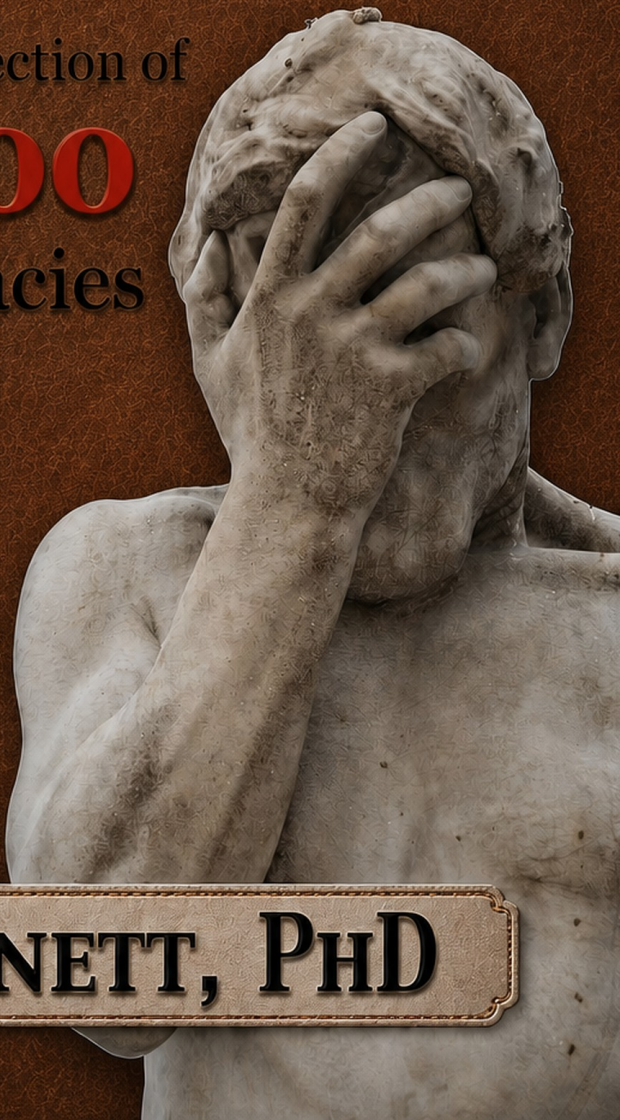
Logically Fallacious

The Ultimate Collection of

Over 300

Logical Fallacies



ACADEMIC EDITION

Bo Bennett, PhD

Logically Fallacious

The Ultimate Collection of Over 300 Logical Fallacies

Academic Edition

Written By

BO BENNETT, PHD

http://www.LogicallyFallacious.com

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For my kids, Annabelle and Trebor.

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Preface

There are those who say that we are living in a "post-truth world." This is the idea that the truth no longer matters. People back up their personal religious beliefs by stating "it's true to me, and that's all that matters." People support their political candidate despite lie after lie by finding a way to derive a kernel of truth from their candidate's lies. The media sells us their "version" of the truth based on the media empire's ideological position—and we buy it, hook, line, and sinker. But guess what, the concept of truth has not changed; what has changed is our willingness to sacrifice our intellectual integrity for information that supports our beliefs, personal values, and ideologies. We can also look at changes in our social environment that strongly contribute to our disturbing new relationship with the truth. For example, most of us get our "news" from social media and heavily-biased media sources that we choose based on what confirms what we already believe to be true. This creates an *echo chamber*, where such views are supported by the vast majority of those who comment on and share the views, only making us more confident that the information and perspective we receive is the "truth." This story does have a happy ending—or it can. Being able to identify errors in reasoning, known as *logical fallacies*, is a way that you can do your part to bring more truth back into our "post-truth world."

This is a book about **reason**, not formal logic. Fallacies have been discussed in philosophy since Aristotle first introduced them in his work, *On Sophistical Refutations*. Since then, prolific writers and thinkers have contributed to this area of study (directly and indirectly) including Francis Bacon (1620), Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole (1662), John Locke (1690), Issac Watts (1724), Jeremy Bentham (1824), Richard Whately (1826), John Stuart Mill (1843), and Irving Copi (1961). For an excellent academic introduction to the philosophical side of logical fallacy theory, see the entry on logical fallacies in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. The focus of this book is on the importance of good critical thinking through the awareness of and avoidance of common errors in reasoning when making and evaluating arguments.

In this latest edition,

- I have replaced the use of “opponent” with “interlocutor,” meaning a person who takes part in a conversation or dialogue. The word “opponent” suggests competition and perhaps even hostility. Good, rational discourse should neither be a competition nor hostile; it should be seen as a partnership in order to get closer to the truth. “Opponent” does still work in some cases such as competitive debate or perhaps legal proceedings, but I do feel that “interlocutor” is a better word.

- I have added several more practice sessions and questions and answers in the back of the book, covering some of the highlights of the last two years.

- I have made sure that all the fallacies have at least two examples, often adding even more.

- I have reviewed the “pseudo-logical fallacies” and moved some of them to the “A-list” while removing others.

- I have added over a dozen new fallacies to this edition.

- I have added several dozen “also known as” names.

- I fixed several typos, added clarification, and made other corrections.

- I made sure each fallacy has either a tip or a “fun fact.”

- I have updated many of the examples with more real-world examples where practical and added some more humor and light-heartedness to make the reading more enjoyable.

I did all this because I care about you, my favorite reader in the whole, wide, world.

