

## How to Point Out Logical Fallacies (with an Example):

Point out logical fallacies to remove your opponents' arguments from the round. If it violates a rule of logic, it can't be considered in a debate.

1) State the name of the fallacy your opponents are using.

- The opposition points out that the voters supported gun control by a wide margin in last year's referendum. But this is just the logical fallacy of *argumentum ad populum*, appeal to public opinion!

2) Explain what the fallacy means, and why it doesn't make sense.

- It doesn't matter how many people agree with you, that doesn't mean it's necessarily *right*.

3) Give a really obvious example of why it's a fallacy.

- Last century, the majority of people in some states thought slavery was acceptable, but that didn't make it so!

4) Point out that the fallacy can't be considered in the round.

- This fallacious argument should be thrown out of the debate.

### A List of Fallacies:

1) Argumentum ad antiquitatem (appeal to tradition):

- Fallacy: "Something is right because it's been done that way in the past!"
- Example: "Every great civilization in history has provided state subsidies for art and culture! That means it's right!"
- How to justify its use: The prevalence of a particular practice in existing societies is evidence that societies that failed to adopt it were weeded out by natural selection.
- How to call it out: "Just because something has happened doesn't mean that it's the right thing to keep doing! The Aztecs tore sacrifices' hearts out for hundreds of years, but that didn't make it moral! They're using a logical fallacy called an argumentum ad antiquitatem, or appeal to tradition."

2) Argumentum ad hominem (argument against the person):

- Fallacy: "Something is wrong because of the person who said it, not the idea itself."

- Example: “Our opponents are communists and baby-killers and stupid, so they must be wrong in this debate!”
- Example: “We all know Nixon was a liar and a cheat, so why should we believe anything he says?”
- How to avoid it: Prove that the source has an incentive to lie or distort information.
- How to call it out: “They’re attacking us instead of actually addressing our arguments. That’s not only disrespectful, that’s a logical fallacy called an argumentum ad hominem.”

### 3) Argumentum ad ignorantiam (appeal to ignorance):

- Fallacy: “Something is true because we haven’t proved it false.”
- Example: “Global warming is happening because you can’t prove it isn’t!”
- Example: “God exists because you can’t prove he doesn’t!”
- Detail: This can depend on the burden of proof. If the prosecution says that the defendant is guilty because the defense can’t prove he ISN’T, the prosecution is WRONG. However, if the defense says the defendant is NOT guilty because the prosecution can’t prove he is, the defense is RIGHT.
- Detail: In debates, depending on the framework, the affirmative is the prosecution and the negative is the defense. (This changes when the negative provides a counter-plan, and therefore assumes a burden of proving that plan against the affirmative’s plan).
- How to call it out: “Just because we haven’t proved something false doesn’t make it automatically true! I can’t prove that invisible magical unicorns aren’t watching this round, but that doesn’t mean that they are! They’re using a logical fallacy called an appeal to ignorance!”

### 4) Argumentum ad logicam (appeal to logic)

- Fallacy: “Something is wrong because one (of many) argument used to support it is fallacious.”
- Example: “We heard five arguments for why global warming is happening, but one of those arguments used an appeal to ignorance, so that means global warming isn’t happening!”
- How to call it out: “Just because one argument used a logical fallacy doesn’t mean that everything we said is wrong. That’s like saying that if one slice of pizza doesn’t taste good, it’s impossible that any of them do. It’s actually a logical fallacy for them to claim that, and it’s called the argumentum ad logicam.”

### 5) Argumentum ad misericordiam (the appeal to pity)

- Fallacy: “Something is wrong because it makes people sad/hurt/feel bad.”
- Example: “Think of the poor children!”
- How to justify it: Use appeals to pity as rhetoric to supplement your otherwise logical argument.
- How to call it out: “They’re trying to tug on your heartstrings and appeal to pity. But that’s a logical fallacy. This case isn’t about feelings, it’s about facts. It’s not about emotions, it’s about evidence. They’re trying to confuse the two so they can confuse you. We ask that you don’t let them.”

