# Argument Evaluation

## Principles of Logic and Critical Thinking

Instructor Name

March 15, 2025

# 1. What Makes a Good Argument? An Overview

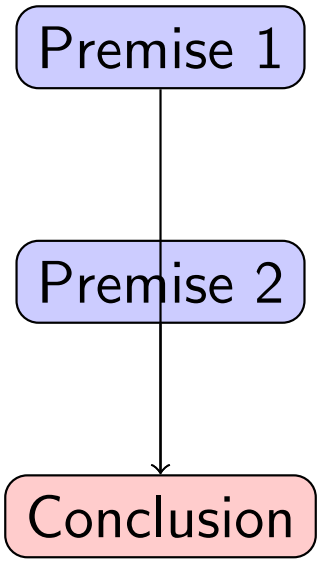
- An **argument** is a set of statements where some (premises) are offered to support another (conclusion).
- Good arguments require both **logical validity** and **factual truth**.
- Arguments are fundamental to critical thinking and rational discourse.
- Evaluating arguments helps us separate sound reasoning from flawed thinking.

## Two Central Questions in Argument Evaluation

1. Do the premises adequately support the conclusion?
2. Are the premises actually true?

# 2. Review: Identifying Premises and Conclusions

- **Premises** are statements offered as reasons or evidence to support a conclusion.
- **Conclusions** are claims that follow from or are supported by premises.
- Indicator words signal premises (because, since, given that) and conclusions (therefore, thus, hence).
- Some arguments have implicit (unstated) premises or conclusions that need to be identified.



# 3. Converting Arguments to Standard Form

- **Standard form** arranges an argument with premises listed first and conclusion last.
- Converting to standard form helps clarify the logical structure of an argument.
- Each premise should be a single, clear statement with one main idea.
- Number premises (P1, P2, etc.) and clearly mark the conclusion (C).

## Example

Original: "Since it's raining and the streets are wet, you should take an umbrella."
Standard Form:

P1: It is raining.

P2: The streets are wet.

C: You should take an umbrella.

# 4. The Principle of Charity: Interpreting Arguments Fairly

- The **principle of charity** requires interpreting arguments in their strongest possible form.
- Charitable interpretation means finding the most reasonable interpretation of unclear statements.
- We should focus on evaluating the substance rather than attacking weak expressions.
- Avoiding "straw man" arguments shows intellectual honesty and strengthens our own reasoning.

## Why Practice Charity?

Applying the principle of charity:

- Demonstrates intellectual integrity
- Leads to more productive discussions
- Helps identify the strongest counterarguments
- Prevents wasting time on superficial disagreements

# 5. Test #1: Do the Premises Support the Conclusion?

- This test examines the **logical relationship** between premises and conclusion.
- We ask: "If all premises were true, would the conclusion necessarily or probably follow?"
- This test focuses on the structure of the argument, not the content.
- An argument can pass this test even if its premises are actually false.

| **Strong Support** | **Weak Support** |
|---|---|
| Conclusion follows necessarily | Conclusion doesn't follow |
| Conclusion follows with high probability | Connection is tenuous |
| Logical structure is sound | Logical gaps exist |
| All relevant factors considered | Important factors missing |

# 6. Test #2: Are the Premises Actually True?

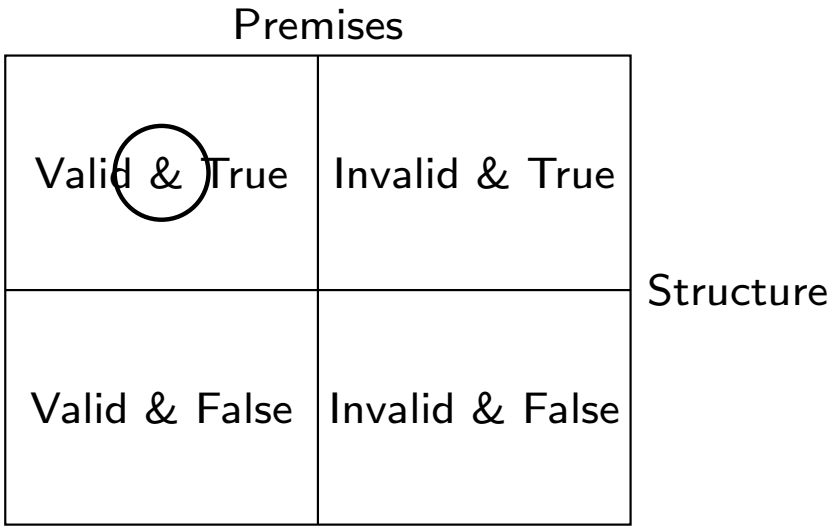
- This test examines the **factual accuracy** of each premise.
- We must verify premises through observation, research, or established knowledge.
- Some premises may be true in certain contexts but not in others.
- Arguments with false premises can never be sound, even if logically valid.

