Logical Fallacies

Ad hominem (Argument to the person): Attacking the person making the argument rather than the argument itself.

*We would take her position on child abuse more seriously if she weren’t so rude to the press.*

Ad populum appeal (appeal to the public): Draws on whatever people value such as nationality, religion, family.

*A vote for Joe Smith is a vote for the flag.*

Alleged certainty: Presents something as certain that is open to debate.

*Everyone knows that…*  
*It is obvious that…*  
*It is common knowledge that…*

Obviously,  
Clearly,  
Certainly,

Ambiguity and equivocation: Statements that can be interpreted in more than one way.

*Q: Is she doing a good job?*  
*A: She is performing as expected.*

Appeal to fear: Uses scare tactics instead of legitimate evidence.

*Anyone who stages a protest against the government must be a terrorist; therefore, we must outlaw protests.*

Appeal to ignorance: Tries to make an incorrect argument based on the claim never having been proven false.

*Because no one has proven that food X does not cause cancer, we can assume that it is safe.*

Appeal to pity: Attempts to arouse sympathy rather than persuade with substantial evidence.

*He embezzled a million dollars, but his wife had just died and his child needed surgery.*

Begging the question/Circular Logic: Proof simply offers another version of the question itself.

*Wrestling is dangerous because it is unsafe.*

Card stacking: Ignores evidence from the one side while mounting evidence in favor of the other side.

*Users of hearty glue say that it works great!* (What is missing: How many users? Great compared to what?)

*I should be allowed to go to the party because I did my math homework, I have a ride there and back, and it’s at my friend Jim’s house.* (What is missing: This child still has an essay to write, the ride is with an unlicensed driver, and Jim’s parents are out of town).

False Analogy: Draws a comparison in which the differences outweigh the similarities.

*Old Joe Smith would make a bad president because old dogs can’t learn new tricks.*

False dilemma (the either-or fallacy): Offers only two alternatives when more exist.

*Go to college, or else you can forget about getting a job.*
Logical Fallacies

**False or irrelevant authority:** Citing the opinion of someone who has no expertise in the subject at hand.

*President Jones says that global warming is not real; therefore, we shouldn’t worry about the environment.*

**Generic Fallacy (a form of hasty generalization):** Assumes something about a person based on that person’s origin.

*Joe Smith is from New York City, so he knows how to deal with street crime.*

**Guilt by association:** A person’s argument/ideas lack merit because of that person’s associates or affiliation.

*John Smith was employed as a file clerk at Big Life Insurance when that business declared bankruptcy; therefore, he should not be allowed to become Mayor.*

**Jumping on the bandwagon (a form of ad populum):** Something is right because “everyone” does it.

*Smoking isn’t unhealthy; millions of people smoke.*

**Loaded question:** Contains one or more unproven assumptions.

*Are you still spending time with known criminals?*

**Name calling:** Attaches an unpleasant label to someone or something.

*Jane Smith was an alcoholic prior to running for office; therefore, she is unreliable.*

**Non-sequitur (irrelevant argument):** Reaches a conclusion that does not follow from the premise.

*Jane Smith is a strong speaker, thus she will make a good president.*

**Post hoc, ergo propter hoc (False Cause):** Because two events are sequential, the first caused the second.

*Santa Ana winds blew during the last earthquake, so the wind must cause earthquakes.*

**Red herring (ignoring the question):** Tries to distract attention from one issue by calling attention to an unrelated issue.

*Why worry about global warming when we haven’t solved the problem of homelessness?*

**Self-contradiction:** Two premises that can’t both be true at the same time.

*Only when our weapons have destroyed us will we be aware of the need to destroy weapons.*

**Taking something out of context:** Deliberately distorts an idea or fact by removing it from surrounding material.

*Critic says: the movie was boring, but the photography was entertaining.*

*Next day the ad claims: Critics call the movie “entertaining.”*