Introduction

While this book is written for the layperson, I do need to introduce some concepts which may be new to you but play an important role in reasoning, as well as issue a few warnings, and explain how this book is organized. First, let me answer the question, "What's up with the title?"

The domain name was available. Moving on…

Reasoning

Humans have the capacity to establish and verify facts, to change and justify beliefs, and in general, to make sense of things. We do this by *reason*, and the process of doing so is called *reasoning*. While virtually all humans past the age of two or three are capable of reasoning, an alarmingly small percentage of us are really any good at it. We'll be exploring why this is the case throughout this book.

Arguments

When we hear the word "argument," we tend to think of an adversarial confrontation between two or more people, with bickering, defensiveness, and increased negative emotions. This is only one kind of argument—not the kind we will be focusing on in this book. Academically and logically, an *argument* is an attempt to persuade someone of something by offering reasons to accept a given conclusion. We make and hear arguments every day and often do not recognize them. We are constantly being bombarded with persuasion and led to conclusions, without being consciously aware. Sometimes the persuasion is very subtle, sometimes the reasons are implied, and sometimes the conclusion is assumed. For the purpose of this book, we just need to be able to recognize arguments when we hear them or make them.

An argument is made up of *premises* and a *conclusion*. The premises can also be referred to as *reasons*, *supporting evidence*, or *claims*.

> *Premise 1 (P1). Pizza is the best-selling food in America.*
>
> *Premise 2 (P2). We can reasonably assume that "best-selling" means that people like it.*

Conclusion (C). People in America like pizza.

If we just stated that "people in America like pizza," we wouldn't technically be making an argument; we would just be stating a proposition, assertion, claim, or even opinion. We cannot talk about logical fallacies unless they are in the context of an argument. Often, arguments are less formal as in

People in America like pizza. This is obvious because it is the best-selling food in America.

From this structure, we can still spot the premise and conclusion. Thus, we can talk about logical fallacies. Again, if we just asserted the conclusion, logical fallacies are unlikely to apply.

I use the terms "arguer" and "interlocutor" or "audience" to represent the one making the argument and the person or persons considering the argument, respectively. Keep in mind that the arguer could be a political candidate, Jehovah's Witness, a spouse, the 17-year-old kid at the returns desk in Walmart, or anyone capable of rational communication. The interlocutor/audience could be a police officer, your best friend, your spouse, or anyone else capable of rational communication.

Deduction is a form of reasoning and argument in which the conclusion follows **necessarily** from the premises. Sticking with the classic example:

Premise 1: All humans are mortal.

Premise 2: Socrates is a human.

Conclusion: Socrates is mortal.

If the premises are true, then the conclusion **must** be true. That is what makes an argument deductive. This is also referred to as a *formal argument*.

Arguments where the conclusion is merely based on probability, not necessity, are considered *inductive arguments*. These are usually constructed through *inductive reasoning*, which is the process of making general conclusions from specific instances. For example:

Premise 1: The sun has risen every day so far.

Conclusion: Therefore, the sun will likely rise tomorrow.

Because the sun could explode tonight, the conclusion is just very probable; therefore, this is an inductive or informal argument.

I will be using these terms throughout the book. If you don't understand them now, you will very soon.

Arguments are everywhere. You make them every day, and you hear them every day. Where you find arguments, you find fallacious arguments. Where you find fallacious arguments, you find fallacious reasoning.

Beliefs

A *belief* is defined as the psychological state in which an individual holds a proposition or premise to be true. Beliefs are formed in many different ways, which is outside the scope of this book, but it will suffice to say that many beliefs are not formed by reason and critical thinking. For our purposes, we are focusing on two aspects of beliefs: 1) the reasoning we use to form new beliefs, and 2) the reasoning we need to evaluate our existing beliefs.

Beliefs can often be stated explicitly as beliefs, stated as opinions, implied, or arrogantly stated as fact. Some examples:

> *I believe that unicorns exist.*
>
> *In my opinion (or I think), we are actually simulations in a computer created by some advanced race of beings. And so are the beings who created us, and the beings who created them, ad infinitum.*
>
> *Hot dogs are delicious when ground up into powder and snorted.*
>
> *If you are not baptized as an adult, you are going to Hell where you will experience an unimaginable level of suffering for all eternity. And Jesus loves you.*

Beliefs can be wonderful, as in believing that humanity is overall good. Beliefs can be benign, as in believing the Red Sox are better than the Yankees. Beliefs can also be devastating, as in believing your god wants you to fly planes into buildings. But no matter how good a belief makes us feel or how good the potential outcome of a belief can be, **it does not affect the truth of the belief.** Although we are focusing on arguments, this book will help you

find the truth of beliefs by examining any fallacious reasoning you may have used to form your beliefs.

What is a Logical Fallacy, Exactly?

The word "fallacy" comes from the Latin "fallacia" which means "deception, deceit, trick, artifice," however, a more specific meaning in logic (a logical fallacy) that dates back to the 1550s means "false syllogism, invalid argumentation."

An Error in Reasoning

One of the earliest academic discussions of logical fallacies comes from the book *Elementary Lessons in Logic: Deductive and Inductive*, published by MacMillian and Co. in 1872 where the modern definition of logical fallacies is used: "the modes in which, by neglecting the rules of logic, we often fall into erroneous reasoning." Today, this basic definition is still used, and often abbreviated to just "an error in reasoning." It is not a factual error.