## Methods to Verify Premises

- Direct observation or experience
- Reliable scientific evidence
- Credible expert testimony
- Logical necessity (e.g., mathematical truths)

# 7. The Relationship Between Truth and Validity

- **Validity** concerns the logical structure regardless of factual content.
- **Truth** concerns the factual accuracy of individual statements.
- A **sound argument** is both valid and has all true premises.
- Validity + Truth = Soundness (the gold standard for arguments).



# 8. Common Mistakes in Argument Evaluation

- **Conflating truth and validity**: An argument can be valid with false premises.
- **Accepting weak support**: Assuming premises adequately support a conclusion when they don't.
- **Mistaking correlation for causation**: Assuming events that occur together have a causal relationship.
- **Incomplete analysis**: Evaluating only some premises while ignoring others.

## Warning Signs of Flawed Evaluation

Watch out for:

- Emotional reactions clouding logical assessment
- Accepting arguments simply because you agree with the conclusion
- Rejecting arguments simply because you disagree with the conclusion
- Failing to consider alternative explanations

# 9. Three Types of Arguments: An Introduction

- Arguments can be classified based on how strongly premises support conclusions.
- The three main categories are: deductive valid, inductive strong, and inductive weak.
- Each type requires different standards of evaluation.
- Understanding the intended type helps us apply appropriate criteria.

| **Type** | **Strength** | **Certainty** |
|---|---|---|
| Deductive Valid | Conclusive | 100% (if premises true) |
| Inductive Strong | High | Probable but not certain |
| Inductive Weak | Low | Unlikely or insufficient |

# 10. Deductive Valid Arguments: When Conclusions Necessarily Follow

- In a **deductive valid argument**, the conclusion must be true if all premises are true.
- Deductive arguments aim for certainty and preserve truth from premises to conclusion.
- The conclusion contains no new information beyond what's implied by the premises.
- Examples include mathematical proofs, syllogisms, and formal logic.

## Example

**Syllogism Example:**
P1: All humans are mortal.
P2: Socrates is a human.
C: Therefore, Socrates is mortal.
*If both premises are true, the conclusion must be true.*

# Extended Example: Deductive Arguments in Sherlock Holmes

- Sherlock Holmes frequently uses chains of deductive reasoning to solve cases.
- His famous quote: "When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."
- This exemplifies valid deductive reasoning from premises to conclusions.
- Holmes' deductions demonstrate the power of formal logic in practical investigation.

## Example

**From "The Adventure of the Speckled Band":**
P1: If the victim was killed in a locked room with no signs of intrusion, the killer must have entered through another means.
P2: The only other possible entrance is the ventilation duct.
P3: The ventilation duct connects to Dr. Roylott's room.
C: Therefore, the killer came from Dr. Roylott's room through the ventilation duct.
*Type of argument:* Valid deductive reasoning using process of elimination (disjunctive syllogism).

# 11. Inductive Strong Arguments: When Conclusions Probably Follow

- In an **inductive strong argument**, the conclusion is likely (though not guaranteed) true if all premises are true.
- Unlike valid arguments, inductive strong arguments extend knowledge beyond premises to reach probable conclusions.
- The strength depends on the quality and quantity of evidence provided in premises.
- These arguments are common in science, everyday reasoning, and prediction.

