

By understanding these common fallacies, you can evaluate statements claiming to be facts—“arguments.” Some statements are not arguments: opinions (“I love ice cream”), the self-evident (“Job candidates are either hired or not hired”) and the self-explaining (“Wuzzle means ‘to mix’”).



Avoiding the Question

- **Red Herring**
 - using an irrelevant point to make an argument ... it can cause the conversation to go off on another trail (like a dog chasing a red herring scent instead of its intended prey)
 - “He’ll make a great sales consultant. He’s a sharp dresser.”
- **Special Pleading**
 - arguing for an exception that isn’t justified ... it’s essentially a double standard
 - “I know we have a mandatory managers meeting every Tuesday morning. But my department is so busy, I can’t attend.”
- **Ad Hominem** (Latin: “to the man”)
 - attacking the person instead of the argument
 - “Let’s not worry with what Bob says would fix this. He was written up for tardiness.”
- **Genetic Fallacy**
 - attacking the argument’s source instead of the argument
 - “‘Harmony in the workplace?’ That’s the kind of thing hippies would worry about.”
- **Tu Quoque** (Latin: “you too”)
 - attacking the person making the argument as being inconsistent in that argument
 - “We shouldn’t follow your recommendation to start a fitness program. You never exercise.”
- **Faulty Appeal to Authority**
 - making an argument based on an authority with no expertise on the argument ... not the same as an appeal to a proper authority
 - “Our Service Department needs to be completely overhauled. The sales manager said so.”
- **Appeal to the People**
 - making an argument based on many other people agreeing with it
 - “We need to have a loyalty card program. All of our competitors have one.”
- **Straw Man**
 - attacking an exaggerated caricature of an argument instead of the argument itself
 - “Writing down our process is a bad idea. I don’t want my people acting like robots.”

Propaganda

- **Appeal to Fear**
 - making an argument based on the fear of the consequences of not accepting the argument
 - "This ad campaign will be bad for business. People could take it the wrong way and sue."
- **Appeal to Pity**
 - making an argument based on the subject being worthy of pity
 - "We can't fire him for embezzling. He has kids to support."
- **Bandwagon** - see Appeal to the People
- **Exigency**
 - using a time limit or deadline as the only reason for an argument
 - "This offer good today only!"
- **Repetition**
 - repeating an argument over and over in hopes that we will believe it
 - "It's like we always say around here: Customers from that end of town never buy from us."
- **Transfer** - see Part-to-Whole and Whole-to-Part
- **Snob Appeal**
 - arguing that buying a product or service makes the buyer better than others
 - "We are a serious competitor. We've bought the most expensive CRM on the market."
- **Appeal to Tradition**
 - arguing that something's connection to the past makes it superior
 - "We use paper and pencil record-keeping—just like companies in the '50s did."
- **Appeal to Hi-tech**
 - arguing that something being the most recent idea/product/service makes it superior
 - "Our marketing centers around DingDong. It's the latest social network."

Statistical Fallacies

- **Hasty Generalization**
 - making an argument based on a poor or small sample of a group
 - "Cross-functional employee teams never work: Ours became a gripe session."
 - "Millennials are lazy. We hired two, and they didn't work."
- **Weak Analogy**
 - arguing that, because two things are similar in small ways, they are similar in big ways ... not the same as a strong analogy
 - "He will be a great employee. He looks like one of our star salesmen."
- **Post Hoc Ergo Propter Hoc** (Latin: "after this, therefore because of this")
 - arguing that something caused something else just because it happened before it
 - "We had two people quit after our last employee recognition lunch. We can't recognize employees anymore!"
- **Proof by Lack of Evidence**
 - claiming an argument is true because there has not been any evidence against it
 - "Our Internet traffic is mainly kids playing around. I haven't seen any proof to the contrary."

Making Assumptions

- **Circular Reasoning**
 - making an argument by restating the argument ... no reasoning—just the argument
 - “I know the Bible is true. The Bible says it is true.”
- **Equivocation**
 - making an argument by changing the definition of a word (claiming two definitions of the word “equate”)
 - “I was working on the computer.” “I didn’t know ‘working on the computer’ involved playing Solitaire.”
- **Loaded Question**
 - asking a question that assumes an argument
 - “When did you stop drinking on the job?”
- **Slippery Slope**
 - assuming that accepting the argument will a one step causing many other steps to be taken
 - “We can’t pull people out of operations to have a meeting. Pretty soon all we’ll be doing is having meetings.”
- **Part-to-Whole**
 - arguing that what is true of a part must be true of the whole thing
 - “Jill is a high-performing employee. I’m sure her whole department is over-performing.”
 - “Buyers are liars.”
- **Whole-to-Part**
 - arguing that what is true of the whole must be true of the part
 - “That family is full of engineers. I’m sure their grandson will make a great technician.”
- **Either-Or**
 - arguing there are only two alternatives—when there are actually more
 - “We can either open on Sunday or go out of business because of lost revenue.”