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ABSTRACT

Five writing assignments, geared to the content of a community college course on international relations, are presented. The first four assignments deal with specific critical reading skills: (1) distinguishing fact from opinion; (2) analyzing the author's point of view; (3) detecting fallacies; and (4) comparing and contrasting articles which take different positions on a single issue. In the fifth assignment, students are asked to use these skills, along with material learned in the course, in a critical analysis and evaluation of a given article. Each assignment is preceded by a lesson in which the specific reading skill is discussed in some detail. By carefully studying the lessons and putting the ideas into practice in the five short papers, the student is expected to leave the course not only knowledgeable about international relations, but also well prepared to critically read and think about issues in the various areas of the social sciences, including world politics. (EJV)

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Political Science 202

International Relations

William Taylor

Writing Assignments

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Political Science 202

International Relations

William M. Taylor

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## Introduction

One of my long term goals for you is that through this course you develop the ability to read about issues of world politics. But I want you to do more than just read. I want you to read intelligently and critically; to distinguish between fact and opinion; to recognize the author's point of view; to suspend judgment until all the facts are in; and to carefully evaluate everything you read.

"To really think while reading, to evaluate, to judge what is important and unimportant, what is relevant or irrelevant, what is in harmony with an idea read in another place or acquired through experience -- these constitute critical reading."

Critical Reading  
--Walter T. Petty

The ability to read critically is closely related to the abilities to think and write critically. Taken together, these three skills are the foundation of a liberal education. For they give you the ability to think and speak for yourself rather than be at the mercy of people who present their ideas in a forceful and authoritative way, even when they're wrong or the facts can be legitimately interpreted in other ways.

What follows is a set of five writing assignments, the first four of which deal with specific critical reading skills: distinguishing fact from opinion, analyzing the author's point of view, detecting fallacies, and comparing and contrasting articles which take different positions on a single issue. These culminate in the fifth assignment in which you are asked to use these skills, along with the material learned in the course, in a critical analysis and evaluation of a given article. Each assignment is preceded by a lesson in which the specific skill is discussed in some detail. By carefully studying the lessons and putting the ideas into practice in the five short papers, you will leave this course not only knowledgeable about international relations but also well prepared to critically read and think about issues in the various areas of the social sciences, including world politics.

## Acknowledgements

All of education and learning is a group exercise. Most of what we know we learned in interaction with someone else, or more likely, with a good many people. We all depend on the efforts of others, and they on us. In preparing these assignments I was especially dependent on the help of Lynda Jerit who teaches English at Oakton. Lynda helped me think through what I wanted these assignments to be all about, she helped me clarify my original efforts to put them down on paper, and she guided me through numerous revisions. I am deeply indebted to her.

## Paper #1

### Distinguishing Facts From Opinions

This paper is designed to give you practice in distinguishing facts from opinions and to help you develop your ability to evaluate a writer's authority, which is to say, the extent to which s/he has a right to be believed by the reader.

#### Facts

A fact is something that has actually happened, is true, or can be "proven" to the satisfaction of reasonable people. In political science, as in much of life, it's not always possible to produce the kind of proof the physical sciences have conditioned us to look for. How do you prove, for example, that you love someone? Or that democracy is the best form of government? In each instance, you can point to all sorts of things to support your contention, but ultimately there's an element of faith involved. You have to believe it, and then live your life based on that belief.

In political science there are facts and there are facts, and then there are opinions and theories. There are facts that can be proven with hard evidence and data, for example that Jimmy Carter imposed an embargo on grain sales to the Soviet Union because of its invasion of Afghanistan, or that the United States possesses the ability to wreak unimaginable destruction with our nuclear weapons.

In addition to facts that can be proven with hard evidence, there are also interpretations of facts or historical events that have attained the status of fact because virtually everybody accepts them as such, for example that we would never initiate an unprovoked nuclear attack against the Soviet Union. It should be noted that such "facts" are not always true; it was once assumed as fact that blacks are inferior to whites. Much scholarly research is concerned with reexamining such widely held views.

In addition to facts, there are also opinions and theories. These are interpretations of facts or historical events about which there is no agreement among scholars, such as what motivated Harry Truman to authorize the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. For our purposes, the difference between opinions and theories is somewhat subtle: when a person or group of persons have done a great deal of scholarly research in developing their interpretation of the facts or historical events the result is called a theory. Opinions are more spontaneous, less well researched, but not necessarily less correct. In addition, opinions can play an important role in the development of knowledge, often serving as a spur to scholarly research that's designed to prove or disprove the opinion.

There are several steps involved in clarifying the nature of facts and opinions. Let's start with facts.

1. Distinguishing Between Facts That Are Central To The Author's Argument And Facts That Are Incidental To The Argument.

Some facts are central to the argument or point the author is trying to make. In such instances we rightly expect the author to convince us that

these facts are true. Other facts are incidental to the author's argument, so we wouldn't want her to waste her time proving that they're correct. For example: "On a cold day in January, in his Inaugural Address, John Kennedy committed the U.S. to resist communism." For most purposes, the first fact, (that it was a cold day in January) is incidental. The second fact (that it was his Inaugural Address) may or may not be significant. The third statement of fact is the important one, and we'd expect the author to prove that Kennedy did indeed commit the U.S. to resist communism. A second example might help illustrate this: "Although Ronald Reagan ended the grain embargo against the Soviet Union, it didn't help the American farmers." The first fact (that Reagan ended the grain embargo) is probably not significant in this context. The important statement of fact is that it didn't help the American farmers. This is a fact that the author should attempt to prove.

Hint: If you're uncertain as to whether a fact is central or incidental, in your mind drop it from the text and see if the sentence or article makes sense without it. If it does, it's probably not a central point.

## 2. Distinguishing Between Facts That Are Common Knowledge And Facts That Aren't.

Authors have a right to expect their readers to possess a certain fund of common knowledge that can be referred to without having to be proven. Simple examples would be: George Washington was our first president; Lincoln wrote the Gettysburg Address; and Richard Nixon resigned in the wake of the Watergate scandal. We would consider it inappropriate if the author took the time to prove things that everyone knows to be true.

On the other hand, some facts aren't common knowledge. For example: Because of a long history of invasion from the East and West, the Russian people and their leaders have an almost paranoid fear of the outside world. If this is important to the author's line of argument, then he should prove that it's true.

As a reader, one problem you may have is that your fund of common knowledge might be smaller than the author thinks. That is, he might assert something to be true without proving it, assuming that the reader will immediately recognize its truth. But you might not. If the assertion is important to the author's argument, you should check it against other sources to find out whether it's commonly accepted as true. (Also take comfort. If you do all the work for the course, by the end of the semester you'll have a larger fund of common knowledge than the average reader).

## 3. Distinguishing Facts From Opinions Or Theories That The Author Attempts To Disguise As Facts.

Some fact can be proven to most people's satisfaction:

- On a cold day in January, John Kennedy gave his Inaugural Address
- George Washington was our first president
- Lincoln wrote the Gettysburg Address

Other apparently-factual statements are really opinions or theories disguised as facts:

- Instead of seeking to inform U.S. policy, the function of the State Department is to confirm what our top officials already believe.
- Franklin Roosevelt provoked the Japanese to attack the U.S. at Pearl Harbor.

As a reader, it's not always easy to distinguish facts from opinions that are disguised as facts. Sometimes, as in the examples above, the statements are provocative enough that they call attention to themselves. But not always. For example:

- John Kennedy committed the U.S. to resist communism at any cost.
- Ronald Regan initiated the greatest arms build-up in U.S. history.