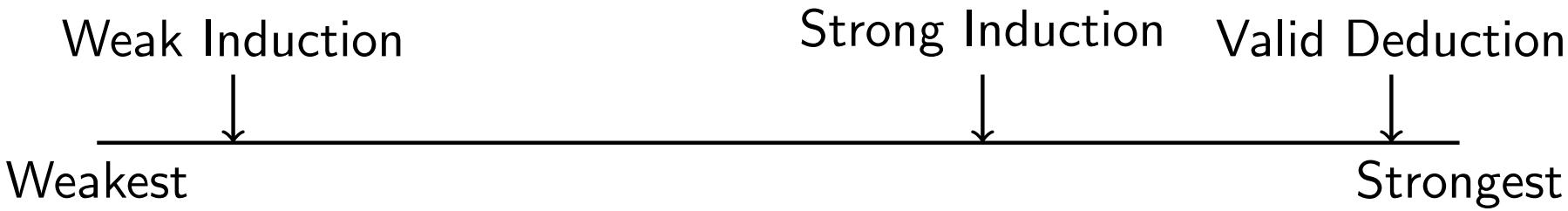
## Characteristics of Strong Induction

An inductive argument is strong when:

- The sample size is sufficiently large
- The sample is representative of the population
- The evidence directly relates to the conclusion
- Alternative explanations have been considered

# 12. Inductive Weak Arguments: When Support Is Insufficient

- In an **inductive weak argument**, the premises provide insufficient support for the conclusion.
- The conclusion might still be true, but the premises don't establish its probability.
- Weak arguments often suffer from limited evidence, biased samples, or logical leaps.
- Recognizing weak arguments helps us avoid accepting poorly supported claims.



# 13. Why Distinguishing Argument Forms Matters

- Different argument forms serve different purposes in reasoning and communication.
- The appropriate standard of evaluation depends on the argument's intended form.
- Misidentifying an argument's form can lead to unfair criticism or unwarranted acceptance.
- Some contexts (science, law, mathematics) require specific argument forms.

## Common Mismatch Errors

- Expecting deductive certainty from inductive arguments
- Treating deductive arguments as merely probable
- Accepting weak induction as if it were strong
- Failing to recognize when certainty is impossible

# 14. Characteristics of Valid Deductive Arguments

- **Necessity**: The conclusion must follow from the premises with absolute certainty.
- **Truth preservation**: If premises are true, the conclusion cannot be false.
- **No new information**: The conclusion only contains information implicit in the premises.
- **Form determines validity**: The structure, not content, determines if an argument is valid.

## Testing for Validity

A deductive argument is valid if and only if:

1. It is impossible for all premises to be true while the conclusion is false
2. The negation of the conclusion contradicts the premises
3. The conclusion is a logical consequence of the premises

# 15. Modus Ponens: "If P then Q, P, therefore Q"

- **Modus Ponens** (affirming the antecedent) is a fundamental valid argument pattern.
- Structure: If P then Q; P is true; Therefore, Q must be true.
- The first premise establishes a conditional relationship; the second affirms the condition.
- This form appears frequently in everyday reasoning and scientific thinking.

## Example

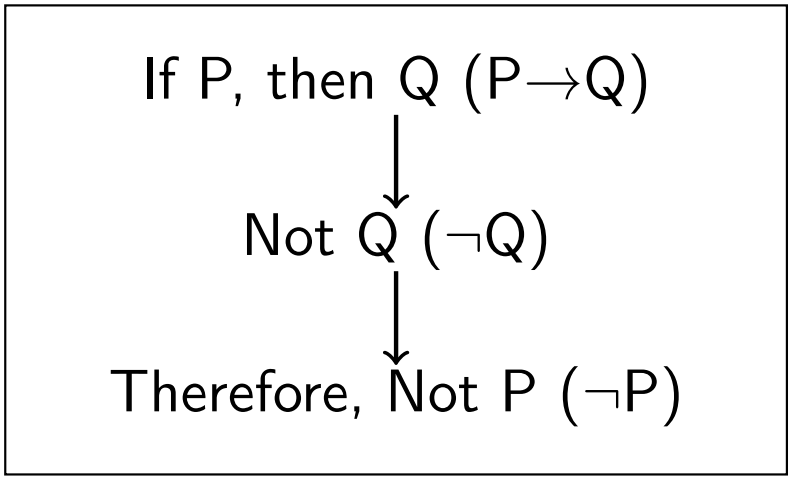
**Modus Ponens in Action:**

P1: If it is raining, then the ground is wet. P2: It is raining. C: Therefore, the ground is wet.

