

Analytic vs. Synthetic Statements

Analytic statements are those that are necessarily true; their usefulness is purely definitional or factual. Synthetic statements are those that need to be proven. Another way to say this is: some statements are purely factual, while others are presented as if they were factual, but are not. It is very important to be able to distinguish between these two kinds of statements, and to be able to tell when a statement is being treated as if it were true by definition when, in fact, it needs to be proven.

Ideally, synthetic statements follow from a series of analytic statements that are made to sustain or contribute evidence toward the believability of the synthetic statement.

Many people make synthetic statements as if they were analytic statements. The following exercises can be used to train students to recognize statements that need to be proven (i.e., they are synthetic), but are presented as if they were factual or definitional (i.e., they are analytic). Ask students to find the synthetic statements (those that need to be proven) that are being presented as analytic statements (as if they were known facts).

Example #1

"The philosophical basis of the Bush administration's approach to the twin issues of protecting nature and moving toward energy independence is that environmental progress cannot be achieved without economic prosperity. 'We have made a national commitment to environmental improvement,' says EPA's Michael Leavitt. But, as Mr. Leavitt... also says: 'Nothing promotes pollution like poverty.'" From: "The Christian Science Monitor," Tuesday, September 28, 2004, p. 4.

Example #2

"Free trade will be good for this country. The reason is patently clear. Isn't it obvious that unrestricted commercial relations will bestow on all sections of this nation the benefits which result when there is an unimpeded flow of goods between countries?" From: With Good Reason by S. Morris Engel.

Example #3

"On a more concerning note, a bill (or motion, or whatever you call it) has been introduced into Congress to re-institute the draft. Was it introduced by the Republicans? Uhhhhhhh...no. Two Democrats introduced it (one of them being Congressman Rangel). Were they presenting it to actually bring the draft into being? Uhhhhhhh...no. The intent was to portray to the American public that the 'Bush Administration' wants to have the draft re-instituted. It was their HOPE that their names would not be tied to it, just that word would get out that Congress was looking to re-institute the draft. It was their HOPE that such info would be tied to the 'warmongering' Bush-ite Republicans. Oops. What a joke of a party. It's no surprise Kerry is the best they have to offer."

Example #4

Labor unions served a very important function in early twentieth century America. At a time when some large industrial companies allowed horrid abuse of their employees, labor unions helped mitigate abuse and install important rights for workers. Several economic booms after WWII created enormous prosperity for American corporations, which labor unions leveraged to gain huge pay increases for blue collar workers. At this point, labor unions became the scourge of American business. Their refusal to negotiate contracts that allowed corporations to be profitable during recessions created massive debts that hamper many large corporations to this day.

Example #1 Answer

"The philosophical basis of the Bush administration's approach to the twin issues of protecting nature and moving toward energy independence is that environmental progress cannot be achieved without economic prosperity. 'We have made a national commitment to environmental improvement,' says EPA's Michael Leavitt. But, as Mr. Leavitt... also says: **'Nothing promotes pollution like poverty.'**"
From: "The Christian Science Monitor," Tuesday, September 28, 2004, p. 4.

Explanation: It is not necessarily true that "Nothing promotes pollution like poverty." But the force of the statement (using the word "nothing") and the placement of the statement (at the end, in order to punctuate the argument) give the reader the impression that it is an analytic statement, that is, that it is true, and therefore adequate proof to justify the Bush Administration's environmental tactics.

Example #2 Answer

"Free trade will be good for this country. The reason is patently clear. Isn't it obvious that **unrestricted commercial relations will bestow on all sections of this nation the benefits which result when there is an unimpeded flow of goods between countries?**" From: With Good Reason by S. Morris Engel.

Explanation: The two statements, "The reason is patently clear," and "Isn't it obvious?" suggest that the statement that follows is an analytic statement. Analytic statements, after all, are "patently clear" and "obvious." The statement is, however, synthetic because it may well be true that free trade will not be good for a country. It is important to remember that the use of a logical fallacy in this passage (begging the question) and the fact that the writer commits the error of confusing synthetic and analytic statements does not mean that the statement is false; it merely means that it is unproven thus far.

Example #3 Answer

"On a more concerning note, a bill (or motion, or whatever you call it) has been introduced into Congress to re-institute the draft. Was it introduced by the Republicans? Uhhhhhhh...no. Two Democrats introduced it (one of them being Congressman Rangel). Were they presenting it to actually bring the draft into being? Uhhhhhhh...no. **The intent was to portray to the American public that the 'Bush Administration' wants to have the draft re-instituted.** It was their HOPE that their names would not be tied to it, and that word would get out that Congress was looking to re-institute the draft. It was their HOPE that such info would be tied to the 'warmongering' Bush-ite Republicans. Oops. What a joke of a party. It's no surprise Kerry is the best they have to offer."

Explanation: Any time we speak to intent, we are making a synthetic statement, unless we have statements from the person intending. (Even then, some caution should be taken). This is a good example of presenting a synthetic statement as an

analytic statement. We are supposed to believe that the intent is a clear conclusion based upon the fact of their hopes. (The two hopes were that their names "would not be tied to it" and that the Bush Administration would be blamed for the proposal). Note also the exaggerated terms, "Uhhhhh... no" (repeated twice) and the opening, "on a more concerning note." It is fairly common to use verbal exaggerations to bolster credibility, and to suggest that such a statement should be accepted as true (i.e., that it is analytic in nature).

Example #4 Answer

Labor unions served a very important function in early twentieth century America. At a time when some large industrial companies allowed horrid abuse of their employees, labor unions helped mitigate abuse and install important rights for workers. Several economic booms after WWII created enormous prosperity for American corporations, which labor unions leveraged to gain huge pay increases for blue collar workers. **At this point, labor unions became the scourge of American business.** Their refusal to negotiate contracts that allowed corporations to be profitable during recessions created massive debts that hamper many large corporations to this day.

Explanation: The author makes several analytic (factual) statements: "Labor unions served a very important function in early twentieth century America," "labor unions helped mitigate abuse and install important rights for workers," and "Several economic booms after WWII created enormous prosperity for American corporations." The synthetic statement is the turning point of the paragraph, allowing the author to reach his conclusion quickly. The key synthetic statement that is presented as an analytic statement is: "At this point, labor unions became the scourge of American business." The final sentence is also a synthetic statement.