

# Glossary of Fallacies

**Abusive *Ad Hominem*** *See Ad Hominem, Abusive*

**Accent, Misleading** Directing another person toward an unwarranted conclusion by placing improper or unusual emphasis on a word, phrase, or particular aspect of an issue or claim. This fallacy is also committed by taking portions of others' statements out of their original context and using them in a way that conveys an unintended meaning.

***Ad Hominem, Abusive*** Attacking one's opponent in a personal or abusive way in an effort to ignore or discredit his or her criticism or argument.

**Affirming the Consequent** Affirming the consequent of a conditional premise and then concluding the affirmation of the antecedent.

**Ambiguity** Directing another person toward an unwarranted conclusion by presenting a claim or argument that uses a word, phrase, or grammatical construction that can be interpreted in two or more distinctly different ways without making clear which meaning is intended. (p. 132)

**Analogy, Faulty** Assuming that because two things are alike in one or more respects, they necessarily are alike in some other important respect, while failing to recognize the insignificance of their similarities and/or the significance of their dissimilarities. (p. 162)

**Appeal to Common Opinion** *See Common Opinion, Appeal to*

**Appeal to Force or Threat** *See Force or Threat, Appeal to*

**Appeal to Irrelevant Authority** *See Authority, Appeal to Irrelevant*

**Appeal to Self-Interest** *See Self-Interest, Appeal to*

**Appeal to Tradition** *See Tradition, Appeal to*

**Arguing from Ignorance** *See Ignorance, Arguing from*

**Attacking a Straw Man** *See Straw Man, Attacking a*

**Authority, Appeal to Irrelevant** Attempting to support a claim by appealing to the judgment of one who is not an authority in the field, the judgment of an unidentified authority, or the judgment of an authority who is likely to be biased. (p. 109)

**Begging the Question** Either explicitly or implicitly using as the premise of an argument the same claim that is asserted as the conclusion of that argument.

**Causal Oversimplification** Oversimplifying the causal antecedents of an event by specifying causal factors that are insufficient to account for the event in question or by overemphasizing the role of one or more of those factors. (p. 190)

**Common Cause, Neglect of a** Failing to recognize that two seemingly related events may not be causally related at all, but rather are effects of a common cause. (p. 196)

**Common Opinion, Appeal to** Urging the acceptance of a position simply on the grounds that a large number of people accept it or urging the rejection of a position on the grounds that very few people accept it. (p. 111)

**Complex Question** Formulating a question in a way that inappropriately presupposes that a definite answer has already been given to an unasked question about an open issue or that treats a series of questions as if the same answer will be given to each of the questions in the series. (p. 69)

**Composition, Fallacy of** Assuming that what is true of the parts of a whole is therefore true of the whole. (p. 149)

**Confusion of Cause and Effect** Confusing the cause with the effect of an event. (p. 194)

**Confusion of a Necessary with a Sufficient Condition** Assuming that a necessary condition of an event is also a sufficient one. (p. 188)

**Continuum, Fallacy of the** Assuming that small movements or differences on a continuum between extremes have a negligible effect and that to make definite distinctions between points on that line is impossible or at least arbitrary.

**Contradiction between Premise and Conclusion** Drawing a conclusion that is incompatible with at least one of the premises. (p. 75)

**Contrary-to-Fact Hypothesis** Treating a hypothetical claim as if it were a statement of fact by making a claim, without sufficient evidence, about what would have happened in the past if other conditions had been present or about an event that will occur in the future. (p. 179)

**Counterevidence, Denying the** Refusing to consider seriously or unfairly minimizing the evidence that is brought against one's claim. (p. 207)

**Counterevidence, Ignoring the** Arguing in a way that ignores or omits any reference to important available evidence that might be unfavorable to one's position, thus giving the false impression that there is no significant evidence against it.

**Denying the Antecedent** Denying the antecedent of a conditional premise and then concluding the denial of the consequent.

