

# Logical Fallacies

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The following list presents many of the fallacies you find in arguments. Some of them differ only slightly from others, and some fallacies are hybrids of what you see here.

**Ad Hominem** (personal attack) attacking the person rather than the argument (ex: President Bush uses poor English; therefore, he wrongfully invaded Iraq.)

**Ad Populum** "bandwagon appeal" an appeal to the prejudices of the people (ex: You should like Tom Hanks movies because everyone else does.)

**Appeal to Force** diverting attention from the real issue to the negative consequences of not accepting an argument (ex: blackmail)

**Appeal to Ignorance** refusing to accept the burden of proof (ex: Extra terrestrials must exist because no one has ever proved that they don't)

**Appeal to Reward** diverting attention from the real issue to what will be gained by accepting the argument (ex: bribery, buying votes)

**Appeal to Tradition** assuming that what has become a tradition because it has been around for so long should continue to be a tradition (ex: The QWERTY keyboard continues to be taught in schools even though it is not the most efficient arrangement.)

**Begging the Question** making a statement that assumes the question being argued has already been proven (ex: Women should not be able to join men's clubs because the clubs are for men only.)

**Complex or Loaded Question** phrasing two questions as one; can't answer yes or no without getting into trouble (ex: "Have you stopped beating your wife yet?")

**Creating False Needs** making listeners believe that they need something that they really don't, or exaggerating the importance of the need (ex: razors for women's legs)

**Dicto Simpliciter** Latin for "simple speech"; applying statements that are true in simple cases to more complex cases without qualifying the statements (ex: "Whole wheat bread is very nutritious, so everyone should eat whole wheat bread"—What about people who are allergic to wheat?)

**Equivocation** giving an honest appearance to a lie (ex: "I don't even have a nickel"— when you have all dimes.)

**False Analogy** comparing things, circumstances, and so on without demonstrating a meaningful connection between them (ex: "This is your brain on drugs."—An egg in a frying pan?)

**False Dilemma** posing an either-or situation and ignoring further alternatives (ex: Mom: You can clean your room, or you can skip the party.)

**Faulty Emotional Appeal** drawing attention away from the topic through emotion (ex: How can you persecute this little old lady for shooting all those people when she's so poor she can't pay her electricity bills?)

**Faulty Use of Authority** using questionable or irrelevant authority to back up an argument (ex: Alex Trebek recommending life insurance)

**Guilt by Association** grouping individuals together and stereotyping all members of the group based on how some members behave (ex: Since she grew up in the city, she must come from a non-traditional family.)

**Hasty Generalization** drawing conclusions on the basis of insufficient evidence (ex: Both times I ate lima beans as a child I got sick; therefore, lima beans must be bad for you.)

**Non Sequitur** “it does not follow” finding a relationship between two facts that does not exist (ex: “You won’t give me all your money; therefore, you must hate me.”)

**Oversimplified Cause** trying to reduce a complex event or phenomenon to one simple cause (ex: Dan Quayle blamed the television show *Murphy Brown* for the breakdown of the American family.)

**Poisoning the Well** presenting an argument in such an emotionally biased way that it is difficult for a critic to respond without looking dishonest or immoral. (ex: “Of course, this liar will tell you that he didn’t steal my stuff. You can’t believe a thief. Go ahead and ask him; he’ll deny it.”)

**Post Hoc, Ergo Propter Hoc** “after this, therefore because of this”—assuming that one event that follows another is the result of the first even (similar to oversimplified cause) (ex: Barry Bonds changed his socks today and he didn’t get a single hit.)

**Red Herring** attempting to draw attention away from the issue at hand by raising irrelevant issues. (ex: “I don’t think the president’s economic plan is a good idea. I mean, what is he going to do about the violence in our inner cities?”)

**Slippery Slope** predicting that taking a first step will lead inevitably to a later, usually much more undesirable action (ex: “Birth control is the first step on the road to euthanasia.”)

**Stacking the Deck** ignoring evidence or arguments that don’t support your position (ex: The Warren Commission ignored eyewitness accounts of smoke and gunshots from the grassy knoll when President Kennedy was killed.)

**Straw Man** attacking a view similar to, but not the same as, the one in question (ex: “We should license knives just like we do guns. (sarcastically)”) )

**Sweeping Generalization** applying a statement that is true for one particular situation to another situation without considering how the situations might be different. (ex: “My accounting degree really prepared me well for law school. Everyone who wants to go to law school should major in accounting.”)

**Two Wrongs Make a Right** attempting to draw attention from a problem by pointing out other problems (ex: Universities in other states charge much more than California does.)