Formal and Informal Fallacies

Two main categories of fallacies are *formal* and *informal*. Formal fallacies are classified by their structure (logical form), while informal fallacies are classified by their content.

Formal Fallacy Example

No X are Y.

Some Z are X.

Therefore, some Z are Y.

Informal Fallacy Example

Timmy is a poo-poo face; therefore, Timmy is wrong.

It seems simple enough. The problem is, however, real life is not a textbook with textbook examples. First, unless one is involved in formal debate, we rarely see one present a formal syllogism that is subject to a formal fallacy. What we find in real life is a bunch of words that need to be parsed into an argument. We often find when there is a flaw in the logical structure of the argument (i.e., a formal fallacy), there is also one or more problems with the

content (i.e., informal fallacies). It is good to know these two general classifications, but don't expect to spot formal fallacies in everyday situations.

The Difference Between Logical Fallacies and Cognitive Biases

In the early 1970s, two behavioral researchers, Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky pioneered the field of *behavioral economics* through their work with *cognitive biases* and *heuristics,* which like logical fallacies, can affect the reasoning process. The main difference, however, is that logical fallacies require an argument whereas cognitive biases and heuristics (mental shortcuts) refer to a problematic pattern of thinking. Sometimes there is crossover. Logical fallacies can be the result of a cognitive bias, but having biases (which we all do) does not mean that we have to commit logical fallacies. Consider the *bandwagon effect*, a cognitive bias that demonstrates the tendency to believe things because many other people believe them. This cognitive bias can be found in the logical fallacy, *appeal to popularity*.

> *Everybody is doing X.*
>
> *Therefore, X must be the right thing to do.*

The cognitive bias is the main reason we commit this fallacy. However, if we just started working at a soup kitchen because all of our friends were working there, this wouldn't be a logical fallacy, although the bandwagon effect would be behind our behavior. The *appeal to popularity* is a fallacy because it applies to an argument. For example, "All my friends are working at the soup kitchen. Therefore, it must be the right thing to do."

I would say that more often than not, cognitive biases do not lead to logical fallacies. This is because cognitive biases are largely unconscious processes that bypass reason, and the mere exercise of consciously evaluating an argument often causes us to counteract the bias.

Factual Errors are Not Logical Fallacies

To illustrate this point, let's consider the *availability heuristic*, a cognitive bias that describes the tendency for one to overestimate the likelihood of more salient events, usually the result of how recent the memories are or how unusual or emotionally charged

they may be. This bias can be demonstrated in believing that you are more likely to die in a plane crash than an automobile accident because of all the plane crashes you see in the news. As a result of this bias, one might argue:

> *Plane crashes kill more people than automobile accidents. Therefore, it is safer to drive in a car than fly in a plane.*

This is not fallacious; it's factually incorrect. If it were true that plane crashes kill more people than automobile accidents, the conclusion would be reasonable. The argument itself does not contain flawed reasoning; it contains incorrect information. Similarly, if I told you that the sun was about 30 miles from the earth and the size of a football stadium, I would not be committing a fallacy—but I would be a moron. Factual errors are not fallacies.

Logical Fallacies Can Be Committed by the Arguer or Audience

In this book, I will be using the term "fallacious" in the following ways, all of which support the primary purpose of this book—**to promote better reasoning**.

Fallacious Arguments. Arguments that are fallacious contain one or more non-factual errors in their form.

> *Just as a woman has the right to get a tattoo, she has the right to get an abortion. (Weak analogy)*

Fallacious Reasoning. When an individual is using erroneous thinking (including bypassing reason) in evaluating or creating an argument, claim, proposition, or belief. This is where cognitive biases frequently play a role.

> *I was pro-abortion before, but now that this speaker made me cry by showing me a photo of an aborted fetus, I am against abortion. (Appeal to emotion)*

Fallacious Tactics. Deliberately trying to get your interlocutor or audience to use fallacious reasoning in accepting the truth claims of your argument.

> *Look at this photo of an aborted fetus. How can you tell me that you still are pro-choice? (Appeal to emotion)*

Note that fallacious tactics are not a deficiency in reasoning (morality, perhaps) on the part of the arguer, although people who fall victim to these tactics do demonstrate fallacious reasoning. While some of these tactics are labeled logical fallacies, the arguer would not be held responsible for committing a logical fallacy. When charities run ads, they don't bombard us with data and moral arguments; they show us a photo of a suffering child who needs our help. These charities know what they are doing. They are not lacking in reason; quite the opposite, in fact. They are using effective persuasion techniques.

If it were up to me, I would prefer to keep logical fallacies and fallacious tactics separate. For decades, people have been classifying select manipulation and persuasion techniques as fallacies. The problem is that there are many, many more of these techniques that aren't considered fallacies for no consistent reason, so what we have is a partial list of manipulation and persuasion techniques that we are arbitrarily calling logical fallacies. I include these for completeness, but let the record show that I object to this usage!

Logical Fallacies are Deceptive

Another characteristic of logical fallacies is that they are not always easy to spot, especially to the untrained mind. Yet they often elude our critical faculties, making them persuasive for all the wrong reasons—sort of like optical illusions for the mind. Some, however, are as clearly wrong as a pig roast at a bar mitzvah (yet still fool too many people). For example,

> "*Don't grow a mustache, because Hitler had a mustache. Therefore, you will be like Hitler!"*

After reading this book, you can probably match about a dozen fallacies with the above argument. The error in reasoning should be apparent—sharing a physical characteristic with a fascist dictator will not make you a fascist dictator.

