

FALLACIES

Consider the following “argument”:

Those four officers who killed the innocent man in New York by mistake should be found not guilty of any crime. None of them had ever been in any kind of trouble before, and, tragically, this kind of thing is just going to happen when we have aggressive police work. (Moore-Parker, 9th ed.)

This is a bad argument, because it commits a number of mistakes in reasoning. There are many *kinds* of mistakes that we can make in reasoning, called fallacies.

In chapter 6, we’ll look at a number of fallacies based on emotions.

It’s crucial to remember that some arguments *are legitimate!* Not all arguments are fallacious!

CRITICAL THINKING
PSEUDOREASONING: Definitions

Pseudoreasoning:

The evidence the author gives *appears* to legitimately support the conclusion, but doesn't *actually* support it. Usually the speaker appeals to some emotion or desire in the audience.

Appeal to Anger

The speaker gets the audience angry in order to get them to go along with a conclusion for which they have no evidence.

I think we should judge this suspect guilty and throw him in jail. Do you have any idea how damaging the impact of vandalism is in our community?

Appeal to Pity

The evidence the speaker gives is not relevant to the conclusion, but instead is intended to induce pity to sway the audience.

The waiter who served us deserves at least 20%. He has 3 kids to support.

Scare Tactics

The speaker threatens the audience in some way. If the audience accepts the claim in order to avoid the threat, rather than because of evidence for the conclusion, they have succumbed to scare tactics.

You have too much stuff. You need to get rid of it when we move. If you don't, I won't let you use my car anymore.

Appeal to Popularity

The evidence the speaker gives is not relevant to the conclusion. Instead, the “evidence” makes the audience want to go along with the conclusion by appealing to their desire to be popular. There are three main types of Appeal to Popularity.

Common Practice

The evidence the speaker gives points out that everyone else does it, so it must be OK.

You don't need to stop at that stop sign. No one else does.

Peer Pressure

The speaker appeals to the audience's desire to fit in with everyone else.

Yuck, toss your sandwich out! We don't eat peanut butter in our group.

Bandwagon

The speaker appeals to the audience's desire to be on the winning side. For example,

Vote for Bush, not Kerry. Bush is going to win.

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Wishful Thinking

The speaker persuades the audience by appealing to the audience's desire for the world to be a certain way.

I just know that I don't have breast cancer because that would be horrible.

Apple Polishing

The evidence the speaker provides persuades the audience by distracting them from the issue using flattery.

Frankly, given your discriminating taste, I don't think that you would be happy with anything less than the best model we have. Buy our model 2208 Culinary Quality Breadmaker.

Group Think

The speaker appeals to what their group thinks for their opinion instead of developing one for themselves. It is different from peer pressure because in group think the individual doesn't bother to have an individual opinion.

Support what Bush says, no matter what. To go against what your country says is unpatriotic.

Rationalizing

The speaker justifies their position in a deceptive way, usually to conceal that they are being benefited. Often involve self-deception.

I can't afford to spend \$100 on these shoes, even though I really like them. But that jacket I bought yesterday cost me \$60 than I expected, so really it's like these shoes are only \$40. I'll buy them!

Smokescreen/Red Herring

The evidence the speaker provides persuades the audience by distracting them from the issue, without appealing to a specific feeling or desire.

"In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, there can be absolutely no doubt that this defendant committed these terrible murders. Look at the mother of the victim, sitting over there, and the father—their lives are forever destroyed by this evil deed. Never again will they know the peace and happiness that was their due. Put yourselves in their shoes, and you will know whether or not this man is guilty."

Two Wrongs Don't Make a Right

The speaker justifies a claim by pointing out that someone else is doing something wrong, not just them.

Why shouldn't I pocket a little extra from the tip jar? The other employees would do the same thing if they had a chance.