



Logical Fallacies

Fallacies are common issues in reasoning that take away from the efficacy of your argument. They can either be faulty or irrelevant arguments, and they can be easily identified by your instructors. Following is a list of common fallacies (by no means exhaustive though) that you should look out for and avoid when formulating claims and building arguments.

1. Slippery Slope

This is a conclusion based fallacy. It relies on the premise that if A happens therefore, through a series of steps B, C, D... Z will eventually happen. In short, it equates the occurrence of A as a logical conclusion to the fulfillment of Z.

For example,

We shouldn't ban employing children as domestic help because then the government will also lead to the banning to all domestic staff within homes.

Here, banning child labor is equated with banning all domestic staff (regardless of age).

2. Hasty Generalization

This one is a conclusion predicated on insufficient evidence/knowledge. Thus, you derive a conclusion based on limited knowledge/facts as opposed to a well-backed up argument.

For instance,

The first two cases of COVID-19 have been identified in Pakistan; the tally is likely to go up to a thousand by the end of this week.

In the above example, a conclusion of the number of cases is drawn without taking into account any facts vis-à-vis the health care system or the efforts of the elected officials.



3. Post hoc ergo propter hoc:

This assumes that if A occurred after B then, B must have been the cause of A.

For example,

The rise in unemployment rates since the election of the PTI government this month indicates that the government is inadequate.

In the above example, the writer is deducing that the unemployment rate must be a direct result of the government's inadequacy. However, there could be various factors such as rapid rise in population, nepotism, companies having a trade deficit etc. that may have contributed to this change in statistic.

4. Genetic Fallacy

This conclusion is based on the argument that the value, worth, and importance of A is determined by its origin.

For example,

We shouldn't read books by Heidegger because he was a Nazi.

In the above example, it is stated that since Heidegger was a Nazi, one shouldn't be reading his books. This is a faulty premise because by eradicating everything related to Heidegger, one will also overlook his holistic description of human existence, his idea of truth, and a deeply intellectual experience overall.

5. Begging the Claim

Here the conclusion that needs to be proven via examples is already alluded to/validated in the claim.

For example,

Filthy and polluting coal should be banned.

Arguing that coal pollutes the earth and thus should be banned is logical. But that very conclusion that should be proved, that coal causes enough pollution to warrant banning its use, is already assumed in the claim by referring to it as 'filthy and polluting'.



6. Circular Argument:

This restates the argument as opposed to actually proving it.

For example,

Prime minister Imran Khan is a good leader due to his exceptional leadership skills.

In the above statement, the claim that Imran Khan is a good leader and the evidence supporting it, i.e., ‘leadership skills’ are the same. In order to substantiate the claim and make an effective argument, specific examples such as his budget plan, domestic and foreign policies etc. will need to be used.

7. Either/or

This conclusion doesn’t hold space for nuance or grey areas in an argument. It oversimplifies the argument by reducing it to only two sides/choices.

For example,

We can either stop using cars or destroy the earth.

In this example, the two choices are presented as the only options, yet the author ignores a range of choices in between such as developing cleaner technology, carpooling, or better community planning to discourage daily driving.

8. Ad hominem

This form of fallacy attacks the character of the person as opposed to their arguments/ideas.

For example,

The demands of the organizing committee of Aurat March are outrageous as they are made by shameless women.

In the above statement, the author hasn’t even listed the demands of the organization, much less evaluate them critically on their merits. Instead, the author has resorted to target the character of the group.



9. Ad Populum/Bandwagon Appeal

This fallacy is based on the premise of jumping on the bandwagon. This means the argument presents what most or a group of people think as opposed to critically engaging with and then formulating one's own ideas.

For example,

In order to be truly educated, one must be familiar with Shakespeare's work.

In the above statement, the author equates 'truly educated' with knowing Shakespeare's work. It is true that Shakespeare's writing comprises a large part of the literary canon but there is no direct correlation between being educated and knowing his work. For, there are many ways of acquiring knowledge.

10. Red Herring

This is divisionary fallacy that relies on avoiding key opposing arguments as opposed to addressing and critically assessing them.

For example,

If we don't employ the 11-year-old as domestic help, she will simply be married off to some man.

In the above statement, the author avoids addressing the employment of child labor by redirecting the concern to another issue i.e. child marriage. It is true that child marriage is prevalent in most societies, however, highlighting that doesn't absolve people from employing child labor.

11. Straw man

This fallacy is based on the premise of oversimplifying an opponent's claim and then addressing their claim as shallow.

For example,

American citizens who oppose USA's invasion of Iraq are not patriots.

In the above statement, the author equates opposing war on Iraq with being anti-nationalistic. However, it could be just as true that these citizens only oppose the war and are critical of the government. This criterion doesn't make them unpatriotic; hence, it is a fallacy.



12. Moral Equivalence

This fallacy compares minor misdeeds with major atrocities and considers them equal in moral significance.

For example,

The organization's management style is fascist.

In this example, the author is comparing the misdeeds of an organization that may have an authoritarian management style with a form of ultra-nationalism associated dictatorial power, forcible suppression of opposition, and atrocities committed by Mussolini and Hitler. This comparison is unfair and inaccurate.