



## Logical Fallacies

Logical fallacies are flawed lines of reasoning that are typically used to make up for a weak claim or argument. We see them often in advertisements (“Joe’s Used Cars is the best in town because we support our troops.”- where no evidence is presented that Joe’s shop is actually the best) or political campaigns (“I’m the better candidate because I served in the military and my opponent didn’t.”- where no actual evidence is presented that the candidate is qualified). Learning to recognize logical fallacies will help you analyze and evaluate the evidence supporting your conclusions, especially testimony gathered during interviews.

**Strawman:** trying to counter a claim or argument by attacking a different issue- usually one that is easier to counter

Example: *People who don't support a minimum wage increase think poor people are lazy.*

Write your own example:

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Response: Setting up a strawman allows the subject to deflect attention from the real issue. For example, arguing whether or not someone opposed to minimum wage thinks poor people are lazy avoids having to deal with valid reasons people might not support increasing minimum wage. Avoid being enticed into arguing this simplified version of the issue. Keep your focus on the main question you are trying to answer. How might you redirect the subject’s attention to the real issue in these examples?

**False cause:** assuming that a real or assumed relationship between two things means that one caused the other. Because A occurred after B, then B must have caused A.

Example: *I ate the brownies she made and now I feel sick, so the brownies must have made me sick.*

Write your own example:

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Response: People often convince themselves that a sequence of events creates causality. This way of thinking can be hard to undo. Instead of focusing on the subject’s perception of causal relationships, ask questions: How long after eating the brownies did you begin to feel sick?” and, “Did anyone else who ate the brownies get sick?” Work to find other ways to unravel causality and either validate the subject’s view or dismiss it.



## Logical Fallacies Continued

**Ad hominem** (attack to the man): attack to the character or motives of the person making the claim, rather than the claim itself. This line of reasoning is a way to avoid dealing with the real issue or claim.

Example: *I know that doctor is hurting my mother because he has a strange accent.*

Write your own example:

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Response: Statements that attack a person's character or motives should be generally dismissed. They are often based in fear and reflect a certain amount of desperation. Subjects that begin their testimony with these kinds of statements may not be able to provide valid evidence. Look for other evidence that can help you find the truth.

**Bandwagon:** an appeal to popular belief or practice to validate a claim

Example: *Everyone knows that nurse is mean and hateful; so she must have hurt that man.*

Write your own example:

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Response: Dismiss the validity of such an argument. It is likely more a reflection of the speaker's opinion than evidence of anything. What others think of the situation is not relevant to your investigation. Let the subject know you care about what he or she thinks- not what everyone else thinks. Then, ask the subject to tell you about specific instances that are relevant to your investigation.

**Black-or-white reasoning:** two opposing states are presented as the only options when more possibilities exist.

Example: *Either you believe what I'm saying or you are evil just like all the others.*

Write your own example:

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Response: Perhaps the best option with this line of reasoning is to ignore it. Assure the subject that you want very much to believe but need to have evidence for your report. Then move on to other questions or ways to get the evidence you need.



## Logical Fallacies Continued

**Begging the question:** a circular argument in which a conclusion is included in the (unproven) premise

Example: *I am sick because I know for a fact that I don't feel good.*

Write your own example:

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Response: Ask additional questions to dig deeper into the issue: "Where do you hurt?" "Are you running a fever?" "Have you asked to see a nurse?"

**Tu quoque:** avoiding criticism by turning it back on the accuser. This literally translates as "you, too." Think of this as the "No I'm not; you are" fallacy.

Example: *My house may be a mess, but just look at your filthy car.*

Write your own example:

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Response: Do not engage in this line of argument as it is irrelevant to the main line of questioning. The state of your car does not affect someone's health, for example. Except to note that the subject is defensive, this line of reasoning is not relevant or valid evidence of anything.

**Appeal to emotion:** manipulating by shifting attention to emotion rather than facts or evidence

Example: *I'm so tired all the time from all I have to do for these people.*

Write your own example:

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Response: Appealing to emotion is an attempt to manipulate. Its aim is to elicit an emotion that the subject can then use to his or her benefit. Try to remain objective and focus on the goal of the investigation.

**The fallacy fallacy:** presuming that because a conclusion has been poorly supported that it's necessarily untrue

Example: *Your timeline of the events is very inconsistent; therefore you must have taken the money.*



## Logical Fallacies Continued

Write your own example:

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Response: This is a logical fallacy you can commit yourself as well as witness in others. Guard against dismissing a claim until you've reviewed all the evidence. Subjects are not always good at expressing themselves; when it's reasonable to do so, give them the benefit of the doubt.

### Matching Activity

*Match the statement to the logical fallacy that describes it.*

#### Statement

1. I may be a bit slow, but it took you three days to get here.
2. The money went missing after that new man moved in.
3. Everyone down the hall thinks I am right.
4. I can trust him with my money because he is a real American patriot.
5. I know his room is cluttered; you just want me to throw everything away.

#### Fallacy

- a. False cause
- b. Tu quoque
- c. Strawman
- d. Bandwagon
- e. Appeal to emotion

#### Your answers:

1. \_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_