

Introduction to Logical Fallacies

Arguments

Most academic writing tasks require you to make an argument—that is, to present reasons for a particular claim or interpretation you are putting forward. You may have been told that you need to make your arguments more logical or stronger. And you may have worried that you simply aren't a logical person or wondered what it means for an argument to be strong. Learning to make the best arguments you can is an ongoing process, but it isn't impossible: "Being logical" is something *anyone* can do, with practice! Each argument you make is composed of *premises* (this is a term for statements that express your reasons or evidence) that are arranged in the right way to support your *conclusion* (the main claim or interpretation you are offering). You can make your arguments stronger by

1. **using good premises** (ones you have good reason to believe are both true and relevant to the issue at hand),
2. making sure your premises **provide good support for your conclusion** (and not some other conclusion, or no conclusion at all),
3. checking that you have **addressed the most important or relevant aspects** of the issue (that is, that your premises and conclusion focus on what is really important to the issue you're arguing about), and
4. **not making claims that are so strong or sweeping that you can't really support them.**

You also need to be sure that you present all of your ideas in an orderly fashion that readers can follow. See our handouts on argument and organization for some tips that will improve your arguments.

This handout describes some ways in which arguments often fail to do the things listed above; these failings are called fallacies. If you're having trouble developing your argument, check to see if a fallacy is part of the problem!

<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/fallacies.html>

1. Ad hominem - Attacking the individual instead of the argument.
 - a. Example: You are so stupid your argument couldn't possibly be true.
 - b. Example: I figured that you couldn't possibly get it right, so I ignored your comment.

2. Appeal to force - Telling the hearer that something bad will happen to him if he does not accept the argument.
 - a. Example: If you don't want to get beaten up, you will agree with what I say.
 - b. Example: Convert or die.
3. Appeal to pity - Urging the hearer to accept the argument based upon an appeal to emotions, sympathy, etc.
 - a. Example: You owe me big time because I really stuck my neck out for you.
 - b. Example: Oh come on, I've been sick. That's why I missed the deadline.
4. Appeal to the popular - Urging the hearer to accept a position because a majority of people hold to it.
 - a. Example: The majority of people like soda. Therefore, soda is good.
 - b. Example: Everyone else is doing it. Why shouldn't you?
5. Appeal to tradition - Trying to get someone to accept something because it has been done or believed for a long time.
 - a. Example: This is the way we've always done it. Therefore, it is the right way.
 - b. Example: The Catholic Church's tradition demonstrates that this doctrine is true.
6. Cause and Effect - Assuming that the effect is related to a cause because the events occur together.
 - a. Example: When the rooster crows, the sun rises. Therefore, the rooster causes the sun to rise.
 - b. Example: When the fuel light goes on in my car, I soon run out of gas. Therefore, the fuel light causes my car to run out of gas.
7. Division - Assuming that what is true of the whole is true for the parts.
 - a. Example: That car is blue. Therefore, its engine is blue.
 - b. Example: Your family is weird. That means that you are weird too.
8. False Dilemma - Giving two choices when in actuality there could be more choices possible.
 - a. Example: You either did knock the glass over or you did not. Which is it?
 - b. Example: Do you still beat your wife?
9. Guilt by Association - Rejecting an argument or claim because the person proposing it likes someone whom is disliked by another.
 - a. Example: Hitler liked dogs. Therefore dogs are bad.
 - b. Example: Your friend is a thief. Therefore, I cannot trust you.
10. Non Sequitur - Comments or information that do not logically follow from a premise or the conclusion.
 - a. Example: We know why it rained today: because I washed my car.
 - b. Example: I don't care what you say. We don't need any more bookshelves. As long as the carpet is clean, we are fine. .