In this instance it takes a certain amount of sophistication to recognize the statements as opinion rather than fact. You'll increasingly develop that sophistication the more widely you read. In the meantime, a good initial way to decide if an author is trying to hide an opinion by asserting it as a fact is to ask whether it's theoretically or practically possible to prove the assertion. If it is, has the author given any evidence that proof exists? If not, maybe it's his or her opinion.

Another approach is to think of two prominent politicians on opposite ends of the political spectrum, such as Ronald Reagan and Edward Kennedy, and ask yourself whether they would agree that the assertion is a fact. If you think they wouldn't, see whether the author provides supporting evidence or proof for the statement. If he doesn't, or if the proof seems weak, he may be expressing an opinion.

Interpretations of historical events need to be approached differently. For example, the statement from above: John Kennedy committed the U.S. to resist communism at any cost. To decide whether this is a fact or an opinion it's necessary to check it out and see if respected historians agree with it. Unfortunately, you'll probably find respected historians on different sides of most historical issues. Significant historical events seldom lend themselves to only one unambiguous interpretation. So you should probably begin with the assumption that interpretations of historical events are theories or opinions rather than facts, unless the author proves otherwise.

Having discussed facts, let's turn now to opinions.

### Opinions

An opinion is a belief that's not based on what's certain, but on what one thinks to be true, valid, or probable based on a reasoned assessment of the evidence.

There is, I think, a tendency to give opinions a back seat to facts, to see them as less important. But in many areas of life, including politics, it's not possible to reduce everything to facts. Opinions, especially the considered opinions of the specialist or expert, play a key role in decision-making. (When I had a severe abdominal pain the doctor said he

couldn't be sure or prove that my appendix was infected, but based on his opinion I agreed to have the appendix removed).

The activities involved in clarifying the nature of opinions are the same ones used in clarifying the nature of facts.

1. Distinguishing between opinions that are central to the argument and opinions that are incidental to the argument.
2. Distinguishing between opinions that require justification and those that don't.
3. Distinguishing between opinions that the author supports with evidence and those that he or she doesn't support.
4. Distinguishing between opinions that the author acknowledges are opinions and those s/he tries to disguise by asserting them as fact.

With all of this in mind, for your first paper I want you to analyze article number five in Annual Editions, "Next Stop, Angola" by Stephen J. Solary, and distinguish the facts and opinions contained in it.

After reading the article thoroughly, write a brief sentence or two capsulizing the central point of the article. Then list (quote the sentences) ten facts that are central to the author's argument and five facts that are incidental, indicating why you think they're central or incidental. Following each of the ten key facts indicate whether or not the author attempts to prove them (simply state: "proven" or "unproven"). If they're not proven, indicate whether or not they're part of your fund of common knowledge (simply state "is" or "is not.") If the facts are proven, give some indication of the kind of proof offered (e.g. statistics, reference to some other source, etc.), whether or not the proof convinces you, and why you are or are not convinced.

Second, quote ten opinions expressed by the author. Following each opinion, indicate whether or not the author acknowledges it to be opinion or instead hides it by asserting it to be a fact ("acknowledges" or "hides".) Then indicate whether the author supports his opinion ("does support" or "does not support".) If he does, give an indication of the type of support, whether or not you find it convincing, and why.

NOTE: 1. In this paper, simply quote the sentences and follow each of them with the requested information.

2. When quoting, indicate where the sentence comes from in the following way: after each quoted sentence, put in parentheses the page number, the column it's in (1, 2, or 3) and the general location of that sentence in the column (A=top third, B=middle third, C=bottom third.) Follow this with the information requested above. Your citation should look something like this:

"In his Inaugural Address, John Kennedy committed the U.S. to resist communism." (121,2,B), it's a key fact because..., proven, reference to another source (book by Arthur Schlesinger Jr.), I'm convinced because...

3. Papers must be typed double spaced.

Determining the Author's Point of View

Each of us develop feelings or attitudes about the things we encounter in our lives: people, foods, television programs, music, movies, teachers, courses we're taking, writing assignments, or sports teams.

In addition, we exhibit these feelings or attitudes in varying degrees of intensity: I don't like fish very much; I can't stand liver; and I love pizza. And so if I were asked to write an essay about one of these foods, I'd find it impossible to be entirely neutral or objective. I'd rhapsodize about pizza, perhaps even to the point of comparing the relative merits of Tombstone, Jen'o's, and Domin'ck's brand pizzas. I'd be hard pressed to find something negative to say. On the other hand, in my essay on liver, the central theme would probably be the refrain from a not-so-famous folk song:

Oh, I hate liver,  
Liver makes me quiver  
It makes me want  
to curl right up and die.

My essay, in other words, would reflect my point of view.

Point of view, then, is the opinion, outlook, attitude, or prejudice we have toward the things we encounter in our lives. It can grow out of extensive research and study, resulting in a well formulated, highly defensible position on a given issue. Or it can be the result of a variety of past experiences which reside in the subconscious and which shape our perceptions of the world around us. In truth, both are operating at once, with our subconscious points of view influencing the research and study we engage in. In addition, well formulated opinions on a given issue influence further research and study into that issue.

Psychologists call this process "selective perception." Selective perception operates in all of us so that we essentially see and hear that which confirms our attitudes and reinforces our prejudices. We're well aware of the phenomenon of "tuning out" certain kinds of information: a smoker avoids accepting evidence that cigarettes and cancer are linked; a loving wife "ignores" her husband's drinking problem, even to the point of denying its existence. Studies of public opinion and laboratory experiments have repeatedly confirmed that individuals select the facts that conform to their point of view, even to the extent that people can completely reverse the meaning of a message so that it accords with their own prior opinion. Thus, as a result of selective perception, we cannot help but have our point of view reflected in what we think or write, no matter how hard we try to be "objective" and attempt not to distort information.

Not only do we selectively perceive the information (fact, message) which we actually receive, we also tend to prescreen that to which we will expose ourselves. Thus we pay selective attention. It's likely that we read newspapers and magazines which print material that's consistent with our interests or point of view. We tend to choose friends whose opinions are similar to or conform with our own. In a variety of ways we avoid information which would conflict with our point of view and at the same time seek to

expose ourselves to information which will reinforce what we already hold to be true.

Selective attention and selective perception are buttressed by selective retention -- we're most likely to remember those things which most closely match our preexisting frames of reference. It's easier to remember information which reinforces our beliefs than information which contradicts them.

In her research, even the best-intentioned author is influenced by her points of view to select from among the full range of information or data on a given subject. This built in tendency to be selective is reinforced by a practical consideration: in most instances there's far too much information for it all to be thoroughly considered.

In addition, if an author comes across a position that differs from her own, there's a chance that she'll filter it out through selective perception or selective retention, perhaps discounting its significance when compared to the material more consistent with her own point of view.

The result is that almost anything we read is biased to a greater or lesser extent. That is, it doesn't give a full and balanced presentation of the facts and the various interpretations of those facts. Instead, it reflects the author's point of view. This is generally not an indication of evil intent. Rather, it's part of the human condition. And in fact, it can play a positive role in the pursuit of knowledge.

When a group of authors within the same field of study interpret facts and data in a more or less consistent way, that is, when they share a common point of view, we speak of them as constituting a "school of thought." Members of these schools often interact with one another in the process of refining their ideas. Generally, there are competing schools of thought which are more or less critical of one another. Their competition forces everyone involved to engage in an ongoing reevaluation of his or her own point of view and the facts that support it. It's as a result of this competition among opposing points of view that ideas within a discipline are refined and knowledge is advanced.

