

## Director of Digital Things Challenge Project

As I mentioned in the original job description, one of the things that will help me figure out who is the right person for the job is to see how you do working through a problem. So I've come up with a challenge project.

It's a little bit design, a little web-savvy. Depending on what you decide to do, it could potentially involve something else in your particular skillset (programming, animation, video, whatever).

So here's what I'm looking for.

Let's say you're reading something online, perhaps a blog entry or a forum post, and whoever is trying to make his point is in fact making a fundamental logical error. A fallacy. Maybe he's doing it intentionally, or maybe he just doesn't know any better.

*"Clearly music videos encourage teen sex. I mean look: as MTV started playing fewer and fewer videos, the teen pregnancy rate went way down. That's a fact."*

If you were to point out to him this basic error (correlation is not causation), he'd think it was about your hidden agenda to get teens pregnant.

It would be so handy to have a simple, non-threatening (but engaging) site to send him to to make the point.

You could reply:

*"The thing is, [correlation is not causation](#). Teen pregnancy and MTV video frequency both declined in the 2000's. You're not showing that one caused the other."*

Your challenge will be to come up with this site/sites someone could link to.

### Some thoughts and parameters

- While there are many logical fallacies, I want to focus on two: Correlation is not causation, and Assuming the conclusion (which is a rephrasing of Begging the question). Text for both is included. Feel free to add new and better stuff from your research but, obviously, don't plagiarize from other places.
- I'm repeating the no plagiarizing thing because, wow, it's important.
- I don't particularly like the design of Snopes, but I like it as a resource.
- "Let me Google that for you" (<http://imgtfy.com/>) is a little snide, but it's similarly useful.
- Nlzkor has an exhaustive list of fallacies (<http://www.nlzkor.org/features/fallacies/>) but I don't find it particularly friendly. If someone sent me there through a link, I wouldn't read it. Ditto for Fallacy Files (<http://www.fallacyfiles.org/begquest.html>)

- Begthequestion.info (<http://begthequestion.info/>) ain't far off, but it's not friendly. It's finger-wagging.
- Whatever URLs you choose, consider both their memorability and their brevity. That is, you'd love for a user to be able to type them from memory, but you'd also like them to be Twitterable. Should the two fallacies be in the same domain, or in optimized single-serving sites? These may not be compatible goals. I leave it to your judgement. There's no wrong answer. I'll just want to know why you did what you did.
- If someone likes the concept and the page, how could they share it? Is there something potentially embeddable? Tweetable? Is there a graphic that could be pasted for forums?
- Feel free to host anywhere you want to host. When this is all over, you're welcome to keep it up or take it down. If it's something you ultimately want to release to the world, or keep for your portfolio, by all means.
- I won't share your name or links with anyone unless you say it's okay.
- I'd love to see something by next Tuesday, February 16th.
- Don't hire outside people. If you have buddies help you with some aspect, that's fine, but I'm not looking to hire a talented manager. I want to see what you can do by yourself.
- I'm curious what you do, but I'm also interested in why and how. I want to know how your brain works.
- I'll be traveling the rest of the week, but I'll try to answer questions as they come up. I don't want to see preliminary designs, but if I've omitted some fundamental piece of the puzzle, let me know.

## Correlation is not causation

Two things may be related, or happening at the same time, but that doesn't necessarily mean one thing is causing the other.

Examples:

*An infographic charts Americans' reading ability and hand size, showing a clear trend: people with bigger hands are better readers. So, does having large hands cause better literacy (better able to hold books), or do better readers grow bigger hands (perhaps from holding heavy books)?*

In this case, neither. Turns out, children have both small hands and low reading ability.

There is often an unseen factor affecting variables that seem connected.

*Facebook is turning us into zombies. Popular culture has become obsessed with the walking dead, who now show up regularly in our movies, comics and even our classic literature, with a retelling of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. It's no coincidence that this is happening at a time when Facebook has become the fourth most popular internet destination.*

Except that it is almost certainly a coincidence. "Facebook is turning us into zombies" is an amusing catchline for a magazine article, but it is an almost indefensible argument. Two things can be popular at the same time (zombies, Facebook) without having any inherent relationship. But writers will invariably try to tie them together.

Tell me more:

When you notice two things seem to be happening together a lot, that's a sign that there may be something worth studying. But don't jump to the conclusion that one thing is causing the other.

## **Assuming the conclusion**

The point you're trying to make is based on a premise you haven't shown to be true — and in fact, your premise is basically just your conclusion in different words.

Examples:

*Taxes are meant to be fair. A tax on plastic bags would affect retailers the most, and that's obviously unequal.*

Are taxes meant to be fair? That's not something that can simply be assumed. And it's essentially the same point as the conclusion, substituting unequal for unfair.

*Zombies can't exist because the dead can't walk.*

Here the premise comes at the end of the sentence: "the dead can't walk."

Thankfully, that's normally true. But you're talking about zombies, who are by common agreement the walking dead.

So if you're in a situation in which the dead are walking, don't listen to the guy telling you they don't exist. He'll be dead soon.

Tell me more:

The proper name of this fallacy is "begging the question." But since that term is very often used to mean "raising the question," we've chosen to use an alternate term for it.