*Logical Form:* If P $\rightarrow$ Q; P; Therefore, Q

# 16. Modus Tollens: "If P then Q, not Q, therefore not P"

- **Modus Tollens** (denying the consequent) is another fundamental valid pattern.
- Structure: If P then Q; Q is false; Therefore, P must be false.
- This form uses the contrapositive relationship: if $P \rightarrow Q$ then $\neg Q \rightarrow \neg P$.
- Modus Tollens is central to falsification in scientific reasoning.



# 17. Hypothetical Syllogism: "If P then Q, if Q then R, therefore if P then R"

- **Hypothetical syllogism** connects conditional statements in a chain.
- New symbol: $R$: A third statement variable
- Structure: If $P \to Q$; If $Q \to R$; Therefore, if $P \to R$.
- This pattern allows us to derive new conditional relationships transitively.
- It demonstrates how valid arguments can combine to create new valid arguments.

## Example

**Hypothetical Syllogism Example:**
P1: If it rains, the soccer match will be canceled. $(P \to Q)$
P2: If the soccer match is canceled, we will go to the movies. $(Q \to R)$
C: Therefore, if it rains, we will go to the movies. $(P \to R)$

# 18. Disjunctive Syllogism: "P or Q, not P, therefore Q"

- **Disjunctive syllogism** eliminates one option from an "either-or" scenario.
- New symbol: $P \vee Q$: P or Q (disjunction)
- Structure: $P \vee Q$ is true; $\neg P$ is true; Therefore, $Q$ must be true.
- This form assumes the disjunction is inclusive (at least one must be true).
- It's useful for narrowing down possibilities through elimination.

## Key Requirements

For a disjunctive syllogism to be valid:

- The disjunction must be exhaustive (covers all possibilities)
- The eliminated option must be definitively ruled out
- The disjunction is assumed to be true (at least one option must be true)

# 19. Recognizing Valid Arguments in Everyday Language

- Valid argument forms often appear in natural language without formal notation.
- Key conditional phrases include "if...then," "when," "unless," and "only if."
- Disjunctions appear as "either...or," "unless," and "at least one of these."
- Negations may be expressed as "not," "never," "none," or other negative terms.

| **Logical Form** | **Natural Language Example** |
|---|---|
| Modus Ponens ($P \to Q$; $P$; $\therefore Q$) | "Since it's raining, and rain makes things wet, the ground must be wet." |
| Modus Tollens ($P \to Q$; $\neg Q$; $\therefore \neg P$) | "The ground isn't wet, so it can't be raining." |
| Hypothetical ($P \to Q$; $Q \to R$; $\therefore P \to R$) | "If you study, you'll pass. If you pass, you'll graduate. So if you study, you'll graduate." |
| Disjunctive ($P \vee Q$; $\neg P$; $\therefore Q$) | "It's either in my purse or my car. It's not in my purse, so it must be in my car." |

# 20. What Makes a Fallacy "Formal"?

- A **formal fallacy** is an error in the logical structure of an argument.
- Formal fallacies make arguments invalid regardless of the content of the premises.
- They involve incorrect patterns of reasoning that can be identified by their form alone.
- Even arguments with true premises and true conclusions can be invalid due to formal fallacies.

| **Valid Forms** | **Invalid Forms (Fallacies)** |
|---|---|
| If $P \to Q$; $P$; Therefore $Q$ | If $P \to Q$; $Q$; Therefore $P$ |
| If $P \to Q$; $\neg Q$; Therefore $\neg P$ | If $P \to Q$; $\neg P$; Therefore $\neg Q$ |
| $P \vee Q$; $\neg P$; Therefore $Q$ | $P \vee Q$; $P$; Therefore $\neg Q$ |

Table: Comparison of Valid and Invalid Argument Forms

# 21. Affirming the Consequent: "If P then Q, Q, therefore P"

- **Affirming the consequent** is an invalid argument form that confuses necessity with sufficiency.
- Structure: If P then Q; Q is true; Therefore, P must be true.
- This pattern wrongly assumes that if P leads to Q, then Q must have been caused by P.
- The fallacy ignores that Q could have multiple possible causes besides P.

## Example

**Affirming the Consequent Example:**
P1: If it is raining, then the ground is wet. P2: The ground is wet. C: Therefore, it is raining.
*Why invalid:* The ground could be wet for other reasons (sprinklers, spilled water, etc.).

