

SOME OF THE MORE COMMON LOGICAL FALLACIES

STAR test –is the fallacy *sufficient, typical, accurate or relevant*.

1. **Straw Man** – when an author does not accurately represent an opponent’s argument, or presents a weak, caricatured version of that argument.
2. **Slippery Slope** – when an author extrapolates from an opponent’s position too “creatively.” Often this involves drawing out implications from an opponent’s position in a way that is only loosely based on the opponent’s stated position, or which proceeds too far from the opponent’s stated position. Claiming that certain things “follow” inevitably from an opponent’s position (in a kind of “chain reaction”) when in fact such an inference is difficult to sustain.
3. **Hasty Generalization** – this involves a generalization from data that is inadequate in some important way. Usually, this means that the generalization fails the STAR test – the data on which the generalization is based is not *sufficient, typical, accurate or relevant*. One of the most common ways in which data fails to be sufficient is when the **sample size is too small**. For example, if I say smoking can’t be bad for people since both my parents smoke and have lived to a ripe old age, the sample size I have based my generalization on is absurdly small – 2 people. A “hasty generalization” may be most obvious when the *scope* of a generalization is at odds with the amount of evidence presented – the stronger the generalization, the more evidence needed. **Anecdotal evidence** may also indicate a hasty generalization – this sometimes indicates that the arguer is using a small and unrepresentative (atypical) sample.
4. **Loaded Question/Begging the Question/Leading Question** – this fallacy involves assuming something that it is the arguers’ responsibility to prove. It thus typically involves the assumptions that an arguer makes. This fallacy often takes the form of a question (“Have you stopped beating your wife yet,” “Are you still as conceited as you used to be?”) but can also be found in the definitions and categories used by an arguer (“the liberal/conservative media”, “the death tax,” etc.) Leading questions are attempts to force a respondent to accept a particular way of seeing an issue. Example: “will you protect our children’s future by voting for the governor’s recall?” Anyone who says “no,” regardless of his or her reasons for not wanting to vote for a recall, is made to seem uncaring.
5. **False Dilemma** – this involves oversimplifying an issue by declaring that only two alternatives or ways of viewing the issue exist. Often one of these alternatives is clearly bad, so it is implied that there is only one reasonable position to take. Sometimes people criticize such an argumentative strategy by saying that it is “reductive.” Consider the bumper sticker “America – love it or leave it.” This assumes there are only two choices. You must “love” America (and by extension, whatever policy its leaders carry out) or you should leave. There is no middle ground, no room for a more qualified, nuanced position (bumper stickers tend to simplify issues, perhaps in part because they can consist of only a few words).
6. **Stacking the Deck** – this involves favoring evidence that suits your claim, and ignoring evidence that does not support it. We can use the STAR criteria – sufficiency, typicality, accuracy and relevance. For example, if you were writing an argument supporting legalization of marijuana, and you only cited scientific authorities who support the legalization of marijuana, you would be stacking the deck. You need to also consider authorities who do not support the legalization of marijuana.
7. **The Either-or Thinking** – this is the so-called black-or-white fallacy. Essentially, it says "Either you believe what I'm saying or you must believe exactly the opposite."

8. **Shifting the Burden of Proof** – when something is at issue, the responsibility, or burden of proof, sometimes falls equally on both sides, but sometimes it falls more heavily on one side than on the other. For example, in a legal context the accused is “presumed innocent until proven guilty,” which means that the burden of proof is on the prosecution not the accused. The accused does not have to prove his/her innocence – burden of proof lies with the prosecution. The prosecution must prove the guilt of the accused “beyond a reasonable doubt.”
9. **Argument ad Ignoratum** (from the Latin, “argument from ignorance”) Proposing that a claim is true primarily because it hasn't been proved false, or that something is false primarily because it has not been proved true. Arguing that unless an opponent can prove otherwise, a claim must be true. Note that the problem with this way of arguing is that the arguer stakes his/her claim on the lack of support for a *contrary* or *contradictory* claim, rather than basing it on reasons and evidence. This fallacy sometimes overlaps with the fallacy of shifting the burden of proof.
10. **Red Herring** – the name comes from a trick once used by prisoners to escape dogs tracking them. Prisoners would drag a fish along the path away from their escape route and thus throw off the scent. Red Herring involves bringing up irrelevant issues, or drawing attention away from the issue at hand by bringing up irrelevant considerations. *Example*: “The governor’s economic program won’t work. It does nothing to stop illegal streetcar racing in San Diego.”
11. **Ad Hominem** ((from the Latin, “against the man”) – attacking the arguer and her/his character rather than the question at issue. Note that there are contexts where the character of the arguer may be relevant to the issue. We may reasonably disbelieve the argument of a convicted embezzler who argues s/he should be put in charge of the finances of a soccer club. However, if this same person argued that he should play wing on the soccer team, it would be an *ad hominem* attack to counter by saying he should not because he has been convicted of embezzlement.

Note that it may be reasonable to bring into question a speaker’s *ethos*. Aristotle suggests that the *ethos* of a speaker plays a crucial role in determining whether an argument is persuasive or not. It may also be fair and relevant to question the way an author has constructed his/her *ethos*.

12. **Non Sequitor** (from the Latin, “it does not follow”) – refers to a conclusion that has no apparent connection to the premises. *Example*: “affirmative action will not work because someone stole my car.” Many examples of this can be found in advertising. Consider advertisements that sell beer or car equipment by showing them next to a beautiful woman. The implied argument is often that you should buy this equipment/beer because the woman is there, or because doing so will make it more likely that a beautiful woman will “like” you.
13. **The Fallacy of Equivocation** – this occurs when a word or phrase that has more than one meaning is employed in different meanings throughout the argument.
14. **Bandwagon Appeal** — The argument that since “everyone” is doing something, you must or should too.
15. **Post Hoc**- (Latin for "after this, therefore because of this") is a logical **fallacy** (of the questionable cause variety) that states "Since event Y followed event X, event Y must have been caused by event X."