



One thing I realized early on when I started to think critically about what I believed was that I was a terrible thinker. Oh sure, I soaked up information like a sponge and understood topics pretty quickly. But, when I reasoned out things on my own - man, I was a mess.

Why was I so bad at reasoning? Because I had never been taught how to do it. The vast majority of us haven't. Neither have most of the sources we read or the people talking on TV and the internet. For decades, schools have been trying to teach kids "critical thinking". The critical thinking we do as kids in school, though, is usually meant to help us learn to solve complex, multilayered, and multidisciplinary problems. The skills we need to make the case for a position we hold - basic logic and reasoning skills - aren't taught.

Nowhere is this lack of training more evident than in the world of social media. Social media encourages us to have conversations about any topic we want with people we may or may not know. In theory, this seems like a great idea. But, in practice, we see that people are encouraged to give an opinion - with a Like or a Sad/Angry Face or a comment - without having put much thought into their opinion. The important thing is that you HAVE an opinion and not that it is particularly well-thought-out.

As Ambassadors for Christ, [one of our tasks is to give reasons for why Christianity is true](#). We need to be able to give well-reasoned arguments for why we believe what we believe (1 Peter 3:15). Our job is to engage in the realm of ideas and model the way things ought to be done. Most people see the "modeling" part as related only to character and personality - stuff like being helpful, kind, and loving. But, if we want people to think clearer, we first have to think clearer ourselves.

Top 6 Logical Fallacies In Modern Discussions

Because we don't get any training on logic and reason, most of us make all sorts of logical errors when we either make the case for our positions or try to defeat someone else's arguments. We don't know how to think well. These logical blunders are known as fallacies.

In this article, I want to give you what I think are the most common fallacies I hear in conversations, online engagements, political speeches, and news reports. After you know what they are, I promise you'll hear them *ALL THE TIME!*. But, spotting these flaws in other peoples' arguments is the *secondary* purpose of this article. The primary purpose is to show them to you so *you* aren't making them yourself. So, here they are in no particular order



Ad Hominem

The ad hominem fallacy occurs when someone attacks the character of the person giving the argument rather than the argument itself. Most of us are familiar with an ad hominem attack from our days as kids on the playground. Remember the days when arguments went something like this? When you and one of your friends would argue over whose turn it was for the swing, eventually someone got called a snaggle-toothed pidgeon licker and then someone went crying to the teacher. An ad hominem attack is basically name-calling like we did as kids.

Sadly, this tactic has become more and more pronounced in the past few years as we attempt to paint the people we disagree with not just as wrong but as *evil*. We want people to think the other side is a terrible person so people won't listen to them. People resort to this tactic when they are at the end of their rope and are unable to defeat the argument in front of them. You know someone either doesn't have any good reasons or has run out of them once they start calling the other side names.

As an example, let's say you lay out a well-reasoned argument for the existence of God, and the person you are talking to responds with "you Christians are so intolerant". By calling you a name, the person has shifted the discussion onto your character rather than the argument you are trying to make. Calling a person intolerant has nothing to do with whether God exists or not - which is what the discussion is supposed to be about.

Politicians and news media outlets use this tactic all the time when they say someone is racist, sexist, xenophobic, or un-American if they don't agree with their position. None of the name-calling does anything to prove the argument as true or false - it only serves to shift the focus to the person giving the argument rather than addressing the argument itself.

Genetic Fallacy

The genetic fallacy occurs when someone attacks *how* someone came to think something is true rather than if the thing is actually true or not. One way to easily spot this fallacy is when the response to a claim starts with "you think that because..".

A charge commonly made by atheists is that Christians only believe that Christianity is true because they grew up in a Christian home. And, if that person grew up in a Muslim home, they would probably think Islam is true. The atheist may be right, but it does nothing to show that Christianity as a worldview is false. And, what if the atheist grew up in an atheist



home? Can we then say atheism is false because if he would have grown up in a Christian home he would be Christian?

This fallacy rears its head in hot button issues when we attempt to discredit someone's opinion based on things like age, gender, or life experiences. For example, if someone in high school says "I think the government should tax the rich more" and someone responds with "you just think that because you have never had a job" rather than respond with good reasons on why the rich shouldn't be taxed more. Either taxing the rich is OK or it isn't. It doesn't matter who says it or how they came to believe it. Or, if a man says that abortion is wrong and someone says he shouldn't have an opinion because he can't get pregnant. Either abortion is wrong or it isn't. It doesn't matter if the person making the statement can get pregnant or not.

Another common occurrence of this fallacy is when someone cites a source and the response is to discredit the source, rather than attempt to refute the information the source gives. "You just think that because you watch (insert most despised news network here)".

Straw Man

The straw man fallacy occurs when someone offers up an inaccurate, easily defeatable version of a position and then shows why it is wrong. The position has "no stuffing", so it falls over easily.