# 22. Denying the Antecedent: "If P then Q, not P, therefore not Q"

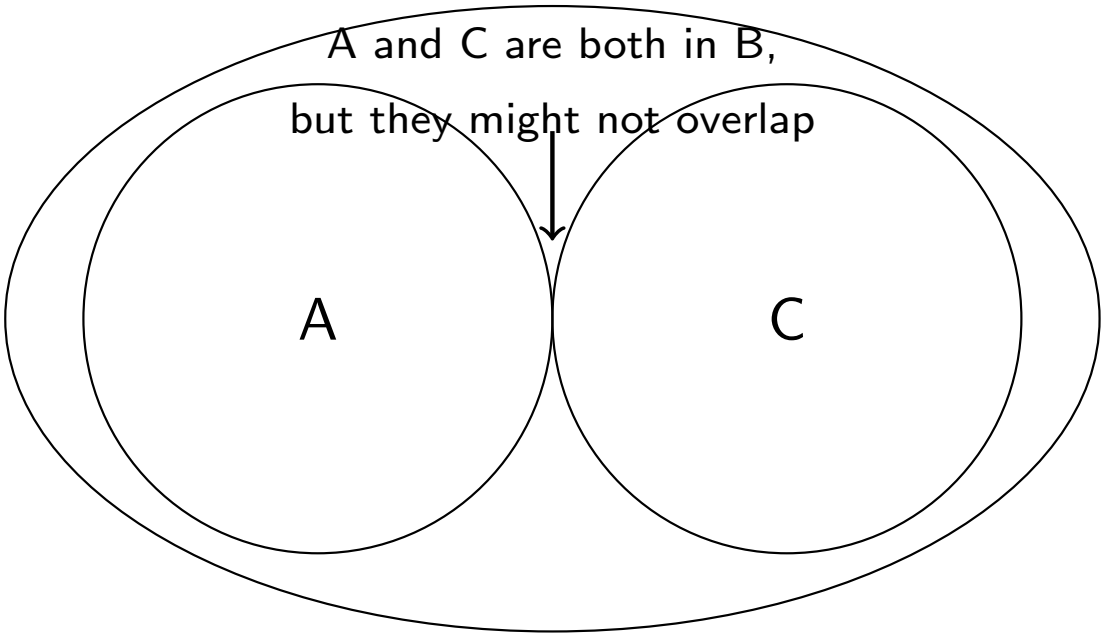
- **Denying the antecedent** is an invalid argument form that misunderstands conditional logic.
- Structure: If P then Q; P is false; Therefore, Q must be false.
- This pattern wrongly assumes that P is the only way to produce Q.
- The fallacy fails to recognize that Q might occur for reasons other than P.

## Why This Form Is Invalid

- The statement "If P then Q" only tells us what happens when P is true
- It tells us nothing about what happens when P is false
- When P is false, Q could still be true for other reasons
- The relationship is one-directional unless explicitly stated otherwise

# 23. The Fallacy of the Undistributed Middle

- The **fallacy of the undistributed middle** occurs in categorical syllogisms.
- Structure: All A are B; All C are B; Therefore, all A are C.
- This pattern incorrectly assumes that because A and C share a common property B, they are the same.
- The fallacy ignores that B could be a broad category containing distinct subcategories.




B = Middle Term

# 24. How to Spot Formal Fallacies in Real Arguments

- Convert the argument to standard form to identify its logical structure.
- Look for conditional statements and check how they're used in the reasoning.
- Examine the relationship between terms in categorical statements.
- Test the argument by creating a counterexample with true premises and a false conclusion.

## Common Warning Signs

Be suspicious of arguments that:

- Conclude "Therefore A" when A appears as a sufficient condition for something
- Conclude "Therefore not B" when the absence of a sufficient condition is noted
- Claim two things are the same because they share a common property
- Cannot be diagrammed coherently using logical notation

# 25. Characteristics of Strong Inductive Arguments

- **Inductive arguments** move from specific evidence to general or probable conclusions.
- A **strong inductive argument** provides good but not conclusive support for its conclusion.
- The strength of induction is a matter of degree, not an all-or-nothing quality.
- Strong induction depends on the quality, quantity, and relevance of evidence.

