LOGICAL FALLACIES

Common Mistakes in Weak Arguments
Definition

Logical fallacies are flaws in reasoning that lead to faulty, illogical statements. They are unreasonable argumentative tactics named for what has gone wrong during the reasoning process.
Most logical fallacies masquerade as reasonable statements, but they are in fact attempts to manipulate readers by reaching their emotions instead of their intellects.
DON'T CONFUSE THESE WITH APPEALS!

While you do want to appeal to the audience's emotions at some point in your argument (usually in your explanation of a serious problem), you CANNOT create false information to try to manipulate the audience's emotions.
FALLACIES YOU'LL NEED TO KNOW

- Ad Hominem
- Red Herring
- Slippery Slope
- Bandwagon (Ad Populum)
Ad Hominem

Latin for *to the man*

Directly attacks someone’s appearance, personal habits, or character rather than focusing on the merit of the issue at hand. The implication is that if something is wrong with this person, whatever he/she says must be wrong.

*How can you say he’s a good musician when he’s been in and out of rehab for three years?*
Sara is divorced, so whatever relationship advice she gives you can’t be good.

It is the suggestions, not the person who makes them, that deserve attention. Sara’s marital status has nothing to do with the quality of her advice. Isn’t it also possible that Sara could be married and give awful advice?
DEBATE STRATEGY: WIN ARGUMENTS WITH AD HOMINEM ATTACKS

NO, YOUR FACE IS A LOGICAL FALLACY!
Red Herring

Definition: Partway through an argument, the arguer goes off on a tangent, raising a side issue that distracts the audience from what's really at stake. Often, the arguer never returns to the original issue.

Example: "Grading this exam on a curve would be the most fair thing to do. After all, classes go more smoothly when the students and the teacher are getting along well.

- Premise: Classes go more smoothly when the students and the professor are getting along well.
- Conclusion: Grading this exam on a curve would be the most fair thing to do.

When we lay it out this way, it's pretty obvious that the arguer went off on a tangent--the fact that something helps people get along doesn't necessarily make it more fair; fairness and justice sometimes require us to do things that cause conflict. But the audience may feel like the issue of teachers and students agreeing is important and be distracted from the fact that the arguer has not given any evidence as to why a curve would be fair.
Logical Fallacies

It is my contention that The Flying Spaghetti Monster does exist!

What evidence do you have to support such an assertion?

Oh there is plenty of evidence; it is all around us!

Besides, look at how I am standing on one leg!
Red Herring

brotip #305
if you can’t win an argument, correct their grammar instead.
Definition: The arguer claims that a sort of chain reaction, usually ending in some dire consequence, will take place, but there's really not enough evidence for that assumption.

The arguer asserts that if we take even one step onto the "slippery slope," we will end up sliding all the way to the bottom; he or she assumes we can't stop halfway down the hill.

Example: "Animal experimentation reduces our respect for life. If we don't respect life, we are likely to be more and more tolerant of violent acts like war and murder. Soon our society will become a battlefield in which everyone constantly fears for their lives. It will be the end of civilization. To prevent this terrible consequence, we should make animal experimentation illegal right now."

Since animal experimentation has been legal for some time and civilization has not yet ended, it seems particularly clear that this chain of events won't necessarily take place.
GAY COUPLES DON'T HAVE ABORTIONS.

PLEASE SUPPORT GAY MARRIAGE. FOR THE CHILDREN.

POLITICAL LOUDMOUTH
MEN AND WOMEN WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO LIVE TOGETHER IN HARMONY UNTIL WOMEN LEARN TO LEAVE THE SEAT UP

DANNY GETS TO THE BOTTOM OF THE CORE ISSUE OF OUR TIME
Bandwagon Appeal

(Ad Populum) Latin for “to the people”

A claim that an idea should be accepted because a large number of people favor it or believe it to be true.

Everyone knows that smoking marijuana is physically addictive and psychologically harmful.
Bandwagon appeal: The "Cash for Clunkers" program has been a success. Tens of thousands of Americans have registered for vouchers to subsidize their new car purchases.

More logical appeal: The "Cash for Clunkers" program has been a success. By subsidizing the purchases of new, more fuel efficient vehicles for Americans willing to trade in their old gas guzzlers, this initiative makes a short-term investment in our long-term goals of environmental protection and decreasing our dependence on fossil fuels.
Your Turn!

- Read through the fallacies and use your notes to guide your thinking. Write the type of fallacy for numbers 1-9.
- Answers are provided to check your comprehension.
Can you name this Fallacy?

1) If we pass laws against fully automatic weapons, then it won't be long before we pass laws on all weapons, and then we will begin to restrict other rights, and finally we will end up living in a communist state. Thus, we should not ban fully automatic weapons.
Can you name this Fallacy?

2) It is ridiculous to have spent thousands of dollars to rescue those two whales trapped in the Arctic ice. Why look at all the people trapped in jobs they don’t like.
Can you name this Fallacy?

3) We have to stop the tuition increase! The next thing you know, they'll be charging $40,000 a semester!
Can you name this Fallacy?

4) Gay marriages are just immoral. Seventy percent of Americans agree.
5) Senator Jones was a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War, so his proposal to limit military spending has no merit.
6) When America criticized the Israeli bombing of Beirut in 1981 in which 300 civilians were killed, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin said, "I don’t want to hear anything from the Americans about hitting civilian targets. I know exactly what America did in Vietnam."
7) I disagree with the councilman’s statement on the need for more parks in our city. After all, how can we trust him? He got into trouble recently for not making his child-support payments.

Can you name this Fallacy?
8) Everyone is selfish; everyone is doing what he believes will make himself happier. The recognition of that can take most of the sting out of accusations that you're being "selfish." Why should you feel guilty for seeking your own happiness when that's what everyone else is doing, too?
Can you name this Fallacy?

9) Zimmerman’s innocence must be considered. Nationally, nearly half of all murder victims are black. And the overwhelming majority of those black people are killed by other black people.
ANSWERS

1. SLIPPERY SLOPE
2. RED HERRING
3. SLIPPERY SLOPE
4. BANDWAGON – AD POPULUM
5. AD HOMINEM
6. RED HERRING
7. AD HOMINEM
8. BANDWAGON – AD POPULUM
9. RED HERRING