



Fallacies

A fallacy is an error of reasoning. It can be used against you in an argument, but if you are familiar with them, you will be able to refute the fallacious argument. Likewise, if you are clever, you can use them to convince others.

Fallacies fall into two major categories:

Fallacies of Relevance

Fallacies of relevance occur when the premises of an argument are irrelevant to the conclusion.

Fallacies of Ambiguity

Fallacies of ambiguity occur when ambiguous, changeable wording in the propositions can lead to there being more than one meaning in an argument.

Here are examples of each of the major fallacies. Reflect upon them and write in a definition that makes sense to you.

Fallacies of Relevance

1. **Argumentum ad Baculum** (appeal to force)

"Pay back the loan and 10 % daily interest by Thursday, or be sure that you have your hospital insurance paid up."

2. **Argumentum ad Hominem** (abusive)

"Don't believe anything John says; he's a nerd."

3. **Argumentum ad Hominem** (circumstantial)

"Of course he thinks fraternities are great. He's a Phi Delta."

4. **Argumentum ad Ignorantiam** (argument from ignorance)

There is no proof that witches exist; therefore, they do not.

5. **Argumentum ad Misericordiam** (appeal to pity)

"Your honor, how can the prosecution dare try to send this poor, defenseless child to jail for the murder of his father and mother. Have a heart; the boy is now an orphan."

6. **Argumentum ad Populum**

"Don't be left out! Buy your Chevette today!"

7. **Argumentum ad Vericundiam** (appeal to authority)

Joe Namath selling pantyhose; Joe DiMaggio selling Mr. Coffee.

8. **Accident**

"What you bought yesterday, you eat today; you bought raw meat yesterday; therefore, you eat raw meat today."

9. **Converse Accident** (hasty generalization)

"That man is an alcoholic. Liquor should be banned."

10. **False cause** (Post hoc ergo propter hoc) (Many of our superstitions stem from use of this fallacy.)

"A black cat crossed Joe's path yesterday, and he died last night. The black cat caused Joe's death."

11. **Petitio Principii** (begging the question)

"It's time to come in the house now, Billy."

"Why?"

"Because I said so!"

"Why?"

"Because it's time, and I said so."

12. Complex Question

"Have you given up cheating on exams?"

13. Ignoratio Elenchi (irrelevant conclusion)

In a law court, in attempt to prove that the accused is guilty of theft, the prosecution may argue that theft is a horrible crime for anyone to commit.

Fallacies of Ambiguity

1. Equivocation

Some dogs have fuzzy ears. My dog has fuzzy ears. My dog is some dog!

2. Amphibole (grammatical construction)

"Woman without her man would be lost." or "Save Soap and Waste Paper."

3. Accent

"We should not speak ill of our friends."

4. Composition

"Each part of this stereo weighs under one pound. This is a very light stereo."

5. Division

"Purdue is a great engineering school. Mike went there; he must be a great engineer."

Listen to your roommate, the TV, and even your profs. You'll be amazed how many fallacies we encounter each day.

More important, check your papers. Does your argument have premises and conclusions stated properly? Have you been guilty of fallacious reasoning?

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