they will win the Grammy. And they will win the Grammy because they're the best band.*)

<u>Black/white</u> – presumes that distinction or classification is exclusive when other alternatives exist. *('You're either a conservative or a liberal.')*

<u>Slippery Slope</u> – 'A slippery slope fallacy is an argument that says adopting one policy or taking one action will lead to a series of other policies or actions also being taken, *without showing a causal connection between the advocated policy and the consequent policies*. A popular example of the slippery slope fallacy is, "If we legalize marijuana, the next thing you know we'll legalize heroin, LSD, and crack cocaine." This slippery slope is a form of *non sequitur*, because no reason has been provided for why legalization of one thing leads to legalization of another. Tobacco and alcohol are currently legal, and yet other drugs have somehow remained illegal.'**

*A Rulebook for Arguments, Anthony Weston, Hackett Publishing Company, 1992.
** 'Logical Fallacies and the Art of Debate' web site; Glen W. Whitman, Assistant Professor of Economics, California State University, Northridge.