## Evaluating Inductive Strength

An inductive argument is stronger when:

- The conclusion follows with higher probability
- The evidence is more comprehensive and representative
- Alternative explanations have been considered and addressed
- The inductive leap (from evidence to conclusion) is smaller

# 26. Inductive Generalizations: From Sample to Population

- **Inductive generalization** extends observations about a sample to an entire population.
- Structure: X% of observed A's have property B; Therefore, X% of all A's have property B.
- The strength depends on sample size, randomness, and representativeness.
- This form is fundamental to scientific research and statistical reasoning.

| **Factor** | **Impact on Strength** |
|---|---|
| Sample Size | Larger samples typically provide stronger support |
| Randomness | Random samples reduce selection bias |
| Representativeness | Sample should reflect population characteristics |
| Variability | Less variability in population strengthens generalization |

# 27. Statistical Syllogisms: From Population to Individual

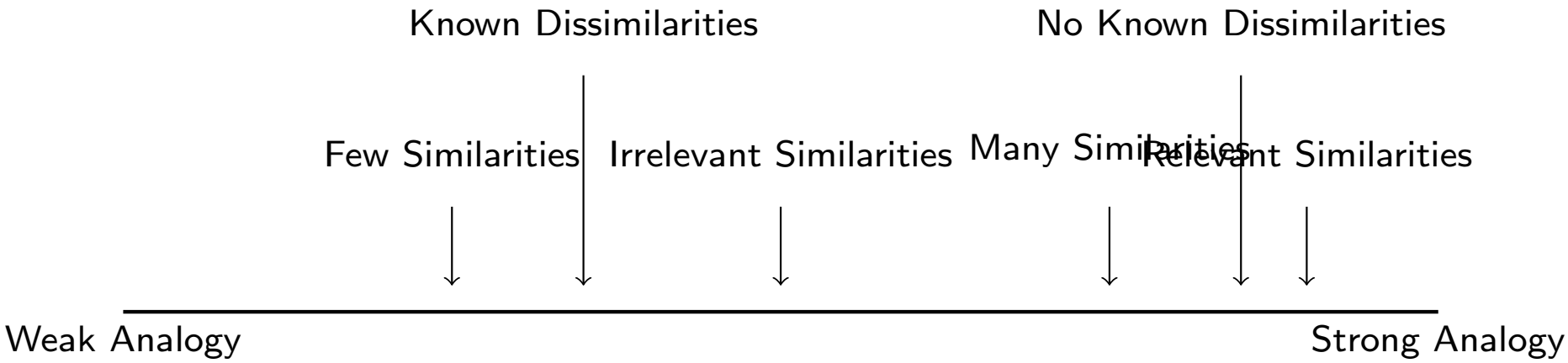
- **Statistical syllogisms** apply population statistics to make judgments about individuals.
- Structure: X% of A's are B; This is an A; Therefore, this is probably a B.
- The probability assigned to the conclusion should match the statistical frequency.
- Strength increases as the percentage approaches 100% (or 0% for negative cases).

## Example

**Statistical Syllogism Example:**
P1: 90% of flight departures from this airport are on time.
P2: Flight 372 is departing from this airport.
C: Therefore, Flight 372 will probably (with 90% probability) be on time.
*Note:* Strength depends on the statistical percentage and absence of defeaters.

# 28. Arguments from Analogy: When Similarities Matter

- **Arguments from analogy** reason that similar cases will have similar outcomes.
- Structure: A and B share properties P, Q, R; A has property S; Therefore, B probably has property S.
- Strength depends on relevance and number of similarities between the compared cases.
- These arguments are common in legal reasoning, ethics, and scientific discovery.



# 29. Causal Arguments: Establishing Cause and Effect

- **Causal arguments** attempt to establish that one event causes another.
- Strong causal arguments require temporal precedence, correlation, and ruling out alternative causes.
- Scientific methods like controlled experiments help strengthen causal claims.
- Causal reasoning is fundamental to explaining events and making predictions.

## Mill's Methods for Establishing Causation

- **Method of Agreement:** If multiple instances of a phenomenon have one factor in common, that factor may be the cause
- **Method of Difference:** If two situations differ only in one factor and one outcome, that factor may cause the outcome
- **Method of Concomitant Variation:** If variations in one factor correlate with variations in another, they may be causally related

# 30. When Inductive Arguments Fall Short

- **Weak inductive arguments** provide insufficient support for their conclusions.
- The probability that the conclusion follows from the premises is low.
- Weak arguments contain significant gaps, oversights, or logical leaps.
- They may still be useful starting points, but require additional evidence or reasoning.

| **Strong Induction** | **Weak Induction** |
|---|---|
| Large, representative samples | Small, biased samples |
| Relevant similarities in analogies | Superficial similarities in analogies |
| Multiple causes considered | Alternative causes ignored |
| Moderate claims relative to evidence | Sweeping claims beyond evidence |

# 31. Sample Size Problems: Too Few Examples

- **Small sample size** undermines the reliability of generalizations.
- Single examples or anecdotes rarely justify broad conclusions about populations.
- The margin of error increases as sample size decreases.
- Random variation can easily be mistaken for meaningful patterns in small samples.