Logical Fallacies are Common and Worthy of Identifying by Name

Over the years, I have received questions from perhaps hundreds of students of logical fallacies who have presented what met all the other criteria of logical fallacies but was unique, very specific, or

already fit nicely under a more general category of logical fallacy. For example, the *appeal to emotion* fallacy is a general category of fallacies, and there are many in that category such as *appeal to anger*, *appeal to pity*, *appeal to fear*, and many more. These are all common enough to be worthy of their own fallacy. But what about "appeal to indignation?" This certainly could be fallacious, but so rare that it's just not worth naming since it fits under the *appeal to emotion* fallacy. If there is a general category under which the rare fallacy fits, it is less likely to be named.

Dr. Bo's Three Criteria for a Logical Fallacy

In this book, we are using what is referred to as the *argument conception of fallacies* (Hanson, 2015). That is, what we are identifying as a "logical fallacy" goes beyond the standard conception of "fallacy" where the error in reasoning must commonly apply to argumentation. More specifically,

1. **It must be an error in reasoning,** not a factual error.
2. **It must be commonly applied to an argument** either in the form of the argument or the interpretation of the argument.
3. **It must be deceptive** in that it often fools the average adult.

Therefore, we will define a logical fallacy as **a concept within argumentation that commonly leads to an error in reasoning due to the deceptive nature of its presentation**. Logical fallacies can comprise *fallacious arguments* that contain one or more non-factual errors in their form or deceptive arguments that often lead to fallacious reasoning in their evaluation.

Recall my objection to calling fallacious tactics "logical fallacies." This is because most fallacious tactics do not meet my second criterion of being commonly applied to an argument. I include the frequently-cited fallacious tactics under the main fallacy section and some of the others under the pseudo-logical fallacies section. Please keep in mind that there are many more similar techniques that are beyond the scope of this book and are not included.

On Reason and Rationality

If you are a parent, you know exactly what it is like to argue with someone who is unreasonable and irrational. Many attempts at logic and reason end with the parent coming down to the level of the child—basing arguments on emotion usually in the form of a tasty bribe or smacked bottom, depending on what the circumstances call for. Unfortunately, many people carry these success-repelling traits with them into adulthood. This makes communication, cooperation, and prosperity a real challenge.

As you might have guessed, those who are acting unreasonably and irrationally are either incapable or unwilling to accept that their arguments are fallacious, if in fact, their arguments are fallacious. In these cases, you can come down to their level, appeal to their emotions, and exploit their cognitive biases—but this takes some manipulative talent, and I would argue that it is not very ethical. You can simply give up and refuse to argue any further, which I have done at times. Or, if possible, you can show how their arguments and beliefs are inconsistent with other beliefs they hold. This is my preferred strategy because it is not patronizing, nor does it reflect my frustration.

Being a Smart-Ass

There are two general schools of thought on how to point out a fallacy to your interlocutor. On the one hand, you can tactfully explain why your interlocutor's reasoning is erroneous (1 smart-ass point), without mentioning the name of the fallacy. On the other hand, you can tell your interlocutor that his reasoning is fallacious (1 smart-ass point), tell him the name of the fallacy he committed (another smart-ass point), tell him why it is a fallacy (another smart-ass point), then extend his underwear over his head, and conclude with, "by the way, in Latin that fallacy is known as [insert Latin name here]." (10 smart-ass points)! Of course, you could take a path somewhere in between, but what you certainly should be prepared for, is your interlocutors pointing out your fallacies, and if you know about fallacies, you will be ready to defend yourself.

I caution you against correcting fallacies that your interlocutor might raise. As you will see in this book, fallacies go by many different names, and there are varying definitions for the fallacies. Except for a handful of fallacies that have been around since the

time of Aristotle, most fallacies are under a continual redefining process that might change the name of the fallacy or the meaning of the fallacy. The bottom line is to focus on exactly what error in reasoning you are being accused of, and defend your reasoning—not a definition or name.

When All You Have is a Hammer, Everything Looks Like a Nail.

In my experience with dealing with claims of fallacies on a daily basis, I have noticed a strong tendency to force-fit fallacies where they don't belong. This seems to come from those who know just enough about fallacies to be dangerous. My guess is that the common perception is that fallacious arguments are false arguments (they're not necessarily false,) and if one can show a fallacy, they can refute the claim of their interlocutor. **Act in good faith.** Apply the *principle of charity* (i.e., do your best to assume the most charitable interpretation of the argument) and resist the temptation to assume the worst from your interlocutor. This will move the conversation forward rather than create a branched argument about a potential fallacy that serves as an irrelevant distraction.

Methodology

As discussed in the preface, the core fallacies detailed in this book date back thousands of years to Aristotle. Academic resources were used when possible when compiling this list of fallacies. These resources include papers in peer-reviewed journals, peer-reviewed encyclopedias, and books published by academic presses. The majority of modern, informal fallacies have been defined and named by students of argumentation throughout the years and published in non-academic resources including web pages. On the one hand, this "wisdom of the crowds" approach has helped identify hundreds of errors in reasoning not previously identified due partly to advances in cognitive science, changing communication, and the sheer number of people contributing ideas. On the other hand, there are many so-called "logical fallacies" that are not worthy of that title by any reasonable definition. Through an exhaustive and ongoing search for the uses and mentions of logical fallacies, I catalog these and subject them to my previously mentioned criteria. Those that pass the test make it as a named logical fallacy in this book. Those that don't are

either ignored, or if visible enough on the Internet, have a mention in the "Pseudo-Logical Fallacies" section at the end of this book.

