

Rhetorical fallacies, or **fallacies of argument**, don't allow for the open, two-way exchange of ideas upon which meaningful conversations depend. Instead, they distract the reader with various appeals instead of using sound reasoning. They can be divided into three categories:

1. **Emotional fallacies** unfairly appeal to the audience's emotions.
2. **Ethical fallacies** unreasonably advance the writer's own authority or character.
3. **Logical fallacies** depend upon faulty logic.

Keep in mind that rhetorical fallacies often overlap.

Emotional Fallacies

Sentimental Appeals use emotion to distract the audience from the facts.

Example: The thousand of baby seals killed in the Exxon Valdez oil spill have shown us that oil is not a reliable energy source.

Red Herrings use misleading or unrelated evidence to support a conclusion.

Example: That painting is worthless because I don't recognize the artist.

Scare Tactics try to frighten people into agreeing with the arguer by threatening them or predicting unrealistically dire consequences.

Example: If you don't support the party's tax plan, you and your family will be reduced to poverty.

Bandwagon Appeals encourage an audience to agree with the writer because everyone else is doing so.

Example: Paris Hilton carries a small dog in her purse, so you should buy a hairless Chihuahua and put it in your Louis Vuitton.

Slippery Slope arguments suggest that one thing will lead to another, oftentimes with disastrous results.

Example: If you get a B in high school, you won't get into the college of your choice, and therefore will never have a meaningful career.

Either/Or Choices reduce complicated issues to only two possible courses of action.

Example: The patent office can either approve my generator design immediately or say goodbye forever to affordable energy.

False Need arguments create an unnecessary desire for things.

Example: You need an expensive car or people won't think you're cool.

Ethical Fallacies

False Authority asks audiences to agree with the assertion of a writer based simply on his or her character or the authority of another person or institution who may not be fully qualified to offer that assertion.

Example: My high school teacher said it, so it must be true.

Using Authority Instead of Evidence occurs when someone offers personal authority as proof.

Example: Trust me – my best friend wouldn't do that.

Guilt by Association calls someone's character into question by examining the character of that person's associates.

Example: Sara's friend Amy robbed a bank; therefore, Sara is a delinquent.

Dogmatism shuts down discussion by asserting that the writer's beliefs are the only acceptable ones.

Example: I'm sorry, but I think penguins are sea creatures and that's that.

Moral Equivalence compares minor problems with much more serious crimes (or vice versa).

Example: These mandatory seatbelt laws are fascist.

Ad Hominem arguments attack a person's character rather than that person's reasoning.

Example: Why should we think a candidate who recently divorced will keep her campaign promises?

Strawperson arguments set up and often dismantle easily refutable arguments in order to misrepresent an opponent's argument in order to defeat him or her

Example: A: We need to regulate access to handguns.

B: My opponent believes that we should ignore the rights guaranteed to us as citizens of the United States by the Constitution. Unlike my opponent, I am a firm believer in the Constitution, and a proponent of freedom.

Logical Fallacies

A **Hasty Generalization** draws conclusions from scanty evidence.

Example: I wouldn't eat at that restaurant—the only time I ate there, my entree was undercooked.

Faulty Causality (or *Post Hoc*) arguments confuse chronology with causation: one event can occur after another without being caused by it.

Example: A year after the release of the violent shoot-'em-up video game Annihilator, incidents of school violence tripled—surely not a coincidence.

A **Non Sequitur** (Latin for “It doesn't follow”) is a statement that does not logically relate to what comes before it. An important logical step may be missing in such a claim.

Example: If those protesters really loved their country, they wouldn't question the government.

An **Equivocation** is a half-truth, or a statement that is partially correct but that purposefully obscures the entire truth.

Example: “I did not have sexual relations with that woman.” – President Bill Clinton

Begging the Question occurs when a writer simply restates the claim in a different way; such an argument is circular.

Example: His lies are evident from the untruthful nature of his statements.

A **Faulty Analogy** is an inaccurate, inappropriate, or misleading comparison between two things.

Example: Letting prisoners out on early release is like absolving them of their crimes.

Stacked Evidence represents only one side of the issue, thus distorting the issue.

Example: Cats are superior to dogs because they are cleaner, cuter, and more independent.

Further Resources: Lunsford, Andrea A. and John Ruskiewicz. Everything's an Argument. 3rd ed. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004.