## Example

**Sample Size Problem Example:**
"I know three people who got headaches after taking this medication, so it must commonly cause headaches."
*Why weak:* Three cases is too small a sample to determine the actual frequency of side effects in the broader population. The observed cases might not be representative.

# 32. Representativeness Issues: Biased Samples

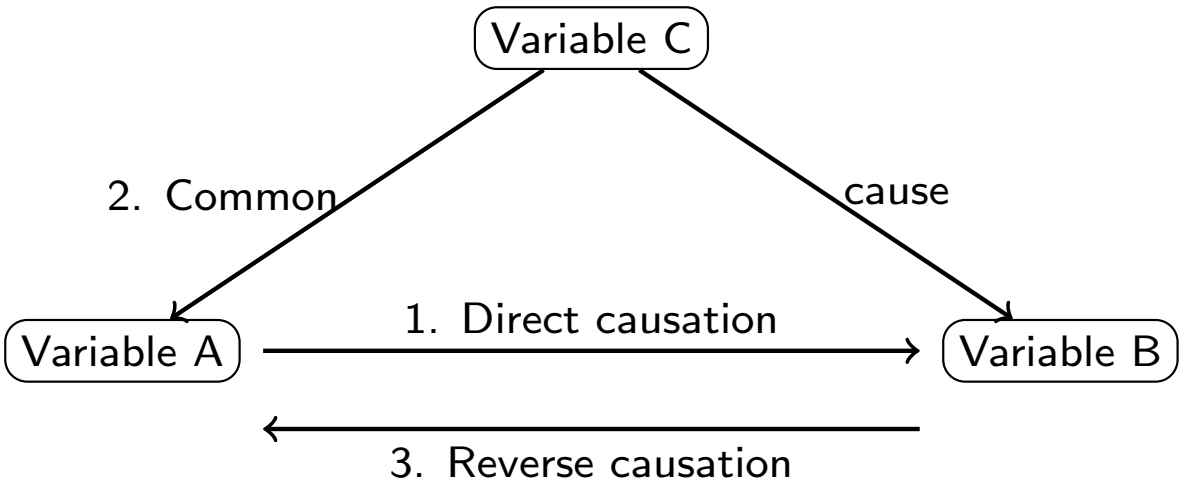
- A **biased sample** contains systematic errors that undermine generalization.
- Common biases include self-selection, convenience sampling, and confirmation bias.
- Even large samples can be unreliable if they aren't representative of the target population.
- Identifying and correcting for bias is essential in scientific research and polling.

## Examples of Biased Samples

- **Self-Selection Bias:** Surveying only people who volunteer to participate, which may not represent the general population.
- **Convenience Sampling:** Using a sample that is easy to access, such as surveying students in a single classroom to represent all students.
- **Confirmation Bias:** Selecting data that supports a preconceived notion while ignoring data that contradicts it.
- **Survivorship Bias:** Focusing on successful cases while overlooking those that failed, such as studying only successful companies to understand business practices.

# 33. Correlation vs. Causation Distinctions

- **Correlation** means two variables tend to occur together or change together.
- **Causation** means one variable directly influences or produces another.
- Correlation alone is insufficient to establish a causal relationship.
- Alternative explanations for correlation include coincidence, common cause, and reverse causation.




4. Mere coincidence (no actual relationship)

# 34. Hasty Generalization: Jumping to Conclusions

- **Hasty generalization** occurs when a conclusion is drawn from insufficient evidence.
- This fallacy involves making a broad claim based on too few examples or atypical cases.
- The error lies in treating a small or unrepresentative sample as adequate support.
- Hasty generalizations often reflect cognitive biases like the availability heuristic.