Format and Style of this Book

If you haven't noticed by now, I like to have fun with both writing and learning. I understand that by using humor that I will inevitably offend someone, which is unfortunate, but a fact of life.

While this book can function as a reference book, I hope you will read this like a novel—from cover to cover. I define what I feel may be unfamiliar terms to the reader as I progress through the fallacies in alphabetical order. Therefore, if you do read the fallacies in order, unfamiliar terms and concepts will be revealed to you as needed—I do this to keep the book interesting.

While it may seem like a crazy number of fallacies to read through, I have done my best to make it enjoyable and educational. The fallacies that are seldom ever seen or not quite fallacies, and not worthy of a complete entry in this book, are just listed in the back section of this book with brief descriptions.

There have been many attempts to categorize fallacies, some of which may make fallacies easier to understand. The previously mentioned book *Elementary Lessons in Logic : Deductive and Inductive*, uses an Aristotelian classification system for the fallacies which might have worked in 1872 when there were a handful of fallacies. Beyond the distinction between *purely logical* and *semi-logical* (now commonly referred to as deductive and informal fallacies), it is no longer helpful, in my opinion. I have chosen to organize all fallacies, alphabetically by the names for which they are best known. I chose this method because:

- There is no official taxonomy used today, nor is there even a taxonomy accepted by the majority of those who classify fallacies.
- The ambiguous nature of most fallacies means that many of the fallacies can fit in a variety of categories.
- Focusing on faux-categorical structures distracts from the fallacies themselves.

Fallacy Name(s). Each fallacy begins with its most commonly used name, followed by the Latin name (if there is one). I then list

all other known names for the fallacy. At times, there might be slight differences in the fallacies that go by other names, but unless I feel the differences are worthy of their own entries, I will just list it as another name for the fallacy. Keep in mind that fallacies are named and referred to mostly by common usage. The point of listing every known alias is not so you can memorize them; it's so that you might recognize them when referred to by these other names.

Description. My descriptions are all short and to the point, giving you the information you need to understand the fallacy, while sometimes adding in some extra commentary.

Logical Form. Most fallacies, especially formal ones, have what are called logical forms, which means that the general fallacy can be represented in symbolic language. I list the logical forms where they apply to help you better understand certain fallacies. With informal fallacies, I use a little artistic license to create a logical form to help you to understand the fallacy better. For informal fallacies, the form does not have be followed. Consider the *appeal to equity* where I list the logical form as

> *A equals B (when A does not equal B)*
>
> *Y applies to A or B.*
>
> *Therefore, Y applies to both A and B.*

For an example, I have

> *If women get paid maternity leave, so should men.*

There are many ways or "forms" to state or imply the same general argument. We can read the above as

> *Men are the same as women.*
>
> *Women get paid maternity leave.*
>
> *Therefore, men should also get paid maternity leave.*

Example(s). I try to include realistic examples and, in fact, many examples are from actual debates of mine (real names protected). I feel that using realistic examples will help you to identify the fallacies when used in real situations—people aren't as stupid as they are portrayed in many examples. If the fallacy requires it, I

will use an extreme example to make the fallacy clear, then include a second or even third example that is more realistic.

When examples are indented and italicized like this:

> *I am an idiot who says stupid and fallacious things.*

This is not me speaking; it is the character. I get some comments from readers who tell me that I am committing an unrelated fallacy in my examples. I realize this, and good for you if you spot multiple fallacies in an example, but please remember that I do this purposely. My fictional characters are not very reasonable by design.

As mentioned, most of these examples are from actual arguments. Reality doesn't shy away from controversial topics, so neither do I. Remember that a bad argument does not mean that the conclusion is false; it only means we can't trust the conclusion based on the argument made. I do my best to be an equal-opportunity offender, no matter what your religion or political affiliation.

Exception(s). Fallacious arguments and fallacious reasoning are more often probability-based then based on an objective fact. Take the following informal or inductive argument, that virtually everyone would consider fallacious:

> "*Don't grow a mustache, because Hitler had a mustache; therefore, you will be like Hitler!"*

Perhaps some psychologist has some data supporting the idea that sporting a mustache, especially a Hitleresque one, can make that individual more susceptible to genocide (I would really like to see the details of that study!) Therefore, one can argue that this argument is not fallacious—the argument itself is strong and the reasoning that was used to construct this argument was sound. Showing this argument is fallacious can be an argument in itself, where it is all about providing stronger evidence and more sound reasoning to support your claim.

There are some arguments that use a formal or deductive structure and contain fallacies of form that are objective fallacies, that is, they are always fallacious in all situations. For example:

> *All humans are mortal.*
>
> *Phil is mortal.*

Therefore, Phil is a human.

Actually, Phil is a groundhog. This is an example of a *syllogistic fallacy* (a class of fallacies), and it always will be, in all situations. Even if Phil were human, the form of the argument would still commit the fallacy. In formal logic, the truth of the premises guarantees the truth of the conclusion. The bottom line: never insist that an informal argument is definitely fallacious, and be prepared to defend your arguments against claims of fallacy.

