

26 Logical Fallacies

A one-page revision map, grouped by the trick each fallacy pulls. Full guide, quizzes and examples at goodlearnerproject.com/logical-fallacies.html

1. Attacking the Person & Dodging

Fallacies that go after the arguer, or duck the question, instead of answering it.

1. Ad Hominem — Attacking the person making an argument instead of the argument itself. e.g. “You can’t trust her views on the budget — she’s been divorced twice.”

2. Tu Quoque — Latin for “you too.” Rejecting criticism by pointing out that the critic is a hypocrite, rather than answering the criticism. e.g. “You tell me to quit smoking, but you smoke too, so your advice is wor...”

3. Straw Man — Misrepresenting or exaggerating someone’s argument into a weaker version, then knocking that fake version down. e.g. “You want more break time? So you think students should just play all...”

4. Red Herring — Introducing an irrelevant point to distract from the real issue and lead the discussion off track. e.g. “Why worry about my late homework when there are far bigger problems i...”

5. Genetic Fallacy — Judging a claim as true or false based on where it came from — its source or origin — instead of its actual merits. e.g. “That idea came from a tabloid, so it must be nonsense.”

2. Appeals to Emotion & the Crowd

Fallacies that push feelings, fear, or popularity in place of reasons.

6. Appeal to Emotion — Trying to win an argument by stirring up strong feelings instead of offering evidence or reasons. e.g. “Think how heartbroken your family would be if you didn’t become a doc...”

7. Appeal to Fear — Using threats or frightening consequences to win support, instead of giving real reasons. e.g. “If this rule passes, chaos will follow and no one will be safe — so v...”

8. Appeal to Pity — Trying to win agreement by making people feel sorry for you, rather than by proving your point. e.g. “I know I copied the essay, but I’ll fail the year and my parents will...”

9. Bandwagon — Arguing that something is true, right, or good simply because many people believe it or do it. e.g. “Everyone’s buying this coin, so it must be a smart investment.”

10. Appeal to Authority — Claiming something is true just because an authority says so — especially an authority who is not actually an expert on the topic. e.g. “A famous actor endorses this diet pill, so it must work.”

11. Appeal to Tradition — Arguing that something is right or better simply because it has always been done that way. e.g. “We’ve always marked exams on paper, so there’s no reason to change.”

3. Loaded Assumptions

Fallacies that smuggle an unproven idea in and build on top of it.

12. Begging the Question — Assuming the very thing you are trying to prove — the argument goes in a circle, with the conclusion hidden inside the premise. e.g. “This book tells the truth because it says right here that everything...”

13. Loaded Question — Asking a question that has an unproven assumption built in, so that any direct answer traps you into accepting it. e.g. “Have you stopped cheating on your tests?” (Either answer admits you c...)

14. False Dilemma — Presenting only two options as if they were the only ones, when in fact more choices exist. e.g. “Either we ban phones completely, or grades will collapse.”

15. Middle Ground — Assuming that the truth must lie halfway between two opposing positions, just because it is the compromise. e.g. “One expert says the bridge is safe, one says it will collapse, so it’...”

16. No True Scotsman — Protecting a sweeping claim by redefining it on the spot, so any counterexample is dismissed as “not a real” case. e.g. “No Scotsman puts sugar on porridge.” “My uncle does.” “Well, no true...”

4. Jumping to Conclusions

Fallacies that race from thin evidence to a big claim, especially about cause.

17. Hasty Generalization — Drawing a broad conclusion from too few examples or a sample that is too small or unusual. e.g. “I met two rude people from that town, so everyone there is rude.”

18. Anecdotal Evidence — Using a single personal story or isolated example as if it outweighs solid, wide-ranging evidence. e.g. “My grandad smoked his whole life and lived to 95, so smoking isn’t ha...”

19. False Cause — Assuming that because one thing followed another, the first must have caused the second. e.g. “I wore my lucky socks and we won, so the socks caused the win.”

20. Slippery Slope — Claiming that one small first step will inevitably lead to a chain of increasingly extreme consequences, with no evidence for the chain. e.g. “If we let students redo one test, soon they’ll redo everything and st...”

21. Appeal to Ignorance — Claiming something is true simply because it hasn’t been proven false — or false because it hasn’t been proven true. e.g. “No one has proved aliens don’t exist, so they must be out there.”

22. Gambler’s Fallacy — Believing that past results in a random process change the odds of the next independent event. e.g. “The coin landed heads five times in a row, so tails is due.”

5. Slippery Words & Faulty Logic

Fallacies that trade on double meanings or the part-and-whole muddle.

23. Equivocation — Using a single word in two different senses within an argument, sliding between the meanings to mislead. e.g. “A feather is light; what is light cannot be dark; so a feather cannot...”

24. Composition — Assuming that what is true of the individual parts must be true of the whole they make up. e.g. “Every player is the best in their position, so the team must be the b...”

25. Division — Assuming that what is true of the whole must be true of each of its parts. e.g. “Our school is the top-ranked, so every student here must be top of th...”

26. Sunk Cost — Continuing with something only because of the time, money, or effort already spent, rather than because it is still worth doing. e.g. “I’ve already spent three years on a course I hate, so I have to finis...”