#### 6) Argumentum ad nauseam (repetition to the point of nausea)

- Fallacy: “Something is wrong because of X, and X, and X, and X, and X, and X, and X, and X, and X...”
- Example: “Drugs are wrong, drugs are wrong, drugs are wrong!”
- How to avoid it: List an argument in your roadmap, give clear warrants and impacts for it in your main body, and recap it in your conclusion.
- How to call it out: “We need a doctor in the room, because our opponents are suffering from B-R-S: broken record syndrome. They repeat the same arguments again and again and again, but that doesn’t make them right. That’s a logical fallacy: an argumentum ad nauseum.”

#### 7) Argumentum ad numerum (appeal to numbers)/Argumentum ad populum (appeal to the public)

- Fallacy: “Something is true because a large portion of people think it is.”
- Example: “At least 70% of people thought slavery was right in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so it was right in the 19<sup>th</sup> century!”
- How to justify it: “In a democracy, the will of the majority determines policy, so the will of the majority is always more important than the will of the minority. It’s not fair for one person’s will to outweigh ten others’!”
- How to call it out: “Just because the majority of people support something doesn’t mean it’s the right thing to do! The majority of Americans supported slavery back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but that didn’t make it moral. To say that it did is logically fallacious: an argumentum ad numerum.”

#### 8) Argumentum ad verecundiam (appeal to authority)

- Fallacy: “Something is true because a well-known or qualified person says it is, even though they are not an expert in the cited field.”

- Example: “Einstein thought communism was good, and Einstein was a brilliant scientist, so communism is good!”
- How to avoid it: Only cite sources when you’re quoting them on things that they are qualified to speak about.
- How to call it out: “We’re not saying that Einstein wasn’t a brilliant scientist, but he was not an accredited political philosopher. To say that his opinion in the latter area carries extra weight because of his authority in the former area is logically fallacious: an argumentum ad verencundiam, or appeal to authority.”

#### 9) Circulus in demonstrando (circular argument)

- Fallacy: “Something is true because something is true!”
- Detail: The arguer uses WHAT they’re trying to prove as part of the proof!
- Example: “Marijuana is illegal. We shouldn’t break the law, and that’s why marijuana should be illegal.”
- How to call it out: “They’re saying that X is true because...X is true. That’s not logical or reasonable. That’s a circular argument, and it’s a logical fallacy.”

#### 10) Complex question/begging the question

- Fallacy: It assumes something is true by its construction when that thing hasn’t been proven.
- Example: “Have you stopped beating your wife yet?”
- Example: “Since we know that Jews are a crime against God and man, the only question is what we should do about them.”
- How to call it out: “The assumption behind your question is simply false. You haven’t proven it, and you can’t prove it. You’re committing the logical fallacy of begging the question.”

#### 11) Cum hoc ergo propter hoc (correlation, therefore causation)

- Fallacy: “Because two things happened at the same time, one of them caused the other.”
- Example: “The president has great economic policies; look at how gas prices have dropped since he’s been in office!”
- How to avoid it: “It is acceptance to demonstrate correlation and then prove causation.
- How to call it out: “Just because two things happened at the same time doesn’t mean that one caused the other. A bee can sting me, and it can start raining, but that doesn’t mean the bee sting caused the rain. To say that it did is logically fallacious: cum hoc ergo propter hoc, or a correlation-causation fallacy.”

## 12) Dicto simpliciter (hasty generalization)

- Fallacy: "Because something is true in one case, or generally true, it will be true in every specific case."
- Example: "Women are generally weaker than men and less able to carry a gun, so women can't pull their weight in a military unit."
- Detail: This is what stereotyping is.
- How to justify: Some generalizations are valid, like "Males have a Y chromosome."
- How to call it out: "Just because something is true in some cases doesn't mean it's true in every case. That's a sweeping generalization."