Variation(s): If the fallacy has an alias but the alias is different enough to warrant an explanation, I will explain the difference in the "variation" section. I will also add a "[form of]" after the alias listed below the main fallacy name.

Tip / Fun Fact: In 2004, I wrote the book, *Year To Success*. In that book, I explain that success is like a game of chance where you control the odds by continually replacing behaviors that pull you away from success with behaviors that bring you closer to success. When appropriate, I include a tip that might be relevant to the fallacy, which will bring you closer to success in mastering fallacies—most of which are serious, but some… not so much (you will know the difference). Alternatively, I will include a fun fact—a little something about almost everything that has nothing to do with anything.

Let's get started!

The Fallacies

Accent Fallacy

accentus

(also known as: emphasis fallacy, fallacy of accent, fallacy of prosody, misleading accent)

Description: When the meaning of a word, sentence, or entire idea is interpreted differently by changing where the accent falls.

Logical Form:

> *Claim is made with accent on word X giving claim meaning Y.*
>
> *Claim is interpreted with accent on word A giving claim meaning B.*

Example #1: In the movie, *My Cousin Vinny*, Ralph Maccio's character, Bill, was interrogated for suspected murder. When the police officer asks him, "At what point did you shoot the clerk?" Bill replies in shock, "***I*** shot the clerk? ***I*** shot the clerk?" Later in the film, the police officer reads Bill's statement as a confession in court, "...and he said, 'I shot the clerk. I shot the clerk.'"

Explanation: In the movie, it appeared that the police officer did understand Bill's question as a confession. So it did not appear to be a fallacious tactic of the police officer, rather a failure of critical thought perhaps due to a strong confirmation bias (the officer was very confident that Bill was guilty, thus failed to detect the nuance in the question).

Example #2: In the hilarious Broadway musical, *The Book of Mormon*, there is a musical number where one character is explaining how to bury "bad thoughts" by just "turning them off" (like a light switch). The character doing the explaining (in glorious song) is specifically explaining to the main character how to suppress gay thoughts when the main character's "bad thoughts" have nothing to do with being gay. After the instructions, the main character tries to make this clear by affirming, "***I'm*** not having gay thoughts," to which the other characters respond "Hurray! It worked!"

Explanation: The stress on the "I'm" was ignored and confused for "Hey, I'm *not* having gay thoughts anymore!" Although this was comedy it portrayed an argument.

Tip: Our biases can cause us to miss the vocal nuance. Listen actively and critically, and try not to jump to conclusions. And you cannot turn off gay thoughts like a light switch.

References:

Damer, T. E. (2008). *Attacking faulty reasoning: A practical guide to fallacy-free arguments*. Cengage Learning.

Accident Fallacy

a dicto simpliciter ad dictum secundum quid

(also known as: destroying the exception, dicto secundum quid ad dictum simpliciter, dicto simpliciter, converse accident, reverse accident, fallacy of the general rule, sweeping generalization)

Description: When an attempt is made to apply a general rule to all situations when clearly there are exceptions to the rule. Simplistic rules or laws rarely take into consideration legitimate exceptions, and to ignore these exceptions is to bypass reason to preserve the illusion of a perfect law. People like simplicity and would often rather keep simplicity at the cost of rationality.

Logical Form:

X is a common and accepted rule.

Therefore, there are no exceptions to X.

Example #1:

I believe one should never deliberately hurt another person,

that's why I can never be a surgeon.

Explanation: Classifying surgery under "hurting" someone, is to ignore the obvious benefits that go with surgery. These kinds of extreme views are rarely built on reason.

Example #2:

The Bible clearly says, "thou shall not bear false witness." Therefore, as a Christian, you better answer the door and tell our drunk neighbor with the shotgun, that his wife, whom he is looking to kill, is hiding in our basement. Otherwise, you are defying God himself!

Explanation: To assume any law, even divine, applies to every person, in every time, in every situation, even though not explicitly stated, is an assumption not grounded in evidence, and fallacious reasoning.

Exception: Stating the general rule when a good argument can be made that the action in question is a violation of the rule, would not be considered fallacious.

The Bible says, "thou shall not murder," therefore, as a Christian, you better put that chainsaw down and untie that little kid.

Tip: It is your right to question laws you don't understand or laws with which you don't agree.

References:

Bile, J. (1988). Propositional justification: another view. *Contemporary Argumentation & Debate*, *9*, 54–62.

Ad Fidentia

argumentum ad fidentia

(also known as: against self-confidence)

Description: Attacking the person's self-confidence in place of the argument or the evidence.

Logical Form:

Person 1 claims that Y is true, but is person 1 really sure about that?

Therefore, Y is false.

Example #1:

Rick: I had a dream last night that I won the lottery! I have $1000 saved up, so I am buying 1000 tickets!

Vici: You know, dreams are not accurate ways to predict the future; they are simply the result of random neurons firing.

Rick: The last time I checked, you are no neurologist or psychologist, so how sure are you that I am not seeing the future?

Vici: It's possible you can be seeing the future, I guess.

Explanation: Although Vici is trying to reason with his friend, Rick attempts to weaken Vici's argument by making Vici more unsure of his position. This is a fallacious tactic by Rick, and if Vici falls for it, fallacious reasoning on his part.

Example #2:

Chris: You claim that you don't believe in the spirit world that is all around us, with spirits coming in and out of us all the time. How can you be sure this is not the case? Are you 100% certain?

Joe: Of course not, how can I be?

Chris: Exactly! One point for me!

