

Common Fallacies in Arguments



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Definition of a logical fallacy: An error in logic (logos).

Definition of an emotional fallacy: An error in the appeal to authority of the writer (ethos) or an error in the appeal to the emotions of the reader (pathos).

- While you should always be looking for fallacies in others' writing, you should also check your own writing for fallacies.
- Often times fallacies come from moments of generalizing from insufficient evidence and when attempting to appeal excessively to the emotions of the reader.

Hasty Generalization

Definition: claims made on insufficient and over-generalized information

Examples of a hasty generalization:

- The food stamp program supports mostly people who don't really need food stamps.
- Women should not work outside the home if they want to be happy because my mom was always a stay-at-home mom, and she was the happiest woman ever.

Appeals to Ignorance

Definition: claims that argue that since nothing is known about something, then it must be true/false.

Examples of appeals to ignorance:

- Because charter schools have not been around long enough to know if they're a successful platform for education, we should stick to traditional public and private schools only.
- Since we do not know the consequences of abolishing grades in school, we should retain the traditional system of grading.

False Dichotomy/Division (or called Either/Or Reasoning)

Definition: claims that things fall into two or three categories only and that there are no other ways of looking at a problem.

Examples of false dichotomy/division or either/or reasoning:

- Either you are for illegal immigration or against it.
- There are only two ways of looking at this problem of controlling the winter cold: either get a vaccine or stay indoors.

False Cause

Definition: claims that identify an unrelated or improper cause from an observed effect.

Examples of false cause:

- I got an A on the paper because I turned it in on time.
- Three students got sick after math class; therefore, math class must have gotten the students sick.

Bandwagon

Definition: claims that argue that since “many people” support it, it must be a sound claim.

Examples of bandwagon fallacy:

- Hitler must have been right in his policies since he was voted as chancellor of Germany by German citizens in 1933.
- Because all colleges with any claim to keeping up with contemporary society are using computers in classrooms, our college should get computers in all of our classrooms.

Slippery Slope

Definition: claims based on the fear that one step in a certain direction we don't like will inevitably lead to the next step with no stopping place.

Examples of slippery slope:

- If we allow embryonic stem cells to be used for medical research, we will open the door for full-scale reproductive cloning.
- If we don't stop the tuition increase for this year, they'll double the tuition increase next year, and then triple it the following year.

Appeals to spite and ridicule or called ad hominem

Definition: claims that include name-calling and attacking the opponent.

Examples of spite and ridicule/ad hominem:

- Don't pay any attention to Fulson's views on sexual harassment in the workplace. I just learned he subscribes to *Playboy*.
- Only an idiot would believe in global warming.