

# Logical Fallacies

The misuse of logical appeal in an argument often results in a *logical fallacy*, or faulty reasoning that breaks down the credibility of a claim.

Becoming familiar with the different kinds of logical fallacies can help you avoid this pitfall in your own arguments, and help you recognize when others are arguing from a flawed premise.

**Some of the more common fallacies are listed below, with examples.**

**Faulty Cause and Effect:** lack of connection between two sequential events

- Because I watched Friends last night, I passed my math test.
- We voted Democrats into office, and then the economy went downhill.

**Red Herring (Ignoring the Question):** when a rebuttal doesn't address the question

- Q: Did the President have an affair?  
A: "He's very busy at the moment with the Middle East Peace talks, and has no time for silly accusations."

**Stacking the Deck (Slanting):** leaving out one side of an argument completely

- There should be no "moment of silence" in schools: it discriminates against certain religions, causes unnecessary controversy, takes away from study time, and mixes church and state.

**Begging the Question:** when the claim is included in the evidence (and thus, nothing is proven)

- Since I'm not lying, I must be telling the truth.
- We know that God exists, because the Bible is the word of God.
- Roger Drudge's book on politics is the best; it says so inside.

**False Authority:** when someone who is not an expert gives testimony

- As an English teacher, I must say that Coke is better than Pepsi.
- I'm not a doctor, but I play one on TV. Excedrin is the best headache medicine.

**Hasty Generalization:** when a claim states or implies that things are all one way

- Women are bad drivers.
- Gun owners refuse to consider new laws that would make our streets safer.

**False Analogy:** comparing two things that are not similar enough to compare

- Bill Clinton is the Jesus Christ of the 20th century.

**Either/Or (False Dilemma):** when only two options are given when many choices exist

- Either you're for the Republican plan, or you're socialist and un-American.

**Ad Hominem Fallacy:** an attack on the person rather than the argument

- Don't listen to Rush Limbaugh; he's a big fat idiot.

- James supports the new tax system; what do you expect from a rich kid?

**Complex Question:** when two different points are linked together in one statement

- Do you support freedom and the right to bear arms?
- Has George W. Bush stopped using illegal drugs? (This assumes that he has used them in the past.)

**Prejudicial Language:** loaded or overly-emphasized word choice

- Right-wing fanatics and NRA storm-troopers will fight to keep guns firing.
- Any reasonable person can see through the cloud of lies coming from the Democrats.

**Wrong Direction:** the cause and effect relationship is reversed

- Cancer causes smoking.
- The fall of the Berlin Wall caused the end of the Cold War. (In fact, the end of the Cold War caused the fall of the Berlin Wall.)

**Complex Cause:** a complex event is shown as having only one cause

- We lost the game because Wilson missed the last shot.

**Straw Man:** creating a weak, easily-refuted argument that misrepresents the opponent's position

- Many who are for abortion like its convenience. But this is a human life we're talking about, and people need to be concerned with more than convenience.

**Equivocation:** using the same word with two different meanings

- The sign said "Fine for Parking Here," so since it was fine, I parked there.
- Liberal politicians favor a liberal lifestyle of free love and drugs.
- God helps those who help themselves, so I'm gonna help myself to more of this tuna casserole.

**Placing Blame Elsewhere:** avoiding the question by attacking something else

- You criticize Chinese human rights violations, but what about the homeless in American slums?