Joe: What?

Explanation: This is a common fallacy among those who argue for the supernatural or anything else not falsifiable. If Joe was not that reasonable of a thinker, then he might start to question the validity of his position, not based on any new counter evidence presented, but a direct attack on his self-confidence. Fortunately for Joe, he holds no dogmatic beliefs and is perfectly aware of the difference between possibilities and probabilities (see also *appeal to possibility*).

Exception: When one claims certainty for something where certainty is unknowable, it is your duty to point it out.

Tip: Have confidence that you are probably or even very probably right, but avoid dogmatic certainty at all costs in areas where certainty is unknowable.

References:

This is a logical fallacy frequently used on the Internet. No academic sources could be found.

Ad Hoc Rescue

ad hoc

(also known as: making stuff up, MSU fallacy)

Description: Very often we desperately want to be right and hold on to certain beliefs, despite any evidence presented to the contrary. As a result, we begin to make up excuses as to why our belief could still be true, and is still true, despite the fact that we have no real evidence for what we are making up.

Logical Form:

> *Claim X is true because of evidence Y.*
>
> *Evidence Y is demonstrated not to be acceptable evidence.*
>
> *Therefore, it must be guess Z then, even though there is no evidence for guess Z.*

Example #1:

> *Frieda: I just know that Raymond is just waiting to ask me out.*
>
> *Edna: He has been seeing Rose for three months now.*
>
> *Frieda: He is just seeing her to make me jealous.*
>
> *Edna: They're engaged.*
>
> *Frieda: Well, that's just his way of making sure I know about it.*

Explanation: Besides being a bit deluded, poor Frieda refuses to accept the evidence that leads to a truth she is not ready to accept. As a result, she creates an *ad hoc* reason in an attempt to rescue her initial claim.

Example #2:

> *Mark: The president of the USA is the worst president ever because unemployment has never been so bad before!*

Sam: Actually, it was worse in 1982 and far worse in the 1930s. Besides, the president might only be partly responsible for the economy during his term.

Mark: Well... the president kicks animals when nobody is looking.

Explanation: Out of desperation, Mark makes a claim about the president's private treatment of animals after his original claim has been refuted.

Exception: Proposing possible solutions is perfectly acceptable when an argument is suggesting only a possible solution—especially in a hypothetical situation. For example, "If there is no God, then life is meaningless." If there is no God who dictates meaning to our lives, perhaps we are truly free to find our own meaning.

Tip: When you suspect people are just making stuff up, rather than providing evidence to support their claim, simply ask them, "What evidence do you have to support that?"

References:

Carey, S. S. (2011). *A Beginner's guide to scientific method*. Cengage Learning.

Ad Hominem (Abusive)

argumentum ad hominem

(also known as: personal abuse, personal attacks, abusive fallacy, appeal to the person, damning the source, name calling, refutation by caricature, against the person, against the man)

Description: Attacking the person making the argument, rather than the argument itself, when the attack on the person is completely irrelevant to the argument the person is making.

Logical Form:

Person 1 is claiming Y.

Person 1 is a moron.

Therefore, Y is not true.

Example #1:

My opponent suggests that lowering taxes will be a good idea—this is coming from a woman who eats a pint of Ben and Jerry's each night!

Explanation: The fact that the woman loves her ice cream, has nothing to do with the lowering of taxes, and therefore, is irrelevant to the argument. *Ad hominem* attacks are usually made out of desperation when one cannot find a decent counter argument.

Example #2:

Tony wants us to believe that the origin of life was an "accident." Tony is a godless SOB who has spent more time in jail than in church, so the only information we should consider from him is the best way to make license plates.

Explanation: Tony may be a godless SOB. Perhaps he did spend more time in the joint than in church, but all this is irrelevant to his argument or truth of his claim as to the origin of life.

Exception: When the attack on the person is relevant to the argument, it is not a fallacy. In our first example, if the issue being debated was the elimination of taxes only on Ben and Jerry's ice cream, then pointing out her eating habits would be strong evidence of a conflict of interest.

Tip: When others verbally attack you, take it as a compliment to the quality of your argument. It is usually a sign of desperation on their part.

References:

Walton, D. (1998). *Ad hominem arguments*. University of Alabama Press.

Ad Hominem (Circumstantial)

argumentum ad hominem

(also known as: appeal to bias, appeal to motive, appeal to personal interest, argument from motives, conflict of interest, faulty motives, naïve cynicism, questioning motives, vested interest)

Description: Suggesting that the person who is making the argument is biased or predisposed to take a particular stance, and therefore, the argument is *necessarily* invalid.

Logical Form:

Person 1 is claiming Y.

Person 1 has a vested interest in Y being true.

Therefore, Y is false.

Example #1:

Salesman: This car gets better than average gas mileage and is one of the most reliable cars according to Consumer Reports.

Will: I doubt it—you obviously just want to sell me that car.

Explanation: The fact that the salesman has a vested interest in selling Will the car does not mean that he is lying. He may be, but this is not something you can conclude solely on his interests. It is reasonable to assume that salespeople sell the products and services they do because they believe in them.

Example #2:

Of course, your minister says he believes in God. He would be unemployed otherwise.

Explanation: The fact that atheist ministers are about as in demand as hookers who, "just want to be friends," does not mean that ministers believe in God just because they need a job.