**Denying the Counterevidence** *See* Counterevidence, Denying the

**Distinction Without a Difference** Attempting to defend an action or position as different from another one by means of alternative words or phrases, when the action or position defended is no different in substance from the one from which it is linguistically distinguished.

**Division, Fallacy of** Assuming that what is true of a whole is therefore true of each of the parts of that whole. (p. 151)

**Domino Fallacy** Assuming, without appropriate evidence, that a particular action or event is the first in a series of steps that will lead inevitably to a specific, usually undesirable, consequence.

**Drawing the Wrong Conclusion** *See* Wrong Conclusion, Drawing the

**Emotions, Manipulation of** *See* Manipulation of Emotions

**End Term, Illicit Distribution of an** Drawing a conclusion in a syllogism in which a distributed end term in the conclusion is not distributed in the premises. (p. 89)

**Equivocation** Directing another person toward an unwarranted conclusion by making a word or phrase employed in two different senses in an argument appear to have the same meaning throughout. (p. 130)

**Fallacy of Composition** *See* Composition, Fallacy of

**Fallacy of Division** *See* Division, Fallacy of

**Fallacy of Novelty** *See* Novelty, Fallacy of

**Fallacy of Popular Wisdom** *See* Popular Wisdom, Fallacy of

**Fallacy of the Continuum** *See* Continuum, Fallacy of

**Fallacy of the Elusive Normative Premise** *See* Normative Premise, Fallacy of Elusive

**Fallacy of the Mean** *See* Mean, Fallacy of

**False Alternatives** Restricting too severely the number of proposed alternative responses to a problem or situation and assuming that one of the suggested alternatives must be the true or the right one. (p. 153)

**False Conversion** Reversing the antecedent and consequent of a conditional premise or exchanging the subject and predicate terms in a universal affirmative or particular negative premise and then concluding that these converted premises retain their original truth value.

**Faulty Analogy** *See* Analogy, Faulty

**Force or Threat, Appeal to** Attempting to persuade others of a position by threatening them with an undesirable state of affairs instead of presenting evidence for one's view. (p. 113)

**Gambler's Fallacy** Arguing that because a chance event has had a certain run in the past, the probability of its occurrence in the future is significantly altered. (p. 199)

**Genetic Fallacy** Evaluating a thing in terms of its earlier context while ignoring relevant changes that may have altered its character in the interim, and then using that evaluation to support a conclusion in the present.

**Humor or Ridicule, Resort to** Injecting humor or ridicule into an argument in an effort to cover up an inability or unwillingness to respond appropriately to an opponent's criticism or counterargument. (p. 225)

**Ignorance, Arguing from** Arguing for the truth (or falsity) of a claim because there is no evidence or proof to the contrary or because of the inability or refusal of an opponent to present convincing evidence to the contrary. (p. 176)

**Ignoring the Counterevidence** *See* Counterevidence, Ignoring the

**Illicit Contrast** A listener's inferring from another person's claim a related but unwarranted *contrasting* claim by improperly placing unusual emphasis on a word or phrase in the speaker's or writer's statement.

**Illicit Distribution of an End Term** *See* End Term, Illicit Distribution of an

**Incompatible Premises** Attempting to draw a conclusion from inconsistent or incompatible premises.

**Insufficient Sample** Drawing a conclusion or generalization from too small a sample of cases. (p. 172)

**Irrelevant Authority** *See* Authority, Appeal to Irrelevant.

**Is-Ought Fallacy** Assuming that because something is now the practice, it ought to be the practice. Conversely, assuming that because something is not now the practice, it ought not to be the practice. (p. 155)

**Manipulation of Emotions** Attempting to persuade others to accept a position by exploiting their emotions instead of presenting evidence for the position. (p. 119)

**Mean, Fallacy of the** Assuming that the moderate or middle view between two extremes must be the best or right one simply because it is the middle view. (p. 160)

**Middle Term, Undistributed** Drawing a conclusion in a syllogism in which the middle term in the premises is not distributed at least once. (p. 87)

**Misleading Accent** *See* Accent, Misleading

**Misuse of a Principle** *See* Principle, Misuse of a

**Misuse of a Vague Expression** *See* Vague Expression, Misuse of

**Neglect of a Common Cause** *See* Common Cause, Neglect of a

**Normative Premise, Fallacy of Elusive** Drawing a moral, legal, or aesthetic judgment without using a discernible normative premise that provides a warrant for it.

