



Dallas Baptist University

Logical Fallacies

Here are some common logical fallacies that you will want to avoid when writing an argumentative paper. Don't let the Latin phrases scare you; we have done our best to simplify the explanations. Again, these are things you should **not** do:

Fallacy	Definition	Example
Affirming the Consequent	Basing an argument on an assumption or hypothetical statement about what caused something.	While trying to convince a teenager that he or she should not drive on the highway, you make a true statement that highway driving is dangerous and results in thousands of deaths each year. Next you mention a teenager who died last week, whom you saw mentioned in the obituaries. Of course, there is no way that you can know how this teenager died; it could have been kidney failure, so treating the assumption that the teenager died while driving as truth is bad logic and weakens your reasoning.
Denial of the Antecedent	Concluding that the absence of a likely cause will always mean the absence of the effect	You promise a teenager that he will live a long and healthy life if he never drives drunk. What if he never drives, but soon dies of kidney failure? *Don't make assumptions about what may or may not cause something to happen.
Ambiguity	Using the same word in different senses without alerting the reader.	You come across the sentence: "The Bible was written by men who lived among Hebrews, who were divinely inspired." The author of this sentence probably means that the authors of the Bible were divinely inspired, but you claim that the author thinks that all Hebrews were divinely inspired. You claim that the Roman cross was a cruel instrument of torture, so be sure to never cross the street without looking both ways. During Thanksgiving dinner, you overhear President Bush say how much he hates turkey. You write in an article the next day that Bush despises Turkey, the country. *This is confusing, misleading, and often interpreted as deliberate. This is highly unethical, so make sure the terms you use and represent are defined clearly.
Amphiboly	Misusing someone else's entire arguments on a different interpretation of its wording.	
Equivocation	Using the same word with two different senses.	
Context	Quoting something out of context.	



<p>Argumentum ad...</p> <p>...antiquitam</p> <p>Claiming that something is right, good, or truthful simply because it has been around for a long time.</p> <p>...novitam</p> <p>Arguing that because something is newer then it must be better.</p>	<p>You argue that Coca-Cola is the right soda to drink because it has been around longer than Pepsi. Or that we should be driving Fords instead of Saturns because the Ford company is older.</p> <p>*Just because we do things the way they've always been done, doesn't necessarily mean it's always right or prudent to do so.</p> <p>You argue that we should use hologram preachers for Sunday worship services because that technology is newer, and thus better, than traditional public speaking.</p> <p>*Just because the way we've always done things seems old and outdated, doesn't mean it's always right or prudent to replace it with something new.</p>	<p>Making an appeal to force or threats.</p> <p>You argue that if Texans don't vote for a certain candidate, then you will hunt them down.</p> <p>*Nobody likes a bully.</p>
<p>...baculum</p> <p>Claiming that a rich person (or company, religion, country, etc.) is more likely to be right and trustworthy than a poor person.</p> <p>...lazarum</p> <p>Claiming that a poor person is more right or truthful than one who has money.</p>	<p>You argue that one can trust Enron's advertising because that company is worth a lot of money.</p> <p>You argue that one should believe a middle-class housewife over Donald Trump because money hasn't corrupted her thoughts.</p> <p>*Don't base your argument on wealth (or lack thereof)!</p>	<p>Directly attacking another person, his or her character, or his or her circumstances.</p> <p>Arguing that Einstein's theory of relativity should not be accepted because Einstein wasn't very good looking.</p> <p>*Be nice and be fair.</p>
<p>...hominem</p> <p>Appealing to emotions and enthusiasm rather than relevant facts.</p>	<p>Convincing someone to buy your product or vote for you simply because you appear enthusiastic and determined, despite your dismal record on taxes, crime, etc.</p> <p>*Most conclusions are best based on reason and not personal feelings.</p>	<p>Claiming that since your idea has been repeated (by yourself, experts, etc.) more than your opponent's idea, then your idea must be better.</p> <p>You cite that more people, regardless of their expertise, have acknowledged your position on property taxes, so you must be right.</p>
<p>...populam</p> <p>...nauseum</p>		

