

FUN WITH LOGICAL FALLACIES: INTELLECTUAL SELF-DEFENSE

Below is a list of the core fallacies. These are common errors in reasoning and inappropriate rhetorical appeals that are commonly found in student writing, political speech, advertising, and discussion on the Internet. Many times these errors are committed accidentally, but they are frequently used to unfairly manipulate audiences. Learning these fallacies helps you to protect yourself.

As an academic writer you want your arguments to be based on sound logic and analysis of evidence, therefore it is vital to learn to identify these fallacies so that you can avoid them.



ERRORS IN REASONING

Non Sequitur: The fallacy of *non sequitur* (Latin: “it does not follow”) is when the premises are irrelevant or otherwise disconnected from the conclusion.

Example: Cats prefer solitude because dogs are social creatures.

Begging the Question / Circular Reasoning: The fallacy of *begging the question* is when the proposition one is trying to establish is unwittingly assumed. One version of begging the question is called *circular reasoning*. This is when propositions lead back and forth to each other, in a circle, each having only the other for support. (Nowadays many people—even educated people—ignite the ire of philosophers by using ‘begs the question’ to mean ‘raises the question’.)

Example: Donald Trump is a good communicator because he speaks effectively.

Insufficient Evidence: This occurs when the premises offer no support for the conclusion or when premises are simply absent.

Example: Climate change can’t be real because it’s snowing today.

Ad Ignorantiam: (Latin: “appeal to ignorance”) the fallacy that occurs when a conclusion is assumed to be true because it has not yet been proved false (or vice versa).

Example: "Scully, we should believe that this man was abducted by aliens because there is no proof that aliens don't exist."

"Mulder, please, that's *ad ignorantiam*."

INAPPROPRIATE RHETORICAL APPEALS

False Dilemma: The fallacy of *false dilemma* or *false dichotomy* occurs when a proposition is claimed to be an either/or situation, when in fact there is at least one additional option.

Example: You need to choose a major: engineering or chemistry.

False Analogy: the fallacy that occurs when a conclusion is drawn by comparing two significantly incomparable ones.

Example: I know she's lazy because her brother is lazy.

Straw Man: the fallacy committed when an opponent's point of view is distorted in order to make it easier to refute.

Example: People who don't support the 'Muslim ban' want our country to be unsafe.



Ad Verecundiam: (Latin: “appeal to authority”) the fallacy committed by seeking to persuade not by giving evidence but merely by citing an authority.

Example: Gwyneth Paltrow’s baby stroller must be the best one you can buy.



Ad Populum: (Latin: “appeal to the people”) the fallacy committed by seeking to persuade not by giving evidence but merely by citing popular opinion.

Example: Beyoncé’s *Lemonade* should have won the Grammy for Album of the Year because everyone says so.

Ad Hominem: (Latin: “appeal to the man”) the fallacy that is committed by attacking the character or credibility of an opponent rather than their thesis.

Example: Protesting doesn’t work because protesters are all lazy, dirty hippies.



Ad Baculum: (Latin: “appeal to the stick”) the fallacy committed by attempting to persuade through fear.

Example: If you don’t give me an A in this class I won’t be able to get into the nursing program.

Tu Quoque: (Latin for “you also”) a type of personal-attack fallacy committed by attempting to show that an opponent does not act in accord with his or her own thesis.

Example: Stop telling me kale is so good for me - I know you had pizza this morning.

Ad Misericordiam: (Latin: “appeal to pity”) the fallacy committed by seeking to persuade by arousing pity.

Example: I know a lot about clowns because clowns brutally murdered my parents.

Slippery Slope: the fallacy committed by assuming, unjustifiable, that a proposed step will set off an uncontrollable chain of events.

Example: Legalizing medical marijuana would lead to the legalization of drugs like heroin and cocaine for recreational purposes.



Definitions borrowed from *With Good Reason: An Introduction to Informal Fallacies* by S. Morris Engel and the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<https://plato.stanford.edu/>). “Fallacy Man” is a creation of www.existentialcomics.com. *Dinosaur Comics* is a creation of Ryan North (www.quantz.com).