One aspect of critical reading, then, is determining the author's point of view so as to be aware of the particular subjectivity with which he writes. In this way, the reader won't be lulled into thinking that everything the author says is true or that he has the only point of view to be considered on the subject.

There are some points of view which could appear in any kind of writing. Others generally only appear in political writings. Let me begin by listing some of the range of viewpoints which fall into the first category. With regard to her subject matter, an author can be:

positive-negative  
sympathetic--unsympathetic  
tolerant--intolerant  
sad--happy

supportive--opposed  
angry--pleased  
respectful--disrespectful  
patient--impatient  
emotional--unemotional  
cynical--trusting

In addition, we should see these points of view as positions on a continuum: an author can be extremely sympathetic, very sympathetic, or only mildly sympathetic; mildly unsympathetic, very unsympathetic, or extremely unsympathetic. He can also be neutral. Be aware also that an author doesn't have to exhibit all, or any one, of these points of view.

In addition to the above, there are several points of view which generally appear only in political writing, namely, liberalism and conservatism. Let me explain each of these in some detail.

In general, the liberal point of view is based on a positive, optimistic view of human nature which sees the individual as willing to sacrifice self-interest in pursuit of the common good. In contrast, the conservative point of view is based on a more pessimistic view of human nature, seeing the individual as motivated by self-interest and willing to violate other people's rights in pursuit of his own interests.

In keeping with these different views of human nature, liberals believe that the government can and should play a positive role in the life of the individual. They feel the government should initiate and fund programs that will help improve the life conditions of people, especially those people who, through no fault of their own, aren't able to make it in society, namely, the poor and down-trodden. Liberals aren't afraid of a large and powerful government involved in many aspects of people's lives since they assume that by-and-large the people in government will use their power for good and noble purposes.

In contrast, conservatives tend to worry about a big and powerful government. They agree with Lord Acton who said: "Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely." Their fear is that the more power a government has the more likely it is to use that power to violate people's rights. Thus, conservatives tend to stress individual initiative rather than government action. For example, Ronald Reagan said in his 1980 campaign, "Why should the government take the money out of your pocket and decide how to spend it? Why not leave it in your pocket and let you decide how to spend it?"

With regard to individual responsibility, conservatives tend to see the individual as responsible for his own ignorance, unemployment, crime, or poverty. In contrast, liberals blame the "system" and propose a wide range of government programs designed to improve the social, political, and economic systems. As far as conservatives are concerned, government programs will not eliminate these problems. Indeed, government intervention makes things worse because it implies that the individual doesn't have to take responsibility for his or her own life. At the same time, conservatives accept the need for a "safety net" of government programs for those who are truly unable to care for themselves -- the "deserving" poor.

Let me further illustrate the differences between liberals and conservatives by examining their points of view on the three broad political issues of our time: the social, economic, and defense issues.

Social issues are those having to do with the relations between the various races, ethnic groups, sexes, and classes in our society. They have to do with guaranteeing the rights of minorities: blacks, Hispanics, women, gays, the handicapped. Liberals favor strong government action on these issues, seeing the government as the appropriate defender of the rights of the individual against an unsympathetic majority. Conservatives express concern about the rights of the individual, but generally oppose government action to protect those rights, preferring private initiative instead.

Economic issues are those having to do with the relationship between the political and economic sectors of our society. Liberals want the government to regulate the economy in the public interest, trusting that it can and will do so. Therefore, they favor strong government action designed to guarantee the right of workers to unionize and bargain collectively; to provide a minimum wage; to regulate the safety of the workplace and of the products produced there; to require that advertising be honest; to ensure that drugs are truly safe and effective before they go on the market. For liberals, taxes are the price we pay for the better society resulting from government programs.

In contrast, conservatives strongly oppose government regulation of the economy, as well as many of the welfare programs for the poor. They see a free and unregulated market as the best and most efficient way to promote economic growth in the private sector. This growth, they say, will do far more to increase economic opportunities for all citizens than can be done by government programs and spending.

For the most part, the position of liberals and conservatives on the defense issue derives from their attitudes toward communism in general and the Soviet Union in particular. Although liberals share with conservatives an opposition to communism, liberals recognize the appeal of communism to the oppressed peoples of the Third World, since communism promises a redistribution of wealth and political power. Therefore, liberals say that the way to prevent the spread of communism in the Third World is to pressure existing governments to make the needed reforms, thereby improving the life-situation of the poor and exploited in those countries, thus undercutting the appeal of communism. Liberals also tend to oppose giving military aid to governments which fail to push for such reforms.

In contrast, conservatives see communism as one of the worst evils in the world and as the paramount threat to the security of western democracy. Our task, they say, is to stop its spread by the wise use of, or threat to use, military power. As a result, conservatives are willing to support anti-communist governments and provide them with military aid when they're confronted with popular revolutions -- even if those governments are violating the human rights of their citizens or are perhaps making little or no efforts to improve the life-conditions of their people.

With regard to the Soviet Union, liberals tend to feel that we can negotiate with them on the basis of mutual self-interest and make progress toward reconciling our differences. Conservatives feel that above all we must not appear to be weak or lacking in resolve, for example by seeming too eager to negotiate an agreement or by cutting back on defense spending, for the Soviets will only move to exploit our perceived weaknesses. Conservatives feel that the only thing the Soviets understand is power, and that whenever we negotiate with them it must be from a position of strength or we'll lose out. They also don't trust the Soviets to live up to agreements that might be made.

In general, then, these are the positions of the liberals and conservatives on the major issues of our time. It would be helpful if people were consistently liberal or conservative on each of them, but in fact that's often not the case. Most of us, authors included, are perhaps liberal on one or two of the issues and conservative on the other(s).

Finally, just as with the points of view listed earlier, so too liberalism and conservatism exist on a continuum from radical liberal to radical conservative with liberal liberal, moderate liberal, conservative liberal, middle of the road, liberal conservative, moderate conservative, and conservative conservative in between. And of course, an author's political point of view toward his subject will be reflected in what he writes.

Before concluding, one more point of view needs to be considered, yours as the reader. Making critical judgments involves more than just determining the author's point of view. It also involves recognizing your own point of view and its impact on your perception of what you read. If your bias is similar to that of the author, you may unthinkingly accept whatever she says. If your point of view is significantly different, you may offhandedly reject whatever she says. In either instant, you would be shutting down your mind, no longer engaging in critical reading, no longer thinking for yourself.

\* \* \* \* \*

Let's turn now to a description of your second paper.

Begin by reading Article #1, "The Real National Interest" by Alan Tonelson. As you read, be looking for the information you'll need to complete the following assignment:

1. In a sentence or short paragraph, describe the issue or main idea that the author is writing about. You may be able to do this by quoting from the article, or you may wish to state it in your own words. (If you quote, be sure to indicate the location as explained for paper #1). For example: "A key issue that must be addressed in any discussion of human rights is the policy of the current U.S. president to support the government of South Africa. (117, 1, C).

**Hint:** Based on the accepted standards for writing articles in the political science discipline, you should be able to find the main issue or idea stated near the beginning of the article, but not always; it may also reappear in the conclusion.

2. Indicate the author's principle point of view or position on this issue. You might find it explicitly stated, in which case you may quote the author's own words. Or you may only find it implied in what he says, necessitating that you draw it out of the article and put it in your own words. For example: "Although he doesn't say it in exactly these words, it's clear that the author is strongly opposed to the president's support for the government of South Africa."

