

A short guide to “logical fallacies”

LOGICAL FALLACIES

Logical Fallacies are fake or deceptive arguments. They seem irrefutable but prove nothing.

By exploiting our cognitive biases and emotional responses, fallacies can make weak arguments appear convincing.

Recognizing and avoiding them is crucial for evaluating information critically, engaging in constructive dialogue, and forming well-grounded opinions.

4 key characteristics of Logical Fallacies

1. At first glance they seem superficially sound
(they appeal to the “System 1” brain processing popularized by Daniel Kahneman in “Think Fast and Slow”).
2. They gain popularity very quickly - at an epidemic rate - as they seem “obvious”.
3. They retain immense persuasive power even after being clearly exposed as false.
4. When used in the forms of personal attacks - *see example* - they can cause permanent reputational damage.

Interested in one example?



Ad hominem

Ad hominem (from the Latin “to the person”), is the fallacy of attempting to refute an argument by attacking the opposition’s *intelligence, education, character, morals, reputation, qualifications or personal experiences*, rather than addressing the **actual content** of the argument itself.

Ad Hominem is a logical fallacy because:

1. Focuses on the **person**, not the argument;
2. The information used to attack the person is not **logically relevant** to the truth or falsity of the argument;
3. Insults, name-calling, or other emotionally charged language are often used to **discredit** the opponent;
4. Employed usually when someone **lacks** strong counter-arguments to the actual claims at hand.

Ad Hominem examples:

1. "That's just your opinion, and **everyone** knows you're always wrong!" or "**Only** an idiot would believe that!" (*Attacking someone's character, often with insults, instead of their argument*).
2. "You're just saying that because you're jealous of their success." (*Attributing ulterior motives to discredit someone's position*).
3. "**Only** someone who hates children would support this policy." (*Playing on emotions to distract from logical reasoning*).



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Ad Hominem is second only to name calling - to which is often associated - as the lowest quality of argument in Paul Graham's "*Hierarchy of Disagreement*" (2008)

