



Avoiding Logical Fallacies

A-State Online Writing Center

What are logical fallacies?

Fallacies prevent the opportunity for an open, two-way exchange of ideas that are required for meaningful conversations. Rather, these fallacies distract your readers with an overload of rhetorical appeals instead of using thorough reasoning. You can use logical fallacies in both written and verbal communication. Using them in your writing is more harmful because you are not present for readers to ask for clarification, and they are left with a negative impression of your tactics.

By recognizing the fallacies below, you can avoid using them in your arguments and catch them while reading other's arguments.

Logical fallacies are divided into three categories:

1. Emotional fallacies- Unfairly appeal to the audience's emotions
2. Ethical fallacies- Unreasonably advance the writer's authority or character
3. Logical fallacies- Depend upon faulty logic

The following are common logical fallacies students use in their writing:

1. Slippery Slope

A slippery slope attempts to discredit a suggestion by arguing that its acceptance will undoubtedly lead to a sequence of unfavorable events. This type of argument assumes that all transitions are inevitable yet provide no supporting evidence. This fallacy plays on the audience's fears. You may remember your parents using this argument to get you to clean your room, or else Santa will not visit you for being a bad child!

Example: *"If you do not do your homework tonight, you'll fail the semester, you'll have to drop out of the university, and you will eventually become homeless."*

*How absurd...right?

2. Strawman Fallacy

This fallacy involves intentionally caricaturing a person's argument with the to attack the caricature rather than the actual argument. This fallacy comes into play when someone misrepresents, misquotes, misconstrues, and oversimplifies an opponent's argument. A straw man argument is usually one that is more absurd than the actual argument. By doing this, the speaker makes the opponent's argument it an easier target to attack and might convince a person to defend the ridiculous argument rather than their original one. This fallacy is a prevalent debating flaw, especially when the moment is tense.

Example: *"Any politician who does not support the proposed state minimum wage increase hates the poor!"*

3. Moral Equivalence:

This fallacy compares small issues to much larger transgressions.

Example: *"Yes, Sarah hit a vehicle and fled the scene, but Jessica got a parking ticket for letting her meter run out. They're nearly identical!"*

4. Irrelevant Authority

First and foremost, experts do not have the characteristic of producing absolute truth. To determine truth from untruth, we must rely on evidence and reason. However, appeals to relevant authority can tell us which things are likely to be true. These authorities should only be used when the expert reports on their respective field of expertise, has backed up their information with research, and can be trusted. It is fallacious to form a belief when the appeal is to an authority who is not an expert on the issue at hand.

Example: *"My dentist says that the government will shut down in the next 30 days, so we should take her claim seriously."*

5. Hasty Generalization

This fallacy happens when someone sets a conclusion based on inadequate evidence. Writers must state their conclusions only after researching all relevant facts to avoid committing this fallacy.

Example: *"Even though I just started this new job, I am going to start looking for a new job because this one is too hard."*

6. Bandwagon Appeal

The bandwagon fallacy is committed by attempting to get people to do or think something because "everyone else thinks this way." Instructors often catch this fallacy because students create arguments based on popular opinion. Remember, all claims are opinions until you back them up

with facts. Never assume that something is a fact because many people believe in it, especially when writing argumentative papers!

Example: *"You should not go to a college close to home because all of your friends are leaving the state to go to college."*

Resources and more information:

[Book of Bad Arguments](#)

[Purdue Writing Lab](#)