**Novelty, Fallacy of** Assuming that a new idea, law, policy, or action is better simply because it is new.

**Omission of Key Evidence** Constructing an argument that fails to include key evidence that is critical to the support of the conclusion. (p. 185)

**Poisoning the Well** Rejecting a criticism or argument presented by another person because of his or her personal circumstances or improper motives. (p. 216)

**Popular Wisdom, Fallacy of** Appealing to insights expressed in aphorisms or clichés, folk wisdom, or so-called common sense instead of to relevant evidence for a claim. (p. 180)

**Post Hoc Fallacy** Assuming that a particular event, B, is caused by another event, A, simply because B follows A in time. (p. 192)

**Principle, Misuse of a** Misapplying a principle or rule in a particular instance by assuming that it has no exceptions. Conversely, attempting to refute a principle or rule by means of an exceptional case. (p. 158)

**Question-Begging Definition** Using a questionable definition, disguised as an empirical premise, to support an empirical conclusion, which has the effect of making the empirical claim at issue true by definition.

**Raising Trivial Objections** *See* Trivial objections, Raising

**Rationalization** Using plausible-sounding but usually fake reasons to justify a particular position that is held on other, less respectable grounds. (p. 101)

**Red Herring** Attempting to hide the weakness of a position by drawing attention away from the real issue to a side issue. (p. 223)

**Resort to Humor or Ridicule** *See* Humor or Ridicule, Resort to

**Self-Interest, Appeal to** Urging an opponent to accept or reject a particular position by appealing solely to his or her personal circumstances or self-interest, when a more important issue is at stake. (p. 117)

**Special Pleading** Applying principles, rules, or criteria to other persons or situations while failing or refusing to apply them to oneself or to a situation that is of personal interest, without providing sufficient evidence to support such an exception.

**Straw Man, Attacking a** Misrepresenting an opponent's position or credible argument, usually for the purpose of making it easier to attack.

**Tradition, Appeal to** Attempting to persuade others of a point of view by appealing to their feelings of reverence or respect for a tradition instead of to evidence, especially when a more important principle or issue is at stake. (p. 115)

**Trivial Objections, Raising** Attacking an opponent's position by focusing critical attention on a minor point in his or her argument, rather than on its strengths.

**Two-Wrongs Fallacy** Avoiding the obligation to honestly evaluate and/or rebut an arguer's criticism of or argument against a certain kind of behavior by accusing the arguer of acting in a way similar to the behavior that he or she is criticizing.

**Undistributed Middle Term** *See* Middle Term, Undistributed

**Unrepresentative Data** Drawing a conclusion based on data from an unrepresentative or biased sample. (p. 174)

**Using the Wrong Reasons** *See* Wrong Reasons, Using the

**Vague Expression, Misuse of a** Attempting to defend a position by means of a vague expression or drawing an unjustified conclusion as a result of assigning a precise meaning to another person's word or phrase that is imprecise in its meaning or range of application.

**Wisdom, Fallacy of Popular** *See* Popular Wisdom, Fallacy of

**Wishful Thinking** Assuming that because one wants something to be true, it is or will be true. Conversely, assuming that because one does not want something to be true, then it is not or will not be true. (p. 156)

**Wrong Conclusion, Drawing the** Drawing a conclusion other than the one supported by the evidence presented in the argument. (p. 103)

**Wrong Reasons, Using the** Attempting to support a claim with reasons other than the reasons appropriate to the claim. (p. 105)