Hint: An author may indicate his or her point of view by positively asserting it, by favorably or unfavorably quoting others, and/or by attacking a position s/he opposes.

3. Indicate the reasons given by the author for why he holds that point of view, as well as any information he gives or arguments he makes to prove or support those reasons. If he says it succinctly, you may just want to quote the appropriate passages, although you'll also want to use your own words to indicate the significance of, and interrelationship among, the passages you quote. If the author doesn't state it in easily quotable passages, you may find it easier to paraphrase part or all of his argument.

Hint: As you analyze the article for this purpose, keep in mind that issues can be dealt with on several levels at the same time. Not everything that's said in an article relates directly to the central issue and/or the reasons for the author's point of view on that issue. Some things might be indirectly related because they support or prove something else that does directly relate to the central issue. These too should be included in your paper since they're an integral part of the author's overall analysis. You can clarify this for yourself by asking: "Exactly what is it that the author is trying to prove here, and how does it relate to the central issue of the article?"

4. Indicate any points of view expressed by the author that don't directly or indirectly relate to the central issue of the article. This would be the case, for example, if in discussing the issue of the president's support for South Africa the author said: "The congress, typically unable to agree on anything, has not taken a position on this issue." By throwing in the part I've underlined, the author tells us what he thinks about Congress, an issue that's not related to the main issue.

Hint: Watch for the adjectives; they are the words which often convey value and reveal point of view. This is a good general hint for the paper as a whole, but it's especially helpful for this section. An author who wishes to convey the image of objectivity concerning the central issue of the article will be very careful in her selection of words, seeking to avoid those which might reveal her point of view. However, in dealing with material not directly related to that issue, she might let her guard down and allow a word or phrase to slip in which can tell you a great deal about her overall point of view. When this occurs, it will often show up in the adjectives or appear in the form of parenthetical expressions or as an aside to the reader. Consider, for example, the difference in these two sentences: "The president does not view the issue of apartheid in moral terms," and "The president, who sees everything in terms of the East-West conflict, does not view the issue of apartheid

in moral terms." The second sentence reveals something about the author's point of view that's not revealed in the first.

5. Finally, look over everything you've learned about the author from what he included in the article and indicate whether he seems to be a liberal or a conservative. Support your opinion by relating the things he says to the description of liberalism and conservatism given above. Conclude by making a judgment about the extent to which his liberalism or conservatism interfered with his efforts to be objective.

As always, your paper should be typed double-spaced.

## Paper #3

### Detecting Fallacies

An important part of critical reading is the ability to detect fallacies. This is your task in the third paper. Depending on your interests, begin reading a variety of articles from Annual Editions. Drawing from all the articles you read, quote fifteen fallacies you discover. Cite the source of each (as you learned to do for the first paper) and then indicate what type of fallacy it is, giving an explanation of why you consider it to be that fallacy. Try to find examples of each of the kinds of fallacies described below rather than making all your examples of the same sort.

Following is a description of the most common fallacies. However, there are others. If you feel you have found one that's not listed, please include it with a brief description of what makes it a fallacy. You won't be penalized for doing so.

\* \* \* \* \*

### FALLACIES

A fallacy is an argument that is unsound, one that relies on flawed reasoning or faulty thinking. And yet, despite the flaw (or perhaps because of it) fallacies can be very persuasive since they often seem to express what is clearly true.

Fallacies can be used consciously or unconsciously by an author. If they're used unconsciously, it probably means the author hasn't clearly thought out what he's saying. If they're used consciously, they may be part of a concerted effort to deceive you, the reader. In either case, uncovering fallacies is an important part of critical reading.

In examining articles in Annual Editions you'll have an opportunity to discover what uses writers make of fallacious reasoning. In addition, you'll be able to see what writers gain or lose from the use of such reasoning. It should be noted that the use of fallacious reasoning does not necessarily mean that the author's point or argument is wrong. It simply means that it can't be proven right or wrong with the reasoning that was used. Further study is needed. Following is a brief description of some of the most common fallacies.

### Labeling

Words not only have meanings (denotations), they also carry feelings and implied values (Connotations). For example: democracy, fascist, do-gooder, mom and apple pie, communism, terrorist, freedom, totalitarianism.

Each of these words arouses positive or negative feelings in us, totally apart from what they mean in and of themselves (we might not even be able to define their meanings).

Aware of this, authors choose their words carefully. Sometimes they may try to avoid defending a position they take by simply labeling an idea or event with an emotionally charged word (positive or negative):

- The decision was made by the bosses in their smoke-filled back-rooms
- The Sandanistas are puppets of Moscow.
- The PLO are nothing more than a bunch of terrorists.
- Free Enterprise is the American Way.

Please note that a sound argument may convince us that these statements are true. Nonetheless, such slanted language has no place in the argument itself. But labeling is most objectionable -- and fallacious -- when it is used to arouse our passions and prejudices in order to evade discussion of the facts.

#### Hasty Generalization

In the fallacy of a hasty generalization, an isolated or exceptional case is offered as proof rather than as a proposition to be proved. In everyday language, this is often referred to as jumping to a conclusion. For example:

A Salvadorian Guerilla was recently captured with a Soviet-made rifle. The evidence proves beyond a reasonable doubt that the Russians are aiding the guerillas in El Salvador. They're responsible for all the unrest in the Third World today.

This statement raises a number of questions: "what evidence", "who's evidence", "beyond who's doubt", "how do I know"? A generalization is hasty, then, when it's based on skimpy or questionable evidence.

#### Appeal To Emotion

The fallacy of appeal to emotion occurs when an argument is designed to win people over simply by playing on their emotions, such as pity, anger, or fear. This fallacy is often used in conjunction with the hasty generalization. For example: "If we cut any money from the defense budget, we will undermine our ability to defend the American way of life."

Appeal to emotion can be very effective since emotions play such a significant role in what we perceive as being important and, therefore, in what we remember. Appeal to emotion is especially powerful when the argument being made is consistent with what we already believe to be true since we're not likely to pause and consider how valid the argument is apart from its emotional content.

#### Appeal to Authority

The fallacy of appeal to authority occurs when an author attempts to prove a point by suggesting that because some recognized authority holds that position the reader should accept it at face value without careful examination:

- We need to spend more money on nuclear weapons. President Reagan has told us we're lagging behind the Soviets.
- It wouldn't risk our security for the U.S. to undertake a unilateral nuclear freeze. Edward Kennedy has assured us that we have more than enough weapons to deter a Soviet attack.

Another problem with appeal to authority is that one can often find authorities on different sides of an issue. Consider, for example, the various positions taken by the experts on the question of the safety of nuclear power plants. To simply cite an authority doesn't prove that the point is correct.

This doesn't mean that citing authorities is always a fallacy. Intellectual inquiry is an ongoing process which builds on the fruits of earlier scholarship. It isn't possible for each author to restate -- and re-prove -- all of the work of previous authors whose writings have helped shape his or her ideas. There are times when it's necessary and appropriate to simply say: "As Hans Morgenthau has demonstrated..."

What's more, sometimes a particular expert is clearly identified within the discipline as the originator of a given set of ideas and so intellectual honesty requires that the author acknowledge his indebtedness to this expert by saying something like "As Walter Lefebvre has indicated..."

In addition, you need to consider the way in which the author uses the quotation. Does it occur within the context of her trying in various ways to prove her point, with the quotation just one part of the overall argument? Or does it stand alone as the only proof offered? The first instance is probably a legitimate appeal to authority. In the second case you should stop and consider the possibility that a fallacy is being employed.

