

INFORMAL LOGIC — Fallacies, False Arguments, and Tricky Politics

One can find these types of fallacies in advertising, editorials, radio and TV news, newspapers, magazine articles, and political speeches. Often, such fallacious reasoning is unintentional on the part of the speaker or writer. However, some individuals use logical fallacies quite purposefully and skillfully, in order to sell a product, push a piece of legislation, or produce political propaganda to control or manipulate public thinking.

◆ EMOTIVE LANGUAGE

1. **Ambiguity** — using a word or phrase with more than one possible meaning.
2. **Vagueness** — unclear as to limits or degrees (many words are both ambiguous and vague).
3. **Definitions** — some words/phrases may incorporate more than one type of definition at a time
 - Real, Essential, Nominal: precise; true or accurate defining characteristics of the thing.
 - Stipulative: definition for the purposes of speaker (may include ambiguity, vagueness, etc.).
 - Ostensive: definition by reference to examples or instances, by pointing at the thing.
 - Persuasive: emphasis on emotional language to persuade listener to speaker's viewpoint.

◆ FALLACIES OF IRRELEVANCE

4. **Ad Hominem** (“against the man”) — attacking the person rather than their views or argument.
5. **Genetic Fallacy** — attacking, or supporting, an idea by reference to its origins; “It can't be true. I mean, look who said it! He's a Democrat/Republican/Torry/Lawyer/Cab driver.”
6. **Tu Quoque** (“you're another”) — redirecting attack to the attacker; “You did it, too!”
7. **Two Wrongs** (make a right) — “Like, he's wrong, too, eh!”
8. **Argument from Ignorance** (Argument by Assertion) — arguing from a lack of evidence; “He must be guilty; no one has proven him innocent!” Or just saying, “I'm right!”
9. **Appeal to Pity** — rhetoric appeal to listener's emotions; argument has no bearing on the case.
10. **Ad Populum** — appeal to prejudice, emotions, sympathies of crowd; “Vote for Joe— a true American” (maybe so, but not a well-argued, reasoned analysis of Joe's qualifications).
11. **Appeal to Authority** — appealing to an authority in one field as an authority in another field; “He's a doctor, a heart surgeon! He says the US economy is too dependent on the EEC.”
12. **Question Begging** (Circular Reasoning) — using an argument's conclusion as part of the argument, that is, as one of the premises claimed to support the argument's conclusion.
13. **Complex Question** — a question requiring more than a single or simple answer, which is asked as if it only had one, simple answer; “So, how long have you been cheating on your wife?”
14. **Black & White Fallacy** — allowing for only one of two positions, it's either “this” or “that.”
15. **Fallacy of Opposition** — arguing in support of an idea on the basis of the opposition's opposing it; “The opposition party is against it, so we had better vote for it.”
16. **Irrelevant Conclusion** (Non-sequitur) — conclusion simply doesn't follow from the premises.

◆ **FALLACIES OF INSUFFICIENT EVIDENCE**

17. **Special Pleading** — one-sided argument, ignoring or not mentioning other side or perspective.
18. **Hasty Generalization** (Hasty Conclusion) — too few cases or evidences for drawing a particular conclusion; “I knew a bad cop, once, beat up on everybody! All cops are Nazis!”
19. **False Cause** — arguing *from* temporal (accidental) sequence “first A, then B” to “A caused B.”
20. **Slippery Slope** (Domino Theory) — arguing purely on the grounds that *if* one event happens *then* other events must/will happen, also (without giving any other reasons for conclusion).

◆ **FALLACIES OF AMBIGUITY**

21. **Equivocation** — when a word or phrase is used one way in the premise and another way in the conclusion; “Bible says, ‘love your neighbor’. Therefore, Bible says adultery’s okay.”
22. **Amphibole** — when sentence structure confuses meaning or makes the meaning ambiguous; “The orchestra will play Bach’s Toccata and Fugue in C Major in just one minute.”
23. **Accent** — misleading by putting stress on certain words/phrases, implying something not said.
24. **Fallacy of Composition** — arguing from what is true of the parts to its being true of the whole.
25. **Fallacy of Division** — arguing from what is true of the whole to its being true of the parts.
26. **Accident** — taking a general rule and misapplying it to an obvious exception; “Freedom of speech says I can yell ‘Fire!’ in a theater any time I want. Hey, get away from me...”
27. **Converse Accident** — taking an obvious exception to build or argue for a general rule; “It’s okay for cops to go 90 mph, then so can I.”
28. **Fallacy of the Beard** — arguing that because some cases are hard to figure, one can never know in any cases (opposite of Black & White Fallacy); “‘Stealing’ is a matter of degree.”

◆ **FOLK FALLACIES** (Add your own ‘favorite folk fallacies’ here...)

29. **Old is Better** — Arguing from the premise that *because* a thing is temporally younger/newer, it follows, *therefore*, that the thing is of less value or less likely true. “The whales [or cockroaches, trees, monkeys] have been on Earth longer than we have; therefore, they must be better/nicer/more spiritual, than we.” Also, consider the Medieval fondness for classicist revival of idealized Greek and Roman culture; or, in our own time, the retro goth/pagan idealization of the OLD gods/Chtulhu/Tiamat, and criticism of Christianity as a “relatively young religion” (an idea, but not an argument). Also, an Appeal to Emotion, and a Fallacy of Irrelevance—the premise has no logical or factual bearing upon the conclusion.
30. **Bigger is Better** (or, Small is Less Important) — “Compared to the whole universe (our sun is a relatively small star) we are utterly insignificant.” Or “Who are we to hunt the whales? Just look at those *huge*, graceful beings!” Tells the speakers feelings, but not an argument.

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