## 13) Appeal to nature

- Fallacy: "Because something is natural, or associated with nature, it is good; because something is unnatural, or manufactured, it is bad."
- Example: "Sodomy is unnatural; anal sex is not the evolutionary function of a penis or an anus. Therefore, sodomy is wrong."
- How to avoid: A typical ecological argument along these lines is that human beings are part of a complex biological system that is highly sensitive to shocks, and therefore it is dangerous for humans to engage in activities that might damage the system in ways we cannot predict. Note, however, that this approach no longer appeals to nature itself, but to the value of human survival.
- How to call it out: "Wearing clothes, tilling the soil, and using fire might be considered unnatural since no other animals do so, but humans do these things all the time and to great benefit. Just because something isn't natural doesn't mean it's bad, and to say it is invokes the logical fallacy called appeal to nature."

## 14) Non Sequitur ("It does not follow")

- Fallacy: "A, therefore C."
- Example: "Racism is bad, so we need affirmative action."
- How to avoid: Use a clear claim/warrant/impact structure.
- How to call it out: "Think of an argument like a chain. A strong chain has clear logical links that connect every step of the way. My opponents' arguments are missing those crucial links, so their chain of logic falls apart."

## 15) Post hoc ergo propter hoc (after this, therefore because of this)

- Fallacy: "A caused B because A happened before B."

- Example: “Most rapists read pornography when they were teenagers; obviously, pornography causes violence toward women.”
- How to call it out: “Just because something happened before something else doesn’t mean that the first thing caused the second! If a bee stings me, and it starts raining, it doesn’t mean the bee sting caused the rain. To say that it was is to use a logical fallacy: post hoc ergo propter hoc.”

#### 16) Red herring

- Fallacy: The arguer uses irrelevant arguments to distract from the more important question at hand.
- Example: “The opposition claims that welfare dependency leads to higher crime rates -- but how are poor people supposed to keep a roof over their heads without our help?!”
- How to justify: You can present relatively unimportant arguments that will use up the other debaters' speaking time and distract them from more important issues. This kind of a red herring is a wonderful strategic maneuver with which every debater should be familiar.
- How to call it out: “This argument has nothing to do with the question at hand. It’s a red herring. They’re trying to confuse the issues, confuse the facts, and confuse the rest of us.”

#### 17) Slippery slope

- Fallacy: “Because we’re taking one action, it will lead to a bunch of other actions!”
- Detail: This only applies when they don’t explain how the first action will cause those other actions.
- Detail: An alternative to the slippery slope argument is simply to point out that the principles espoused by your opposition imply the acceptability of certain other policies, so if we don't like those other policies, we should question whether we really buy those principles. For instance, if the proposing team argued for legalizing marijuana by saying, "individuals should be able to do whatever they want with their own bodies," the opposition could point out that that principle would also justify legalizing a variety of other drugs -- so if we don't support legalizing other drugs, then maybe we don't really believe in that principle.
- Example: “If we legalize marijuana, we’ll legalize heroin, and cocaine, and we’ll all be smoking in the streets.”
- Example: “If we have gay marriage, we’ll start marrying our dogs!”
- How to justify: Show how the first action causes the others.

#### 18) Straw man

- Fallacy: This refutes a caricatured or extreme version of your opponents' argument instead of addressing the actual argument they've made.
- Detail: It's the same thing as "putting words in your mouth."
- How to call it out: "We never said anything like that. They're putting words in our mouth and making up arguments because they know they can't beat the real arguments we made."

#### 19) Tu quoque ("you too")

- Fallacy: "They said we're bad people...but they're bad people, too!"
- Example: Person A says, "You need a haircut!" Person B replies, "No, YOU do!" Even if B is right, that doesn't change the fact that he needs a haircut.
- Detail: This doesn't change the fact that an error was made, even if the other side is also guilty of it.
- Detail: Tu quoque arguments play an important role in debate because they may help establish who has done a better job of debating (setting aside the issue of whether the proposition is true or not). If both teams have engaged in ad hominem attacks, or both teams have made a few appeals to pity, then it would hardly be fair to penalize one team for it but not the other.
- Detail: In addition, it is not fallacious at all to point out that certain advantages or disadvantages may apply equally to both positions presented in a debate, and therefore they cannot provide a reason for favoring one position over the other (such disadvantages are referred to as "non-unique").
- Detail: In general, using tu quoque statements is a good way to assure that judges make decisions based only on factors that distinguish between the two sides.