Appeal to authority, then, may or may not be a fallacy. But whenever it occurs it should be a red flag for you. Stop and ask yourself whether the author is trying to slip an opinion by you, disguising it as a fact endorsed by some authority. If you have any doubts, do a little research.

#### Bandwagon

The bandwagon fallacy reverses the strategy of appeal to authority. The author who uses this fallacy tries to convince his readers to accept a point or argument he's making by implying that it must be true because so many people believe it. For example:

- Twenty million Frenchmen can't be wrong.
- It's generally agreed that ...
- As everyone know ...

This fallacy plays on the individual's natural desire to be part of the group. It may be that the masses are correct. But saying it's so doesn't make it so.

It's important to distinguish the bandwagon fallacy from legitimate references to public opinion. Consider the following:

Sixty-nine percent of the American people think the President is doing a good job.

If the implication of an argument based on this statement is that the reader should think favorably of the President because so many others do, then

the author is guilty of the bandwagon fallacy. If instead the author is reporting the latest poll findings, such evidence is acceptable within its context and for what it's worth, and therefore is not a fallacy.

### Cardstacking

Cardstacking occurs when the author presents only those facts that support his views, ignoring those that run contrary. Examples of this can found in using quotations out of context, omitting key words from a quotation, or using favorable statistics while suppressing unfavorable ones.

Cardstacking can be one of the more effective fallacies because it's so difficult to detect: the author's presentation may appear to be very scholarly. It may also require a certain amount of background knowledge to realize that he's stacking the deck.

One indication that might tip you off is an argument that's completely one-sided. In discussing appeal to authority, I pointed out that experts can often be found defending all sides of an issue. An author who doesn't acknowledge that there may be alternative points of view may be stacking the deck.

It should be noted that one or a few statements standing alone don't constitute this fallacy. Instead, cardstacking occurs within an article as a whole in which the author consistently presents only one side of the issue.

### Begging the Question

When the author states his views in such a way that the reader hesitates to question it, then that author may have fallen into the fallacy of begging the question. The types of phrases associated with this fallacy are:

- It is obvious that...
- There is no question that...
- Of course we know...
- It is evident that...
- It is only reasonable to conclude...

By using phrases such as these, the author may be hoping that the reader who does not immediately see what is supposed to be "obvious", "beyond question", or "evident" will blame his own ignorance, rather than investigating to see if the author has truly made her point obvious, evident, and beyond question.

A variation on this occurs when the author attempts to get the reader to identify with her by using the word "we":

- We all know that...
- We all agree...
- As we can see...
- What else can we conclude but...

If the author is successful, the reader may stop thinking for himself,

simply accepting whatever the author says. Therefore, when you come across phrases such as these, step back and decide whether there's evidence to support the position "we" hold.

#### False Dilemma

The fallacy of the false dilemma asserts that only two opposing points of view may be held on a particular topic when in fact there are a number of possibilities. This argument is often stated in the form of either/or.

The false dilemma is used frequently in political writings, such as in discussing the conflict between the U.S. and the Soviet Union: it's either us or them; better dead than red; either we improve our nuclear weapons system or we expose ourselves to the possibility of a Soviet first-strike. The fallacy of the false dilemma ignores other possibilities, such as compromise and cooperation (better pink than extinct).

A variation of the false dilemma occurs when an author presents two possible solutions to a problem: his own and one that can't possibly be accepted: "Unless we make the death penalty mandatory, no one will be safe from murders and rapists."

#### False Analogy

An analogy is a comparison between two ideas, events, persons, places, or things that are similar to one another in one or more respects, but not in every respect. For example, "Trying to pin down the candidate on her attitude toward aid to the Contras is like trying to catch a greased pig." The purpose of the analogy is to illuminate what is unknown by comparing it to what is known or easily imagined (the difficulty of trying to capture a slippery animal). There is no implication that the unknown is like the known in every respect.

A false analogy is a statement which asserts that because things are similar in one or more respects they must be similar in all other respects as well. This often occurs when historical analogies are used.

For example, in recent years congressmen have been prone to draw an analogy between U.S. involvement in Vietnam and our possible involvement in Lebanon, Angola, Somalia, El Salvador, Nicaragua, or other hot spots in the world, asserting that if we get involved the outcome will be equally disastrous. In fact, they may be correct in their conclusion. But this can't be proven by only showing that there are certain similarities between the two situations.

Note that authors uses false analogies because they help prove his or her point. But sometimes analogies are used as a literary device to lend color or to make the writing more interesting. In such instances the author isn't trying to prove something, so we wouldn't call it a false analogy.

#### Non Sequitur

The non sequitur fallacy is an assertion that because one event follows after another, the first caused the second.

For example: "Last week Senator Doe received a campaign contribution from the United Auto Workers. This week he voted to limit the number of cars imported from Japan. Therefore, he's guilty of accepting a bribe." In truth, he may be guilty. But the fact that the vote followed the contribution doesn't in itself prove it.

The term non sequitur (in Latin it means "it does not follow") is used in a less technical sense to refer to faulty reasoning where the conclusion doesn't follow from the evidence. For example: "The loss of the shuttle clearly shows how careless NASA has become and that it's time to scrap the program."

### Unproven Assumptions

Sometimes an author builds his or her entire argument on one or more key assumptions without attempting to prove that they're true. This is the fallacy of the unproven assumption (which is not to say that it's necessarily wrong). For example, an author might assume, but not prove, that the primary reason why the U.S. is involved in Latin America is to protect the investments of U.S. companies in the area. This assumption may or may not be stated, but it would nonetheless influence what s/he writes.

In addition to unproven assumptions, there are some assumptions which are unprovable. For example, President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (Star Wars) is based on the assumption that the leaders of the Soviet Union would initiate a nuclear attack, against which we need to defend ourselves. There's no way to prove this assumption (it wouldn't do any good to call and ask; if they said "No, we'd never strike first, we wouldn't believe them). In such situations it's necessary to weigh what evidence there is and make an educated judgment.

Unproven assumptions often lead to stereotyped thinking: (that blacks are lazy, Italians are gangsters, Poles are dumb, blonds have more fun, politicians are crooks, etc.).

### Special Pleading

The fallacy of special pleading involves applying a double standard, one for ourselves (because we're special) and another, stricter one for everyone else.

For example: "It's okay for the United States to give aid to the government of El Salvador but wrong for the Soviet Union to give aid to the government of Nicaragua."

Often, special pleading occurs in more subtle ways through the choice of words. Pay particular attention to the adjectives and adverbs used by the author. For example:

- I'm firm; you're stubborn; he's pigheaded.
- I use stern measures; you engage in ruthless tactics.
- I plan; you scheme.
- I'm enterprising; you're opportunistic.
- I'm devoted; you're fanatical.
- I'm colorful; you're flaky.

In this form, special pleading is much the same as labeling.

### Repetition

The fallacy of repetition occurs when a statement or idea is simply repeated often enough, perhaps loudly enough, and with such strong emotion, that eventually it becomes accepted as true, even though it's never been proven.

This fallacy is at the heart of product advertising:

- You can't beat Crest for fighting cavities.
- Tylenol won't upset your stomach.
- Listerine kills germs on contact.

This applies to the advertising of candidates as well:

- Goldwater: In you heart you know he's right.
- All the way with LBJ
- Nixon's the one.
- McGovern: He's one of us.

The hope is that the people, hearing these slogans stated over and over again, will come to assume that they're true.

### Misleading Statistics

Since ignorance of mathematical terms and concepts is quite widespread, authors who present facts through statistics, graphs, tables, and charts can easily deceive the average reader. The person who assumes that numbers don't lie should take a warning from the title of a book written by Darrel Huff: How To Lie With Statistics.