Exception: As the bias or conflict of interest becomes more relevant to the argument, usually signified by a lack of other evidence, the argument is seen as less of a fallacy and more as a legitimate motive. For example, courtesy of Meat Loaf…

Girl: Will you love me forever?

Boy: Let me sleep on it!!!

Girl: Will you love me forever!!!

Boy: I couldn't take it any longer

Lord, I was crazed

And when the feeling came upon me

Like a tidal wave

I started swearing to my god and on my mother's grave

That I would love you to the end of time

I swore that I would love you to the end of time!

Tip: When you know you have something to gain from a position you hold (assuming, of course, you are not guilty of this fallacy for holding the position), be upfront about it and bring it up before someone else does.

Supporting this cause is the right thing to do. Yes, as the baseball coach, I will benefit from the new field, but my benefit is negligible compared to the benefit the kids of this town will receive. After all, they are the ones who really matter here.

References:

Walton, D. (1998). *Ad hominem arguments*. University of Alabama Press.

Ad Hominem (Guilt by Association)

argumentum ad hominem

(also known as: association fallacy, bad company fallacy, company that you keep fallacy, they're not like us fallacy, transfer fallacy)

Description: When the source is viewed negatively because of its association with another person or group who is already viewed negatively.

Logical Form:

Person 1 states that Y is true.

Person 2 also states that Y is true, and person 2 is a moron.

Therefore, person 1 must be a moron too.

Example #1:

Delores is a big supporter for equal pay for equal work. This is the same policy that all those extreme feminist groups support. Extremists like Delores should not be taken seriously—at least politically.

Explanation: Making the assumption that Delores is an extreme feminist simply because she supports a policy that virtually every man and woman also supports, is fallacious.

Example #2:

Pol Pot, the Cambodian Maoist revolutionary, was against religion, and he was a very bad man. Frankie is against religion; therefore, Frankie also must be a very bad man.

Explanation: The fact that Pol Pot and Frankie share one particular view does not mean they are identical in other ways unrelated, specifically, being a very bad man. Pol Pot was not a bad man *because* he was against religion, he was a bad man for his genocidal actions.

Example #3:

Callie: Did you know that Jake Tooten was a racist?

Chris: I know Jake well. Why do you say he's a racist?

Callie: He was on a podcast the other day...

Chris: Did he say something racist?

Callie: No, but the podcast host did an interview two years ago with a woman who said she supported an organization that had a history of racism back in the 1960s. Jake clearly supports racism!

Explanation: In this case, Jake Tooten is the "source" who is viewed negatively (as a racist) because of his association with the organization referenced. Note that his "association" with this group says nothing about his beliefs, which makes this fallacious. It is even more fallacious due to 1) Jake being several steps removed from this organization and 2) the organization's history

of racism rather than the organization's current position on racism.

Callie actually was right, but for the wrong reason. Jake runs a Nazi youth group.

Exception: If one can demonstrate that the connection between the two characteristics that were inherited by association is causally linked, or the probability of taking on a characteristic would be high, then it would be valid. In example #1, if Delores supported the "all men should be castrated" position, we can call her an "extremist." In example #2, if we used "murdered children" instead of "against religion," the claim of being a "very bad man" would be justified. In example #3, if Jake appeared on the podcast titled "I am racist, and you should be too," Callie's claim of Jake being a racist would be justified.

Tip: People change. Be forgiving of one's questionable past associations, especially if they realize and admit those associations were wrong.

References:

Walton, D. (1998). *Ad hominem arguments*. University of Alabama Press.

Ad Hominem (Tu quoque)

argumentum ad hominem tu quoque

(also known as: appeal to hypocrisy, "you too" fallacy, hypocrisy, personal inconsistency)

Description: Claiming the argument is flawed by pointing out that the one making the argument is not acting consistently with the claims of the argument.

Logical Form:

Person 1 is claiming that Y is true, but person 1 is acting as if Y is not true.

Therefore, Y must not be true.

Example #1:

Helga: You should not be eating that… it has been scientifically proven that eating fat burgers are no good for your health.

Hugh: You eat fat burgers all the time so that can't be true.

Explanation: It doesn't matter (to the truth claim of the argument at least) if Helga follows her own advice or not. While it might appear that the reason she does not follow her own advice is that she doesn't believe it's true, it could also be that those fat burgers are just too damn irresistible.

Example #2:

Jimmy Swaggart argued strongly against sexual immorality, yet while married, he has had several affairs with prostitutes; therefore, sexual immorality is acceptable.

Explanation: The fact Jimmy Swaggart likes to play a round of bedroom golf with some local entrepreneurial ladies, is not evidence for sexual immorality *in general*, only that *he is* sexually immoral.

Exception: If Jimbo insisted that his actions were in line with sexual morality, then it would be a very germane part of the argument.

Tip: Again, admit when your lack of self-control or willpower has nothing to do with the truth claim of the proposition. The following is what I remember my dad telling me about smoking (he smoked about four packs a day since he was 14).

Bo, never be a stupid a—hole like me and start smoking. It is a disgusting habit that I know will eventually kill me. If you never start, you will never miss it.

My dad died at age 69—of lung cancer. I never touched a cigarette in my life and never plan to touch one.

References:

Walton, D. (1998). *Ad hominem arguments*. University of Alabama Press.

End of the free sample

You have just read the preface, the full introduction and the first nine fallacies of *Logically Fallacious* by Bo Bennett, PhD.

The complete ebook (EPUB and PDF) is available direct from the author at

bobennett.com/bookstore