

Logical Fallacies

Definitions and Examples

1. Ad Hominem--Attacking the individual instead of the argument.

Example: You are so stupid your argument couldn't possibly be true.

Example: I figured that you couldn't possibly get it right, so I ignored your comment.

2. Appeal to Majority/Bandwagon—Convincing a person to accept a position because a majority of people hold to it.

Example: The majority of people like soda. Therefore, soda is good.

Example: Everyone else is doing it. Why shouldn't you?

3. Begging the Question/Circular Argument--Assuming the thing to be true that you are trying to prove. Both premise and conclusion are the same.

Example: He is ugly because he is unattractive.

Example: I am a good worker because Frank says so. How can we trust Frank? Simple: I will vouch for him.

4. False Cause/Correlation=Causation/Post hoc ergo propter hoc--assuming that the effect is related to a cause because the events occur together. Assuming correlation must mean causation.

Example: When the rooster crows, the sun rises. Therefore, the rooster causes the sun to rise.

Example: When the fuel light goes on in my car, I soon run out of gas. Therefore, the fuel light causes my car to run out of gas.

5. Black or white – Two alternatives are presented as the only possibilities, when in fact more possibilities exist.

Example: "Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." –George W. Bush 2001.

6. Non Sequitur/Red Herring--Comments or information that do not logically follow from a premise or the conclusion.

Example: We know why it rained today: because I washed my car.

Example: I don't care what you say. We don't need any more bookshelves. As long as the carpet is clean, we are fine.

7. Straw Man Argument—When a person simply ignores a person's actual position and substitutes a distorted, exaggerated or misrepresented version of that position.

Example: Liberals just want to be lazy and have the government take care of you from the time you're born until the time you die and don't want anyone to have to work. I believe that people should value hard work and self reliance.

Example: Conservatives don't want rich people to have to pay any taxes. I believe everyone should pay their fair share.

8. Appeal to emotion -- a logical fallacy characterized by the manipulation of the recipient's emotions in order to win an argument, especially in the absence of factual evidence.

Example: Santa Claus has to be real. Imagine how sad the world would be if he weren't real.

Example: Our new cutlery set will make you feel so good when you see it laid out on your dining table. 'Style and Grace' is the right thing for you.

9. Appeal to authority – arguing that something is true simply because someone in a position of authority is said it's true. This person may be an illegitimate or unqualified person to make this claim.

Example: More doctors smoke camels than any other brand of cigarette.

Example: My 5th grade teacher once told me that girls will go crazy for boys if they learn how to dance. Therefore, if you want to make the ladies go crazy for you, learn to dance.

10. Guilt by Association/Poisoning the Well--Rejecting an argument or claim because the person proposing it likes someone whom is disliked by another.

Example: Hitler liked dogs. Therefore, dogs are bad.

Example: The Unabomber believes in Global Warming. Should you?

11. Slippery Slope-- a person asserts that some event must inevitably follow from another without any argument for the inevitability of the event in question. In most cases, there are a series of steps or gradations between one event and the one in question and no reason is given as to why the intervening steps or gradations will simply be bypassed.

Example: If you don't wake on time in the morning, you won't be ready to learn at school. If you're not ready to learn at school you'll get bad grades. If you get bad grades you'll get a bad job. If you get a bad

job you'll be a failure in life. If you're a failure in life you'll become a Yankee fan. Don't become a Yankee fan! Wake up on time!

Example: DirecTV ads.