There are several ways that numbers can be used intentionally or unintentionally to deceive:

#### The Deceptive Sample

Many statistics are based on a sample of the population. If the sample is biased -- only the subscribers to the Wall Street Journal were interviewed -- then the results will be similarly biased.

Even when a true random sample is used, the results will be unreliable if the questions are ambiguous or contain a subtle bias, or if the people feel compelled to answer in a socially acceptable way ("Did you do your share to help alleviate famine in Africa?").

#### The Misleading Average

Most of us have a pretty clear sense of what a mathematical average is. But statisticians don't use that term very often. Instead, they use the more precise (as well as more obscure) mean, median, and mode. The differences among these are significant, and the author will often choose to highlight the one that best supports his line of argument.

For example, let's say there's a company with forty-eight employees. The company president points with pride to the fact that the mean salary of the employees is \$20,000. In contrast, the head of the union complains that 80% of the employees earn only \$14,000. Is one of them lying? No, they're just using different statistics. The President earns \$110,000 and the vice-president, \$90,000. The other employees earn \$50,000, two others \$29,000, and two others \$21,000. The remaining forty workers earn \$14,000 each. The president chose to highlight the mean (average) salary. The head of the union chose the mode (the most common salary). Both are correct.

Graphs and charts are visual representations of numerical statistics. Therefore, they're subject to similar kinds of manipulation.

All of this suggests that if the author relies on statistics to make her point you should do what you can to be sure that she's presenting an accurate statistical picture.

\* \* \* \* \*

Having read through all of this, you may now feel overwhelmed. There's so much!

Indeed there is, especially if it's all new to you. But don't lose heart. Do you remember all the things you had to keep in mind when you first learned to drive a car? With enough practice it became second nature.

The same will happen with your ability to detect fallacies. In the beginning you'll need to keep these descriptions close at hand and refer to them often. You'll make mistakes, but that's all right. You can learn from the mistakes. And with practice you'll find that your ability to detect fallacies will keep improving. Just be sure to look carefully at the context in which the possible fallacy occurs. Does it stand alone to prove a point without any further supporting evidence? If so, it may be a fallacy. Check it out.

## Paper # 4

### Comparison and Contrast

At various points in the description of the first three papers I've indicated that experts often disagree on fundamental questions, such as which historical events are relevant for helping us understand a contemporary situation, which information or data is properly related to the issue under discussion, how information or data should be interpreted, and what point of view provides the best perspective from which to view the issue or event.

I've also indicated that the disagreement and competition among the experts result in a lively, ongoing debate that helps refine and advance ideas within the field.

In paper #4 I want you to enter into that debate by critically evaluating various positions taken by different authors. You'll do this by selecting an article from Annual Editions, finding another article that takes a different perspective, and comparing and contrasting the two. But before I describe the paper in detail, let me say a few things about comparison and contrast as ways of making thoughtful judgments .

In your everyday life you quite naturally fall into the habit of comparing and contrasting things: your and your friend's political science teachers, hamburgers from McDonald's and Wendy's, Fords and Chevrolets, or the current Cubs team with 1984's. For some topics you may look more at similarities (comparison), with others more at differences (contrast). But in reality it's almost impossible to perform one type of evaluation without including the other.

The purpose of comparison and contrast is usually to make a judgment, to be able to say which teacher, hamburger, car, or team you think is better; to be able to say which author's analysis and interpretation seems more accurate. Notice that I said "seems" rather than "is" more accurate. In the social sciences, as in much of life, judgments are tentative and open to change based on new information.

Since the purpose of comparison and contrast is to make a judgment, sound analysis begins with an examination of similar aspects of the things being evaluated. You wouldn't be in a position to make an intelligent judgment as to which car to buy if you test drove the Ford but not the Chevy, and checked out the Chevy's stereo and kicked its tires, but didn't do the same with the Ford. Thus, you need to compare apples to apples, not apples and oranges.

Unfortunately, it isn't that easy when comparing different authors and their perspectives on a given subject. Authors don't always agree on which material is important enough to be included in their analyses. And some material which isn't included is implied or assumed. There's also a good chance that they'll disagree on interpretation. And so you'll find that you won't always be able to compare two different articles point for point the way you can two cars.

However, you will be able to compare their points of view and make a judgment as to the appropriateness of the material presented in support of those points of view. You can get a sense of the extent to which the authors confuse fact and opinion or employ fallacious arguments. You can develop a feeling for how much you can trust each author. Based on all of this you can make a tentative judgment as to which author (if either) seems more correct, or in what area(s) one is more correct than the other. But as a student of political science you must remain receptive to new information which may alter or modify your conclusions. Don't allow your judgment that one author is more correct to lead you to assume that the entire issue is resolved. So judgments must be made, but tentatively, and always open to revision based on the discovery of new information.

With this in mind, let me turn to a detailed description of the process you should employ in this paper. Begin by choosing an article from Annual Editions. Almost any article will do, but you probably want to select one that deals with a "hot" issue which is likely to have had many articles written about it. Next, find an article from another source which takes a different point of view on the same issue. Before I suggest some ways you can go about this, let me say a few words about the nature of different types of periodicals.

Traditionally, periodicals are described as being either scholarly or popular. Scholarly periodicals are those in which the author addresses his remarks to fellow scholars. Because of this intended audience, the writer assumes a high level of common background knowledge, can freely use technical language appropriate to the discipline, and can present his argument at a high level of sophistication. Such periodicals are often called journals. Every field of study has its own professional journals in which specialists test out their research and ideas on fellow specialists. A lay person would probably find it difficult to understand the issues being argued, let alone the significance of particular points of the debate.

If specialists wish to communicate with the general public, they do so through "popular" periodicals written for the average person. Given this audience, they don't assume broad knowledge and so they provide the necessary background. Thus, they have to translate the technical language into more easily understood terms. And they have to gear their presentation to broader issues with more popular appeal.

With regard to political science, I would distinguish four categories of popular periodicals. The first is made up of those magazines which deal with a wide range of issues, including an occasional article on a political topic. Into this category I'd put magazines such as Reader's Digest, Playboy, People, Redbook, and the like. Because of standards within the discipline, for almost any paper you would write for a political science class, it would be unacceptable to use magazines in this category.

The second category of popular periodicals is news magazines and newspapers. It would include such magazines as Time, Newsweek, Business Week, and U.S. News and World Report, as well as daily and weekly newspapers such as the Chicago Tribune and the New York Times. Although these engage in some analysis of the news, their primary purpose is to summarize the major

news events. Depending on the course you're taking and the type of paper you're writing, it may be appropriate to use these periodicals for the purpose of gaining broad outlines of understanding on an issue with which you're relatively unfamiliar. But no college paper should make more than limited use of such magazines.

The third category is made up of those periodicals that are directed toward the interested and educated lay person. Readers of these magazines have more background knowledge than the average person, but not as much as the specialist. They have some familiarity with the technical language of the field. And they're looking for analysis at a more sophisticated level than one would find in the more popular magazines in the first two categories. These magazines assume readers are familiar with the major news events and therefore focus on the "news behind the news": careful analysis of why key people acted as they did and why events occurred as they did. An additional feature of periodicals in this category is that they tend to have a consciously articulated point of view. That is, they tend to be either liberal or conservative. Among the liberal magazines are The Progressive, The Nation, and The New Republic. Among the conservative magazines are Commentary and The National Review. In papers written for most undergraduate political science courses, it's normally quite appropriate to use periodicals which fall into this category.

