

FALLACIES

A fallacy is an example of false or illogical reasoning.

Types of fallacies:

1. **Arguing from Ignorance**--an attempt to prove something true on the grounds that it cannot be (or has not been) proven false.
2. **Begging the Question**--when part of what has to be proved is assumed to be true. This fallacy may take the form of a circular argument. (ex) "In taking the position that persons accused of a crime cannot be interrogated without their lawyers being present, the Supreme Court is showing more concern for the protection of the criminal than for the protection of society. The laws were made to protect law-abiding citizens, not those who defy the law." (ex) "Much of this talk about spending millions for slum clearance is based on the fallacy that if we provide fine homes for who live in the slums, they will suddenly become responsible and productive citizens. This argument puts the cart before the horse. The basic trouble is with the people who live in the slums. These people are shiftless and irresponsible. The conditions under which they live prove this. If they had any initiative, they would not be living in slums."
3. **Ad Hominem**--means "argument against the man"--attacking the person instead of the argument. (ex) "No, I haven't read the bill. I don't need to. It's being supported by Congressman Smith, and there isn't a worse scoundrel in the country. If Smith is in favor of this bill, I'm against it."
4. **Ad Populum**--prejudice toward a group that results from stereotyping people rather than seeing individual differences. (ex) "You cannot trust politicians. They're all crooks."
5. **Red Herring**--In hunting, a strongly scented object drawn across a trail distracts hounds and causes them to follow the new scent. A red herring fallacy is a false issue used to lead attention away from the real one. (ex) "As long as we're talking about whether women should be paid at the same rate as men for similar work and have equal chances of promotion, we should also be asking whether women want to be equal with men and still retain preferred treatment of social occasions, such as having men pay the expenses of a date, open doors for women, and so on. It seems to me that what women want is to have equal and preferred treatment at the same time."
6. **Hasty Generalization**--any conclusion drawn from an obviously small sample.

(ex) “Our English teacher last year made us read some poetry, and it really was dull. I know one thing now--I’ll never like poetry.”

7. **Either-or Fallacy/False Dilemma**--when we say must either do this or that, we are assuming that there are no other alternatives. This is another fallacy. (ex) “John’s grades are not good. Either he lacks the ability to do the work or he is lazy.”

8. **Doubtful Cause/Post Hoc**--assuming that one thing causes another when it does not or may not.(ex) “No wonder I had such a bad day. I broke a mirror this morning.” (ex) “After using electric rollers for about a year, my mom got some bald spots on her head. I’ll never use those things.”

9. **Faulty Analogy**--when two things compared are not alike in ways essential to the conclusion being drawn. (ex) “Bill, you’re a great mechanic; you find the problem and fix it. Surely, then, you will have no trouble seeing what your rough draft needs and quickly rewrite it.”

10. **Irrelevant Authority**--when a person testifies to something of which he is not qualified. (ex) Freud has stated with simple clarity the impossibility of religious belief to the educated man today.”

11. **Appeal to Force**--arguing that one is right because he/she is stronger or in a position of power. (ex) “I don’t have to discuss anything. I’m the boss here.”

12. **Band Wagon Appeal**--arguing that something is right because the majority believe it is right. (ex) “But Mom, *everybody* is doing it.”

13. **Slippery Slope**--stating that taking a first step will lead to a second, undesirable step without evidence to prove it. (ex) Handgun control will lead to a police state. (Note there are European countries with handgun control that are not a police state.)

14. **Appeal to tradition**--argument that says something should be done just because it has always been done.