

LOGICAL FALLACY

When writing an argumentative essay it is easy to make quick judgments to back up your claim. It takes time and practice to construct a sound and credible argument, and to recognize areas where there may be holes in your logic. One way to strengthen your argument is to recognize **Logical Fallacies**, or common errors in reasoning that will weaken the logic of your argument. These are often accompanied by lack of reasoning to support evidence. Here are some common logical fallacies to look out for in your writing, and with some practice you can learn how to avoid them and build stronger arguments!

Slippery Slope:

Making the conclusion that if A happens, a series of small events (B, C, D) will eventually lead to Z.

Example: If we strengthen gun control law, the government will eventually ban all weapons.

In this example, the author is equating banning guns with banning all weapons which is not the same thing.

Hasty Generalization:

These are conclusions that are made with little or no evidence to back it up. This means coming to a rushed conclusion without taking all of the facts into account.

Example: Even though it is my first time trying to ride a bike, I can tell it is too hard for anyone to do.

In this example, the author is basing the difficulty of riding a bike on one day of their own experience. They are making a quick judgment, and to create a stronger argument they would need to ride the bike many days to build a strong opinion and do other research to find multiple sources and create a dynamic argument.

Red Herring:

This is a tactic that is used to create a diversion, and distract the audience away from the main topic being discussed.

Example: The murder rate in Texas is really high. We need more law officials, and that means we need to give them a pay raise. Vote now to give police officers a pay raise!

In this example, the argument starts out discussing the murder rate in Texas and then moves on to discuss the pay that police officers are receiving. Although they seem related, this distraction is taking away from the importance of the murder rate and is getting the reader to now think about pay raises for police officers instead of the problems with the Texas crime rate.

Genetic Fallacy:

Drawing a conclusion about something based on its relation to a person, event, or place determines its worth or value or character

Example: The Volkswagen Beetle is an evil car because it was originally designed by Hitler's army.

In this example the author is equating the character of a car with the character of the people who built the car. However, the two are not inherently related.

Post hoc ergo propter hoc:

The assumption that if D happened after C, then C caused D to happen.

Example: I opened up a new can of soda and then tripped walking up the steps, so opening up cans of soda will make you trip.

Although the two may seem related, making the distinct connection that opening up the soda can was what made you trip does not leave room for other possibilities and makes the claim that every time anyone opens a can of soda, they will trip. There is no evidence to back up the claim that this was caused by this exact sequence of events.

Circular Argument:

This argument just restates the claim in a new way instead of giving examples or evidence to prove it.

Example: Jennifer Aniston is a really good actress because she knows how to act really well on screen.

The second part of the example ends with "because..." which is usually where the evidence to back up the claim would be found. Instead, the claim that she is a "really good actress" is restated in a new way. To prevent a circular argument, examples of her good acting could be shown, or specific ways that she is a good actress could be addressed like her ability to conform to any role or how she can cry on cue.

Either/Or: This reduces your argument to only having two options. This is over-simplifying the issue and making it seem as if there are only ever two outcomes or sides to an argument.

Example: We can either start creating more recycling programs now, or the Earth will die.

In this example, the author ignores the range of other options available to help nature conservation such as long term recycling goals, wildlife preserves, trash pick-ups, and eco-friendly cars.

Ad Hominem: The use of the fallacy attacks a person based on personality traits or physical appearance, instead of focusing on attacking their claim/argument.

Example: The United Nations doesn't get anything done because they are all lazy, ineffective hippies.

Instead of focusing on the character traits of the people involved in the U.N., the argument should focus on the policies or actions they take. Instead of character traits, real evidence of the U.N. being ineffective would create a stronger argument because it would *show* the reader *how* they are ineffective, instead of attacking their character or traits which is subjective.