A non sequitur is a conclusion or reply that doesn’t follow logically from the previous statement. You’ve probably heard an example of a non sequitur before; therefore bunny rabbits are way cuter than chipmunks.

Non sequiturs are often used for comedic effect in movies, novels, and TV shows. When someone says a non sequitur, it usually means the person was off in her own thoughts and not listening to the other person. If one girl says, “I’m worried he might break up with me, I don’t understand why he listened to her” and her friend replies, “I wonder what you call a male ladybug?” the non sequitur shows the friend clearly wasn’t listening.

Non sequiturs often appear to be disconnected or random comments, or random changes in subject, especially socially inappropriate ones. When non sequiturs are used frequently this can be called "absurd humor".

The non sequitur can be understood as the converse of cliché. For example: in theatre, traditional comedy and drama depend on the ritualization—that is, the predictability—of human emotional experiences. In contrast, the theatre of the absurd depends upon the disjunction—that is, the unpredictability—of that experience.

Usage:
- The speaker’s logic contained a non sequitur and was thereby flawed.
- The non sequitur in her English paper caused her to receive a low grade.
- Having a costumed superhero abduct the vicar was an utter non sequitur in the novel.
- Non sequitur joke: Question—How many pancakes does it take to shingle a dog house? Answer—Ice cream has no bones.
- Non sequitur example: Question—Would you like some dessert? Answer—No thanks, I don’t smoke.
**DIRECTIONS**: Discuss the meaning of the word with your students, with special emphasis on any variations or nuances of the word specific to your discipline. Consider taking it a step further by using one or all of the following ideas as you involve students with the new vocabulary. **Remember to preview all content you intend to share with students. Not all items on the lists provided below are appropriate for all classes or age levels.**

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**#1** Read this article from the Noted section of *The New York Times* entitled “Celebrities Leave a Void in Twitter,” 18 July 2012. The article discusses the fact that Twitter has become the “... garbage dump of choice for their [fans] every opinion and non sequitur.” The word is used in the fourth paragraph. [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/19/fashion/celebrities-are-leaving-twitter.html?smid=tw-nytimes&seid=auto&_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/19/fashion/celebrities-are-leaving-twitter.html?smid=tw-nytimes&seid=auto&_r=0)

**#2** Check out several of these samples of the comic strip *Non Sequitur*. Discuss not only the jokes, but, after looking at several, why the strip carries the title that it does (*Non Sequitur*):

- [http://www.gocomics.com/nonsequitur/2013/08/16#.UqUd4CeFcoE](http://www.gocomics.com/nonsequitur/2013/08/16#.UqUd4CeFcoE)
- [http://www.gocomics.com/nonsequitur/2013/12/08#.UqUcbieFcoE](http://www.gocomics.com/nonsequitur/2013/12/08#.UqUcbieFcoE)
- [http://www.gocomics.com/nonsequitur/2013/08/22#.UqUdbyeFcoE](http://www.gocomics.com/nonsequitur/2013/08/22#.UqUdbyeFcoE)
- [http://www.gocomics.com/nonsequitur/2013/08/28#.UqUerCeFcoE](http://www.gocomics.com/nonsequitur/2013/08/28#.UqUerCeFcoE)

**#3** Listen to this song by Joey Cape entitled “Non Sequitur” and read the lyrics. Have students discuss the meaning of the lyrics and the overall message of the song. Pay close attention to the line “I'm a negative endless sentence, non sequitur with claws.”

Song: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EKYBhR986zI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EKYBhR986zI) (4min., 38 sec.)

Lyrics: [http://www.lyricsreg.com/lyrics/joey+cape/Non+Sequitur/](http://www.lyricsreg.com/lyrics/joey+cape/Non+Sequitur/)

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**#4** Watch this Cadbury chocolate commercial from 2007. It is a great example of the use of non sequiturs in advertising, and fun to watch!

(1 min., 31 sec.)

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TnzFRV1LwIo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TnzFRV1LwIo)
Examples and Observations:

"**Non sequiturs** are most obvious when absurd. For instance, from the facts that most cats like milk and some cats have tails I could not derive the conclusion that David Hume was the greatest British philosopher. That would be a complete *non sequitur* that borders on the surreal, whether or not its conclusion is true. *Non sequiturs* are often advertised by the spurious use of 'so' and 'therefore' . . ., but the context of a statement can also suggest that it is a conclusion derived from what has gone before even when there is no such word used to indicate it.

"Any formal fallacy will have a *non sequitur* as its conclusion, though most of these *non sequiturs* will be less obvious than the one above." (Nigel Warburton, *Thinking from A to Z*. Routledge, 1996)

"The difference between the *post hoc* and the *non sequitur* fallacies is that, whereas the *post hoc* fallacy is due to lack of a causal connection, in the *non sequitur* fallacy, the error is due to lack of a logical connection." (Mabel Lewis Sahakian, *Ideas of the Great Philosophers*. Barnes & Noble, 1993)

For examples of both a *non sequitur* and a post hoc fallacy, watch part of this video entitled The Fallacy Project: Examples of Fallacies from Advertising, Politics, and Popular Culture” and discuss the subtle differences between the two. (non sequitur 1:30 – 2:00; post hoc 2:00-2:50) 
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fXLrQk7vV5I
- **Ralph Wiggum:** Martin Luther King had a dream. Dreams are where Elmo and Toy Story had a party and I was invited. Yay! My turn is over!
  *Principal Skinner:* One of your best, Ralhie.

- "**A non sequitur** is any pretended jump in logic that doesn't work cleanly, perhaps because of unfounded premises, unmentioned complicating factors, or alternative explanations, such as 'This war is righteous because we are French!' or 'You will do what I say because you are my wife!'"
  (Steve Hindes, *Think for Yourself*. Fulcrum, 2005)

- "Warming was caused by sunspots, or fluctuations in the Earth's orbit, or volcanic eruptions. Therefore it cannot be caused by mankind. The 'therefore' is the giveaway, the delicious **non sequitur**: just because Earth has warmed for one or another reason in the past is no reason why it cannot warm for a completely different reason in the future."
  (John Llewellyn, "In a Confusing Climate." *The Observer*, Sep. 2, 2007)

**WTL:** Have students look for examples of non sequiturs this week. Suggest they focus on advertising and television sitcoms. Have them bring you the example along with a paragraph explaining how or why it qualifies as a non sequitur.