

Informal Fallacies

(Errors in Content)



Unlike **formal fallacies** (which are structural), informal fallacies occur because of the **content** or the **way the language is used**.

A. Fallacies of Relevance

These arguments use premises that are **logically irrelevant** to the conclusion.



1. Argumentum ad Hominem (Against the Person)

Definition:

Attacking the **character, background, or physical appearance** of the **opponent** instead of their argument.

Example:

"You shouldn't listen to Dr. Smith's advice on heart health; he's a divorced man."



MASTER THE NOTES? TAKE THE QUIZ

2.

Straw Man Fallacy

Distorting or oversimplifying an opponent's position to make it easier to attack.



Definition:

Distorting or oversimplifying an opponent's position to make it easier to attack.



Example:



Person A

We should put more money into health and education.

I am surprised that you hate our country so much that you want to leave it defenceless by cutting military spending.



Person B

3.

Argumentum ad Baculum (Appeal to Force)

Using threats or the "might is right" approach to win an argument.



Definition:

Using threats or the "might is right" approach to win an argument.



Example:



If you don't agree that my proposal is the best, you might find yourself looking for a new job.



Better arguments are based on logic, not on distortion or threats.

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4.

Argumentum ad Populum (Appeal to People/Bandwagon)

Arguing that something is true because many people believe it.



Definition:

Arguing that something is true because many people believe it.

Example:



"Millions of people buy this brand of phone, so it must be the best one on the market."



5.

Red Herring

Introducing an irrelevant topic to divert attention from the original issue.



Definition:

Introducing an irrelevant topic to divert attention from the original issue.

Example:



"Why are you late to the meeting?
That's the real issue."

"Well, if you really cared about the team,
you would have supported my idea for the new project!"



➤ Stay focused on the issue — don't get distracted by the noise! ➤

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Argumentum ad Misericordiam (Appeal to Pity)

Uses sympathy, guilt or a difficult situation to win support, instead of real reasons or evidence.

Example:



Please pass me in the exam. My grandmother is sick and my whole family depends on me getting this certification.

Key Points



Relies on emotion instead of facts.



Often creates guilt or sympathy.



Diverts attention from the real issue.



Remember:

Empathy is human, but it shouldn't replace solid reasons.

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Tu Quoque (Appeal to Hypocrisy)

Attempts to dismiss someone's argument by pointing out their own inconsistent behavior.

Example:



Why should I follow your advice about filing GST returns on time, when you paid your property tax late last month?

Key Points



Shifts focus from the argument to the other person's behaviour.



Highlights inconsistency instead of addressing the claim.



Tries to discredit the opponent, not the argument.



Remember:

Someone's past actions don't prove your point is wrong.

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Argumentum ad Ignorantiam (Appeal to Ignorance)

Claims something is true (or false) because it hasn't been proven either way, yet.



Definition:

Asserts a claim is true because it hasn't been proven false, or false because it hasn't been proven true.

Example:



Key Points:



Relies on the absence of proof, not real evidence.



Assumes a claim is true (or false) until proven otherwise.



Avoids the need for actual evidence.



Remember:

Lack of evidence is not evidence.

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Ignoratio Elenchi (Missing the Point)

Uses valid reasons to support one conclusion, but ends up with a completely different, unsupported conclusion.



Definition:

Presents relevant premises that lead to a different conclusion than the one being argued.

Example:



Key Points:



The premises are actually relevant and valid.



The conclusion doesn't logically follow from the premises.



It diverts attention to an unrelated claim.



Remember:

A valid reason doesn't always lead to the right conclusion.

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10.

Argumentum ad Verecundiam (Appeal to Unqualified Authority)

Uses the reputation or popularity of a well-known person to support a claim, even if they're not an expert in the relevant field.



Definition:

Quoting a well-known figure's opinion or endorsement to support a claim, even when they lack real expertise in the topic.

Example:



Key Points:



Relies on the reputation or fame of the person.



The person may not have expertise in the subject.



It diverts attention from the actual evidence or facts.



Remember:

A famous name doesn't make a claim true.

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