The fourth category is made up of one magazine, Foreign Affairs. It falls somewhere in between the periodicals in category three and the scholarly periodicals; in some ways it fits into both groups. It's the magazine in which the members of the foreign policy establishment communicate with one another. This establishment is made up of foreign policy specialists who move in and out of government with changes in the Oval Office. In the pages of Foreign Affairs they set forth their ideas of what the government should do about the current problems in international politics. But in addition to the specialists, a small but sophisticated group of laypersons subscribe to the magazine as a way of nurturing their interest in international relations. By the end of this course your general sophistication should match theirs, but you'll probably lack the breadth of detailed information they have regarding specific issues or areas of the world; this you'll acquire with further study and reading.

At this point it might be useful to consider our text. A glance at the index of Annual Editions will reveal that all of the articles come from popular periodicals, mostly from categories three and four. This perfectly suits my purpose which is to help you develop the skills to critically evaluate articles which appear in the popular press, a purpose which is reinforced by your reading and by this set of writing assignments. Earlier I mentioned that as much as possible you should compare apples and apples. What this means is that you should select articles with an eye toward the knowledge their authors bring to the writing, the level of understanding assumed of the reader, and the complexity of the discussion. It's unlikely that you'll find an article in USA today that compares favorably with one in Foreign Affairs. But let your own reading be your guide. The article you choose from Annual Editions will set your standard for comparison.

The next question, of course, is how to find such an article. The answer is to use the various periodical indexes available in the library. The one you're most likely to use is The Readers' Guide To Periodical Literature which indexes articles that occur in popular magazines. For the most part, however, it doesn't index articles from newspapers. If you plan on using a newspaper article, you'll have to go to the index provided by the individual papers. There's another index you probably won't use but I want to mention so you'll know about it for the future. It's The Social Science Index. Here you'll find an index of articles in the social sciences appearing in scholarly magazines. Finally, there are a series of specialized indexes such as The Education Index, The Humanities Index, The Business Periodicals Index, The Applied Science and Technology Index, The General Science Index, and many more. (There are approximately 64,000 English-language periodicals published each year; The Readers' Guide indexes 180 of them. Obviously, most of them are indexed in the specialized indexes.)

The next step is to consider the various articles cited in The Readers' Guide. Let's say that you've selected a piece from Annual Editions written in August of 1984 and having to do with death squads in El Salvador. The original article came from The New Republic and you want to find another one written at about the same time with which to compare it. Following is a list of eight articles chosen from more than forty articles cited in the March '84 - February '85 volume of the Guide. Using The Readers' Guide is somewhat akin to using the Yellow Pages. Things can be indexed in what at times seem odd categories. Be patient and resourceful. These citations appeared under the heading "El Salvador" and the subheading "Civil War":

Appease plan [death squad issue]. J. Morley New Repub  
190:13-16 Mr 12 '84

Behind the death squads [with editorial comment] A. Nairn.  
11. Progressive 48:9 20-9 My '84

Death squads and U.S. policy. W. F. Buckley Natl Rev.  
36:62-3 F 24 '84

Death squads, truth squads. Natl Rev. 36:18-19  
Ja 27 '84

Duarte's shakeout [plan to curb death squad killings]  
Newsweek 103:44 Je 25 '84

El Salvador's death squads must go. W. E. Griffith  
map. Readers Digest 124:116-20 Ap '84

Inside a death squad. A. Nairn Harpers 269:14-15 J1 '84

The white hands of death J. Kelly 11. Time 123:58-9  
My 21 '84

I assume that you're familiar with how to read the above citations, but I'll review the first one for you. The title of the article is "Appease Plan". Since that doesn't give a very clear picture of what the article is

about the Guide puts an indication of its content in parentheses: [death squad issue]. The article is by J. Morley and it appears in The New Republic, volume 190, on pages 13-16, in the March 12, 1984 issue. With this information the librarian in the periodicals room can help you find the article (probably on microfilm). If our library doesn't subscribe to the magazine in which the article appears, the librarian can get a copy of the article from Central Serials Service, but this could take a week or more.

Now, before you read any further, go back and carefully look through the above list and see if you can get some clues as to which article you might want to choose. Then come back and I'll give you a few hints...

The first thing you probably noticed is the article from Reader's Digest. It may be a perfectly fine article, but the conventions of the political science discipline dictate that it not be used.

The second thing to look at is the title of the articles. Let's say that the one you read in Annual Editions criticized the U.S. government for continuing to aid the El Salvadoran government despite ongoing death squad activity. You now want to find an article that takes a different position. Do the titles of the articles help you select one? For the most part they don't in this instance. With most of the titles it's difficult to know what position the author takes (the clearest indication is given by the article in Reader's Digest). However, the article entitled "Death Squads and U.S. Policy" clearly does deal with the issue. Keeping that in mind we turn to the next clue, the nature of the different magazines.

The original article found in Annual Editions came from The New Republic. You're going to want to compare it with an article from a similar type of magazine. The New Republic falls into category three of the popular journals. This category is made up of magazines written for the educated and interested layperson who keeps up with the news and is looking for background information and analysis. These publications often have an editorial policy that's either liberal or conservative. We can see from the list that most of the magazines cited fall into this category. However, in addition to the article from Reader's Digest, we can eliminate the ones from Newsweek and Time as well since they fall into category two. We can probably also eliminate the article from The New Republic. Since the magazine has a liberal orientation it's probably not going to print an article critical of the position taken in a previous article, though this can and does sometimes happen. We can probably also eliminate the article from The Progressive since it has a more liberal policy than The New Republic (you get to know these things after a while). That narrows it down to three articles, the two from National Review and the one from Harper's. Let's consider the last one first.

Harper's is a magazine which covers a wide range of issues, only occasionally dealing with political issues. In this sense it's a category one magazine. And yet, it's a very serious publication directed at the educated and sophisticated reader. Regardless of what its authors write about, they do so with care and a concern for accuracy. Therefore it's a category three publication and appropriate to consider as a possible source in this instance. However, further investigation reveals that the author of the Harper's article also authored the one in The Progressive. Indeed, it could be the same article with a different title. So you'd probably eliminate that one as well.

That leaves the two articles from the National Review. Fortunately, this is the premier conservative magazine in the country. Since it doesn't often agree with The New Republic, there's a good chance that the articles will take a different point of view. So which one would you choose? Well, surely you'd want to read them both to decide. But there are some clues that would help you predict which one you'll end up with. You'll notice that the citation for "Death Squads and U.S. Policy" indicate that it's authored by William F. Buckley, the editor of the magazine and a leading conservative. The other article, "Death Squads, Truth Squads", has no author listed. This probably means that it's a news item rather than an analysis of the situation. Buckley leaves the news writing to others and saves for himself the analysis and editorial comment. So it's likely that his article will be the one you'll choose.

The mention of William F. Buckley suggests another clue you might use when referring to the Reader's Guide: look for familiar names. At this point you may not know a lot of the important political analysts, but you know some and as time goes on you'll get to know more, and you'll also recognize their typical point of view.

Three final clues. First, look at the number of pages in each article. Although length doesn't necessarily imply quality, it does at least indicate whether the article is likely to contain enough information to be useful. Second, consider the dates when the articles were published. The article from Annual Editions appeared in August of 1984. The articles from National Review were written in January and February of that year. It's possible that information and/or events will be reflected in the August article that weren't public or which hadn't yet happened earlier in the year. Ideally, select articles that were written around the same time. If that's not possible, do your best with what you have. Third, notice the last citation, "The White Hands of Death." I can't tell from the title what the article is about, but since it sounds as though it might be about the death squads I put it on my list. So don't just consider the articles that are obvious from their titles. There may be a diamond hiding in the rough.

