

Overview of Logical Fallacies

The examples given here are simplistic; consider them only as general illustrations of the definitions.

Ad hominem (translation: against the man)

Ad hominem arguments attack a person rather than an issue or idea. They skirt an issue and are often considered as hits 'below the belt' when used in debate.

Bandwagon appeal

A claim that relies on popularity rather than reasoning: "A million Americans own cats, so we should too." This is the one your parents use to manipulate you. (Of course, parents are guilty of relying heavily on numerous logical fallacies in their argumentation tactics...)

Begging the question

A form of circular reasoning in which a claim is restated, usually in different words, as support for itself: "Cats are evil because they are bad." Student papers often beg the question. This kind of argument is also called tautological.

Hasty generalization

A claim made on the basis of insufficient evidence: "Cats are evil because I once saw a cat scratch someone when I was a child."

Non sequitur (translation: does not follow)

While almost any fallacy may be said to involve conclusions that do not naturally or logically follow from the reasoning provided, a non sequitur argument is distinguished by reasoning or evidence that is exceptionally irrelevant to the claim being made. Students are often guilty of this too. "Cats are evil because they run too fast."

Post hoc, ergo propter hoc (translation: after this, therefore because of this)

This fallacy confuses a temporal relationship with a causal relationship. Just because A happens after B, you cannot necessarily conclude that A caused B. "I shot the cat because I broke my leg after it crossed my path." Always remember this easy saying: correlation is not causation. This is an important fallacy to remember for Law.

Slippery slope

The slope is slippery when a claim is made that some initial action, often innocuous in itself, will nonetheless lead inevitably to a disastrous sequence of consequences. "A lone cat is allowed outdoors, all cats will soon follow, and then all birds will be eaten and worms will overtake our lawns." The fallacy usually involves a failure either to explain why the first step must result in a slide toward catastrophe, or to consider alternative chains of consequences that are more benign and thus more likely to occur.