<p>...numeram</p>	<p>Claiming that if the majority of people believe that an idea is right, then that idea must be the best one.</p>	<p>Remember: Hitler was elected to office.</p> <p>*Most conclusions are best based on reason and not popularity or majority acceptance.</p>
<p>...verecundiam</p>	<p>Appealing to authority outside of that authority's expertise, or arguing from the opinions of a person who has no authority on the subject.</p>	<p>You claim that the President's actions are always good and right simply because he has the authority of the President, or you claim that a New Testament scholar's thoughts on Esther are more qualified than an Old Testament scholar's.</p> <p>*Don't rest your argument entirely on someone's authority in a position or field of study; refer mainly to the facts.</p>
<p>Begging the Question</p>	<p>Saying that your conclusion is right by making your reader assume the truth of only one of your points.</p>	<p>A: How do you know God exists? B: Because God wrote the Bible. A: How do you know God wrote the Bible? B: Because the Bible says so. A: Why should I believe the Bible? B: Because God wrote the Bible. (This conversation still does not prove the existence of God or that God wrote the Bible. For Person A to accept Person B's conclusion that God wrote the Bible, Person B would have to admit that God does exist. However, Person B does not believe that God exists, so Person A is wrong for making Person B accept that belief in order to prove his point.)</p> <p>*Don't make you readers accept your conclusions; persuade them with facts, reason, and logic.</p>
<p>Bifurcation</p>	<p>Unfairly presenting a situation with only two alternatives</p>	<p>You force your thirsty brother to decide between water and tea to drink while there is soda and lemonade in the fridge.</p> <p>*There may be many other alternatives to the problem at hand than the two provided, so forcing a choice between only two solutions is sometimes wrong. There are often more than two ways to solve a problem.</p>
<p>Complex, or Loaded Question (Fallacy of Interrogation)</p>	<p>Asking a question that has certain ideas that your audience dislikes, but any answer they give will admit to those claim; a question in which a simple yes or no is not reasonable.</p>	<p>A political question: "Will you vote for Republicans and prosperity?" (If you are a Democrat and answer "no," then you will be thought of as against prosperity, but since you are a Democrat, you cannot reasonably answer "yes" either.)</p> <p>Question: "Have you stopped beating your wife?" (Answering yes or no automatically shows that the responder has beaten or still beats his wife, even though he has never committed the act.)</p> <p>*Be mindful of the rhetorical questions you ask in your papers!</p>

<p>Irrelevance (<i>ignoratio elenchi</i>)</p> <p>Non-sequitur</p>	<p>Arguing a cause and effect that have absolutely no logical connection.</p> <p>Drawing conclusions from arguments that have no logical or reasonable connections with each other.</p>	<p>You argue for the passing of a health care bill based on the reasoning that it is good for everyone to have health care, without arguing that the actual bill will achieve that goal.</p> <p>You argue that universal health care is good, so any bill that offers universal health care is good, regardless of its ability to reasonably achieve such a goal.</p> <p>*Context is very important. If you are arguing about a specific bill, then argue the facts of the bill; if you are arguing about universal health care in general, then argue about that.</p>
<p>Red Herring</p>	<p>Distracting readers from the real argument and making them pay attention to a less important or irrelevant issue.</p>	<p>Someone asks you about your views on school funding, and since you don't really have a valid opinion on the topic, you bring up your patriotism and claim that all patriots need to make sure schools are funded. (In this case, "patriotism" is the red herring.)</p> <p>* This is much like Irrelevance. Stick to the topic at hand.</p>
<p>Reification</p>	<p>Making an abstract concept into something concrete.</p>	<p>The concept of faith in God is not as reasonably concrete (touchable) as things like population statistics. So, in a debate over the validity of statistics about how the population of Ohio voted in the 2004 elections, it would be wrong to introduce the concept of faith in God as a tenant of your argument because the nature of the argument requires statistical facts, not theological proofs.</p> <p>*Be aware of the context of the argument. What is it requiring you to argue? Facts? Statistics? Definitions? Ideas?</p>
<p>Special Pleading</p>	<p>Expecting special treatment of your argument for whatever reason.</p>	<p>Your instructor gives you a failing grade on an assignment, and you automatically expect special treatment because of your perfect attendance, regardless of the lack of time you actually spent studying.</p> <p>*In the interest of equality and fairness, you want your argument to be treated the same way you would treat another's argument.</p>
<p>Straw Man</p>	<p>Misrepresenting an argument, attacking the argument, and then concluding that you have proven the argument wrong.</p>	<p>A certain politician disagrees with some of the wording of the Patriot Act and will not sign it until his concern is addressed. You claim that since he won't support the passing of the Patriot Act, then he is obviously not a patriot and should be tried for treason.</p> <p>*Don't misrepresent what someone actually says, and be wary of assuming anything; disagreeing with a particular bill is not necessarily the same thing as committing treason.</p>

Two Wrongs/ Two Rights (<i>tu quoque</i>)	Two wrongs do not make a right.	If a session of Congress did not pass a Civil Rights bill in the 1940s, it would be wrong for Congress in the 1960s to strike down another Civil Rights bill merely because a previous Congress did. *This usually comes as an appeal for consistency, much like the fallacy of <i>argumentum ad antiquitatem</i>.
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