Now that you've selected your articles, the next step is to carefully read them and then go back and take notes. There are a number of ways you can do this. I'd probably use index cards because they're easy to move around on a table. I'd write out each of the relevant points made by the authors on separate cards, including some notation as to the importance of that point for the author's line of argument. I'd then line them up in two columns. In column "A" I'd organize the cards for the article from Annual Editions in a way that seems most reasonable (perhaps starting with the more important points, placing under each of them the appropriate supporting points). In column "B" I'd try to match the cards for the second article with the cards in column "A" so I could immediately see how the authors deal with the same points. Any blank spaces would indicate that an author hasn't dealt with that point, which would immediately get me wondering why. Did he overlook it? Does he consider it unimportant? Or is it a point that would undermine the position he's taking in the article? I'd then look to see whether they agree on the relative importance of the points they share. If they don't, why not? Do their differing points of view dictate different priorities? Or have they simply ranked the different points in a way that's designed to present their

position in the most favorable light? All of this, and any other questions that emerge from the cards, should put me in a pretty good position to organize an outline for the paper.

As you prepare your outline you have two choices as to how to organize the paper. One way is to take a point from article "A" and then show how it's dealt with in article "B", in this way proceeding through the articles, being sure to include points made in one article that aren't also covered in the other.

In the second method, you present all of the relevant points from article "A" and then, in presenting the material for article "B", you refer point by point to the related material in "A", comparing and contrasting the two, as well as noting things that are in one article but not the other.

However you organize your material in preparation for your paper, when you write it I want you to put it in prose style, with properly structured sentences and paragraphs. As you write, imagine that you're addressing someone who knows the general outline of the issue but not the specifics. Begin with an introduction that explains the issue under consideration. Then present your comparison and contrast. Conclude by giving your reader a personal assessment of what you believe about the issue based on what you might have known previously and what you've read in the two articles. So that you don't fall into the fallacy of appeal to authority (the authority being you in this instance), be sure to explain to your reader why you've concluded as you have. If appropriate, you might want to indicate what pieces of information are missing and what "facts" still needs to be verified. And, of course, you'll want to do everything you can to impress your reader, so you'll be sure the paper is typed double-spaced and in such a way as to reflect well on your scholarship.

Paper #5  
Critical Assessment

As I indicated at the beginning of the semester, one of my goals for you has been that you would develop the ability to critically read about issues of world politics and that through this you'd come to think as a political scientist. Each of the papers you've written thus far has focused on one aspect of critical reading. In the fifth and final paper you're asked to combine the individual components to which you were introduced in the earlier papers and use them in a critical assessment of an assigned article. This paper, therefore, represents the culmination and goal of all the work you've done so far in the course, both in terms of the papers you've written as well as the material covered in class.

A critical assessment involves making judgments - based on a set of standards - on the merits or demerits of a work under consideration. Whether the work is an article, speech, book, play, work of art, movie, or automobile, assessment is analogous to what Siskel and Ebert do every day. For you, the standards to be applied are contained, in part, in the four previous writing assignments. They're also to be found in what you've learned about the components of national self-interest, about those things that make countries weak or strong as they pursue their interests, and in the specific issues of foreign policy that we've discussed throughout the semester. Think back and you'll realize that you've come a long way since we first met as a class and that you now possess a great deal that can be used as standards in making this kind of critical assessment.

And so, for your final paper I would like you to critically assess article #31, "Strategic Dissensus" by Harry J. Shaw. Since this will require you to engage in careful analysis and evaluation of the article, let me spend a little time reviewing these with you.

The purpose of analysis is to improve your understanding of the article. It involves:

- breaking down the article into its constituent parts:
  - main and subordinate ideas
  - supporting evidence
  - stated and unstated assumptions
  - conclusion(s)
- determining the central issue of the article
- specifying the author's position on the issue
- distinguishing facts from opinions, and
- detecting logical fallacies

In other words, analysis is what you've already done in the previous papers, but this time you perform all the analytic tasks for the purpose of fully understanding this particular article.

Evaluation involves you in making judgments about the accuracy and validity of the arguments presented in the article. Part of that judgment is based on your analysis of the article itself. Are there reasons why you shouldn't trust the author or accept what he says? Does he confuse fact and opinion? Does he support his facts with evidence? Does he use fallacious

arguments? Is he clearly biased toward his material? Is the article illogical or poorly written? Are his conclusions consistent with the evidence he presents? Is his analysis adequate?

In addition to looking within the article itself, evaluation may also require you to look outside the article as you did in the fourth paper. Is what the author says consistent with what you already know from class or previous knowledge? Do other authors agree with how this author states the facts? Do they agree with his interpretation of the facts? If not, which one seems more correct as far as you can tell?

All of the above is done in preparation for writing your critical assessment. Through analysis and evaluation you decide what you want to say about the article. How you then organize the paper is pretty much up to you since it could be done in a variety of ways.

I could just end at this point, leaving you with the responsibility of trying to figure out on your own how to organize your paper. But being the nice guy that I am, I'm not going to do that. Rather, I'm going to describe how I went about writing a critique of an article you're all familiar with, the one I asked you to analyze at the very beginning of the semester: "Foreign Policy: A Tragedy of Errors" by George Ball. (If I haven't already given you a copy of my critique be sure to ask for it). In doing this, I don't mean to imply that this is the way to do it. My hope instead is that it will get you thinking about how you can best write your paper.

I began by carefully reading through the entire article to get an overview of what the author was trying to say. I then re-read it, identifying the main issue and the author's position on it. (I should say that during the second reading I changed my mind about the main issue).

To be sure I understood the author's line of reasoning I went back and outlined his argument, showing his main points and the supporting arguments, facts, and/or data for each point. In the process of doing all this I looked for (and marked off in the text):

- facts, proven or unproven,
- opinions, acknowledged or not,
- opinions disguised as facts, and
- fallacious arguments.

When I felt I fully understood the article, I made some tentative judgments as to the validity of the author's point of view and line of argument. With all of this in mind, I decided what I wanted to include in the critique and made an outline.

I decided I should begin by stating what I considered to be the central issue of the article, the Reagan Administration's handling of the placement of Pershing II missiles in Europe. It seemed to make sense to then follow this with the author's position on the issue, that the Administration had mishandled the situation because it repeated a well established pattern of errors in the making of U.S. foreign policy. Since that pattern was key to understanding the author's point of view, I went on to summarize it.

Having done all that, it seemed logical to show how the author saw this pattern repeated in the case of the Pershing IIs and what he considered to be the consequences of following that pattern.

I then went back to see if I had left out anything of importance. I hadn't mentioned Vietnam, Lebanon, and Central American. I wasn't sure I needed to, but I found an easy way to squeeze them in so I did it.

By this time I felt I had done a pretty good job of summarizing the important elements in the article and that I was in a position to give my own evaluation. I began with the article itself, pointing to a number of problems I saw in it: the lack of supporting documentation, the author's use of labeling and other fallacies, and his assertion of opinions as facts.

I didn't go to other sources to see if they agreed with Mr. Ball, but had I done so I probably would have added that information here, showing both agreements and disagreements. Instead, I concluded with a final summary assessment.

As I said before, this isn't meant to be a model of how you should proceed. Rather, it is intended to stimulate your thinking about how you should organize your own critique of the assigned article.