

Fallacies



Fallacies

- An error in reasoning.
 - Differ from *factual* errors.

A fallacy is an “argument” in which the premises or evidence for the claim do not provide the needed degree or amount of support.

Fallacy Categories

- We'll look at three categories of fallacies:
 1. Fallacies of Reasoning
 2. Fallacies of Appeal
 3. Fallacies of Language

Fallacies of Reasoning

- Hasty Generalization
- Non-Sequitur
- Circular Argument
- Forced Dichotomy
- Ad Hominem
- Card Stacking
- Red Herring
- Slippery Slope
- False Cause

Hasty Generalization

- Draws a broad conclusion from inadequate evidence
 - Stereotyping
- “My friend gets toxic when she plays League of Legends, so all League players must be toxic.”
- [Guys Love Bacon](#)

Non-Sequitur

- Provides evidence which does not actually prove the point
- “People like to walk on the beach, and beaches have sand, so I should move my couch so that it faces the east wall.”
- [Now Watch This Drive](#)

Circular Argument

- One assumes the truth of a premise or claim, draws a conclusion from the premise, and then uses the conclusion to prove the initial premise
- “Snowboarding is a dangerous sport because it is unsafe.”
- America is #1

Forced Dichotomy

- Gives only two alternatives when more exist; oversimplifying the issue
- “Either go to college or forget about getting a good job.”
- [With Us or With the Terrorists](#)

Ad Hominem

- Diverting attention to the person advocating the opposite position, usually with disparaging statements, instead of dealing with the issue
- [Dick Cheney in 3-inch Heels](#)
- [King of Ad Hominem](#)

Straw Man

- Takes another person's argument or point, exaggerates it in an extreme way, and then attacks the distortion
- “My political opponent wants to spend more money on a social safety net than on prisons, they must be a communist.”
- [Chocolate or Vanilla](#)

Red Herring

- Sidetracks an issue by presenting a totally unrelated issue
- “Why worry about pandas becoming extinct when we should be worried about the homeless?”
- [Also the King of Red Herrings](#)

Slippery Slope

- Uses one weakness in a position to assume that the whole is doomed to failure
- “If we lower the voting age, at what point do we stop? Are we going to let babies vote in our next election?”
- [DirecTV](#)

False Cause

- Confusing chronology with a cause-and-effect relationship
 - “A preceded B, therefore, A caused B.”
- “I sneezed just moments before the power went off. My sneeze must’ve been so strong, it knocked out the power grid.”
- No Alligators on Sesame Street

Fallacies of Appeal

- Appeal to Ignorance
- Appeal to the People
- Appeal to Emotion
- Appeal to Authority
- Appeal to Tradition

Appeal to Ignorance

- Asking an audience to accept the truth of a claim because no proof to the contrary exists
- “You can’t prove Martians aren’t living under the surface of Mars, so it’s reasonable to believe that they are.”
- It’s the Soviets

Appeal to the People

- Something is right, appropriate, justified, or true because everyone is doing it
- “Smoking must be not so bad, so many people do it.”
- [Cigarettes in 1949](#)
- [The Pepsi Generation](#)

Appeal to Authority

- Cites an authority or “expert” who has no claim to expertise about the subject
- Celebrity endorsements
- Lincoln
- Polaroid

Appeal to Emotion

USING EMOTION MORE THAN REASON TO PERSUADE.

- Appeal to Fear
- Appeal to Pity
- Mean Girls
- The Single Most Tearjerking Video in Existence
- Maddie

Appeal to Tradition

- Appeals to the logic that the way things are being done is how they have been done traditionally, are correct, and do not merit change
- Waterbending

Fallacies of Language

- Ambiguity and Equivocation
- Emotionally Loaded Language
- Technical Jargon

Ambiguity and Equivocation

AMBIGUITY

- An argument that accommodates multiple meanings
- Vagueness that avoids commitment
- Simple representations

EQUIVOCATION

- Occurs when a term is used in two or more different senses within a single argument

Emotionally Loaded Language / Imagery

- Occurs when emotion is used instead of a reasoned argument to obscure the fact that no compelling or rational reason exists for one's position
- [Dire Warning for America](#)
- [The Carousel](#)

Technical Jargon

- The “gibberish” fallacy
- When incomprehensible jargon or confusing gibberish is used to give the appearance of a strong argument in place of good evidence and reasoning
- [What Even Are These Words](#)

Takeaways

- Fallacies are a common feature of argumentation and persuasion, with many examples being in both advertising and politics
- As a critical thinker, be aware of argument fallacies in both informal and formal discourse
- Be concerned more with the content and nature of a good argument and less with all the fallacy names