The easy versions of this fallacy to spot are the ones where the phrase "you don't care" appears somewhere in the argument. For instance, if someone states that they think abortion is wrong because it takes the life of an innocent human being and someone responds with "you think abortion is wrong because you don't care about women's rights". Or if someone says they think people should wear masks to help stop the spread of COVID-19 and someone says "you think people should wear masks because you don't care about freedom".

In the abortion example, the first person said nothing about women's rights. His argument was about the loss of innocent life and the response said nothing about that. And, in the second example, the person feels that masks are a good way to stop the spread of COVID-19, and the person responding did nothing to refute that - only to say the person hates freedom.

Another version of this fallacy comes up all the time in videos on the internet when someone is monologuing about someone else. You can usually spot it when someone attempts to state



his or her opponent's position and then shows why it is a terrible position to hold. Look for phrases like "you believe that". For example, "you Christians believe that there's some big, bearded Sky Daddy up there in space so you hate science". This is a strawman because Christians do not think of God as a big, bearded man floating around in space. Christians believe that God is a timeless, spaceless, immaterial, personal being of immense power - not the GOD painted in the Sistine Chapel.

Appeal To Authority

An appeal to authority is an attempt to state that something is true simply based on the authority of the source. For example, saying something is true about nature or healthcare policies simply because a scientist or a doctor said it. As we've seen since the discovery of COVID-19 in 2020, doctors and scientists often change their minds. And, don't always agree. For every doctor who says that wearing a mask indoors will stop the spread of the virus, you can find another doctor who says that it won't.

This fallacy isn't meant to dismiss the claims of experts. We would be smart to listen to people who have demonstrated a depth of knowledge in a particular area. The point of this fallacy is that saying something like "we should do X because Bob said so and Bob is a doctor" without giving the reasons Bob says we should do X.

Along these same lines, it is really common for people to give immediate credit to people with lab coats and PhDs on *any* topic they may weigh in on. Scientists and those who have earned doctorate degrees *are* usually pretty smart. But, that doesn't mean they are knowledgeable in *everything*.

For example, Stephen Hawking - one of our lifetime's most brilliant scientific thinkers - wrote a book called [*The Grand Design*](#). In it, he states that philosophy is dead, and then goes on for a few hundred pages making the argument that philosophy is dead. See the problem? Hawking used philosophy to say that philosophy is dead. Now, Hawking was no dummy. But, when it came to philosophy, he was not very good. Even the most brilliant minds have their limits.

Christians do this, too, though. In fact, the number one way most Christians respond when talking to non-believers is to commit this fallacy. It happens when someone asks them why they do something or why they believe something and the only response they give is "because the Bible said so".

Now, don't get me wrong here; the Bible IS the authority I turn to when I want to figure out



what I should do. And, if the Bible tells me I should act in a way that I don't like, I trust that God knows better than me. But, that's because I see the Bible as an authority. Non-believers do not. You can - and should - share things that the Bible says with them. But, answering a question with "because the Bible says so" is not going to work with them.

Appeal To Emotion

Last, but certainly not least, is the appeal to emotion fallacy. This one is easy to spot because it's used so frequently. The reason it's used so frequently is that it's really rhetorically powerful.

The classic example of this one gets used by us dads with our little kids who are picky eaters. When your kid says "I don't like pickled anchovies" and you say "you know, there are starving kids in third world countries who would love to be able to eat pickled anchovies" - that's an appeal to emotion. Appeals to emotion do nothing to give rational reasons why something is true or not. Or why one should or shouldn't do something. They just tug at your heartstrings one way or another.

This isn't to say that a sound, logical argument shouldn't evoke an emotional response. Good arguments can certainly do that. The point of an argument is usually to get you to change your mind on something. The fallacy occurs, however, when the only reason given on why something is true or false has to do with your feelings.

This tactic gets used *all the time* in the political dialog when a politician asserts that if you don't vote for his or her bill, it's because you want grandma to die. Or people who want this bill to pass hate America. The news outlets are certainly guilty of this, too, because they know the more riled up they can get their viewers the more they will watch.

Now You Know, So Knock It Off!

In this article, we discussed some of the most common ways people use flawed logic in their discussions. Learning to stop these bad habits is hard and requires a lot of awareness on our part. It's easy to fall into these traps when we are talking about things we care deeply about. We want to convince the other person we are right using any means necessary. I catch myself employing these from time to time still - especially when it comes to my kids.

Now that you know what some of these fallacies look like, you'll spot them everywhere. But, the main goal of this article isn't so you can correct other peoples' bad thinking; it's to make sure you aren't doing it, too!



Common Logical Fallacies And How To Avoid Them

As ambassadors, we have to first model the behavior we want others to model. In this case, it's clear thinking. Before we can expect others to stop being bad thinkers, we have to become good thinkers ourselves. Spotting the flaws in our reasoning is a great first step towards that goal.