## Example

**Hasty Generalization Examples:**

"My neighbor's electric car had battery problems, so electric cars are unreliable."
"I got food poisoning at a Mexican restaurant once, so Mexican food is unsafe."
*Why fallacious:* Drawing broad conclusions about entire categories based on single instances or very limited experience.

# 35. Post Hoc Ergo Propter Hoc: After This, Therefore Because of This

- **Post hoc ergo propter hoc** assumes that if B follows A, A must have caused B.
- This fallacy mistakes temporal sequence for causal relationship.
- The error lies in ignoring other potential causes or coincidental timing.
- This fallacy is common in everyday reasoning, superstitions, and pseudoscience.

## Avoiding the Post Hoc Fallacy

To avoid this fallacy, ask:

- Could the timing be coincidental?
- Are there other plausible explanations?
- Is there a logical mechanism connecting cause and effect?
- Would controlled studies confirm the causal relationship?

# 36. Appeal to Unqualified Authority: When Expert Opinion Isn't Expert

- **Appeal to unqualified authority** occurs when citing someone who lacks relevant expertise.
- The fallacy treats expertise in one domain as transferable to unrelated domains.
- The error lies in confusing fame, status, or credentials with subject-specific knowledge.
- Even genuine experts can be wrong, especially outside their field of expertise.

| **Valid Expert Appeal** | **Appeal to Unqualified Authority** |
|---|---|
| Expert has relevant qualifications | Person lacks relevant expertise |
| Expert represents consensus view | Opinion contradicts consensus |
| Expert provides reasoning/evidence | Authority simply states conclusion |
| Field has established standards | Field lacks scientific standards |

# 37. Appeal to Ignorance: Absence of Evidence Isn't Evidence of Absence

- **Appeal to ignorance** claims something is true because it hasn't been proven false (or vice versa).
- This fallacy shifts the burden of proof improperly.
- The error lies in treating lack of evidence as evidence itself.
- Special contexts like legal presumptions ("innocent until proven guilty") are exceptions, not appeals to ignorance.

## Example

**Appeal to Ignorance Examples:**
"Scientists haven't proven that this herb doesn't cure cancer, so it must work."
"No one has proven that ghosts exist, so they must not exist."
*Why fallacious:* Both examples improperly treat absence of evidence as positive evidence for the contrary position.

# 38. Slippery Slope Fallacy: When Small Steps Don't Lead to Disaster

- The **slippery slope fallacy** claims that a small action will inevitably lead to extreme consequences.
- This fallacy exaggerates the likelihood of a chain of events without adequate justification.
- The error lies in assuming each step must follow without allowing for intervention or stabilization.
- Not all slippery slope arguments are fallacious—some chains of events are genuinely likely.

## Examples of Slippery Slope Fallacy

- "If we allow students to redo assignments, soon they'll expect to retake entire courses."
- "If we ban smoking in public places, eventually the government will ban all personal freedoms."
- "If we legalize marijuana, it will lead to the legalization of all drugs."
- "If we start regulating social media, it will lead to complete government control over the internet."

# 39. The Texas Sharpshooter Fallacy: Cherry-Picking Evidence

- The **Texas Sharpshooter Fallacy** involves cherry-picking data to fit a predetermined conclusion.
- This fallacy gets its name from a shooter who fires at a wall, then draws a target around the cluster of hits.
- The error lies in ignoring data that contradicts the desired pattern or selectively defining patterns.
- This fallacy is common in confirmation bias, conspiracy theories, and pseudoscience.

## How to Avoid Cherry-Picking

To avoid this fallacy:

- Define criteria and predictions before examining data
- Consider all relevant evidence, not just confirming examples
- Ask what evidence would disprove your hypothesis
- Use statistical methods that account for multiple comparisons

# 40. The Gambler's Fallacy: Misunderstanding Probability and Independence

- The **Gambler's Fallacy** assumes that independent random events are influenced by past outcomes.
- This fallacy leads people to believe that a string of one outcome increases chances of the opposite.
- The error lies in failing to understand statistical independence in random processes.
- Each independent trial has the same probability regardless of previous results.

## Example

**Gambler's Fallacy Example:**
"The roulette wheel has landed on black six times in a row. Red is definitely due to come up next!"
*Why fallacious:* The roulette wheel has no "memory" of previous spins. Each spin is an independent event with the same probability distribution. Past results do not influence future outcomes in truly random processes.