

The Logical Fallacy Field Guide

Catch the tricks in any argument

Attacks and distractions

Ad hominem

attacking the person instead of their argument. Example: "You can't trust her economics take, she's barely passing math."

Straw man

swapping someone's argument for a weaker one, then beating that. Example: "You want later start times, so you basically want kids to do nothing all day."

Red herring

changing the subject to dodge the point. Example: "Why worry about our budget when there are bigger problems in the world?"

Whataboutism

answering a criticism by pointing at someone else's fault. Example: "Our team fouled, sure, but what about their fouls last game?"

Broken logic

Slippery slope

claiming one small step must lead to disaster. Example: "If we allow one retake, soon no one will study at all."

False dilemma

pretending there are only two options. Example: "Either we ban phones entirely, or grades collapse."

Circular reasoning

using the claim to prove itself. Example: "This app is the best because nothing else is as good."

Hasty generalization

a big conclusion from one or two cases. Example: "My two friends hated the book, so it must be terrible."

Emotion and the crowd

Appeal to emotion

using feelings in place of a reason. Example: "Think how sad the mascot would be if we cut the team."

Bandwagon

it must be right because everyone believes it. Example: "Everyone's switching to this diet, so it works."

False authority

citing someone famous who is not an expert here. Example: "A movie star says this supplement cures colds."

Appeal to tradition

it is right because we have always done it. Example: "We have always run the fundraiser this way, so we should not change it."

How to call it out

When you spot one in a debate, three quick moves handle it:

- 1 Name it plainly: "That's a straw man."
- 2 Explain why it does not prove the point: "You changed my argument into a weaker one."
- 3 Steer back to the real question: "My actual claim was that later start times help sleep."

Spot the fallacy

Name the fallacy in each, then check yourself.

"You can't trust his climate stance, he drives a big truck.": ad hominem, plus whataboutism.

"If we start school later, kids will just stay up even later.": slippery slope.

“Either you support the new rule or you don’t care about safety.”: false dilemma.

“Everyone in class is doing the extra credit, so it must be worth it.”: bandwagon.

“A pro gamer endorsed this energy drink, so it must boost focus.”: false authority.

— Use it well

- Steelman first. Restate their argument at its strongest before you challenge it.
- Do not fallacy-hunt to score points. One clean call beats five nitpicks.
- A fallacy means the reasoning is weak, not that the conclusion is false. Beat the logic, then make your own case.