Relevance Fallacies

**Appeal to Pity**

1. Brings up sad things
2. Intends to evoke pity
3. Motivates psychologically to accept a conclusion
4. The sad things are irrelevant to the conclusion.

**Appeal to Fear (including force)**

1. Brings up scary things
2. Intends to evoke fear
3. Motivates psychologically to accept a conclusion
4. The scary things are either irrelevant or baseless.

**Appeal to the People**

1. Encourages audience to accept what others believe
2. Uses peer pressure to influence
   1. Inclusivist peer pressure or
   2. Exclusivist peer pressure
3. Direct or Indirect versions
4. Not claiming special expertise
5. Not common knowledge

**Ad Hominem\***

1. Responding to another, opposing argument, or testimony
2. Brings up negatives or perceived negatives about the opponent, specifically at least one of the following:
   1. Abusive (negative character traits)
   2. Circumstantial (motives to argue for the conclusion, predispositions to argue for the conclusion)
   3. Tu Quoque (hypocrisy on behalf of the opponent)
3. NOT a case of *legitimately* *undermining* testimony

**Straw Man\*[[1]](#footnote-1)\***

1. Responds to another, opposing, argument or claim
2. Misrepresents the opposing view, and then pretends to defeat that view.
3. May be relevant to, even defeat, some similar *sounding*, or related, possibly more general, view.

**Accident**

1. Appeals to a general rule or principle
2. The rule or principle is not absolute (There are exceptions.)
3. Applied to an exceptional case
4. Arguer acts as if either (a) the rule is absolute or (b) the case is typical.

**Red Herring**

1. Premises are not logically relevant to the conclusion
2. It is NOT one of the other fallacies of relevance (“other” category)
3. The psychological impetus for accepting the conclusion is distraction, often by a similar *sounding*, or related, possibly more general, conclusion.

* Sometimes this fallacy is said to occur when one gives arguments about a subject that is irrelevant to the established discussion, whether those arguments themselves are fallacious or not.

**Fallacies of Weak Induction**

**Appeal to Unqualified Authority**

1. Encourages audience to accept what others believe
2. Claims or assumes special expertise
3. One or more of the following problems:
   1. Appeals to people who are not experts in the appropriate field, or not experts at all.
   2. Lack of consensus among experts.
   3. Not an area of established knowledge.
   4. Appeals to untrustworthy experts.

**Appeal to Ignorance**

1. Can be paraphrased in the following way
   1. There is no evidence/proof that p
   2. Therefore, p is false
2. It is NOT the case that: If p were true, good evidence or a proof of p would have been discovered.

**Hasty Generalization**

1. Reasoning from a sample to the general population
2. One of the following
   1. The sample is too small
   2. The sample is biased
3. NOT one of the other, more specific, fallacies. (Some other fallacies could be subsumed under HG, especially FC and WA)

**False Cause**

Pattern 1: Post Hoc, Assuming Correlation = Cause, Oversimplified Cause

1. The conclusion is that X causes Y
2. Premises say that Y followed X, or that X is correlated with Y
3. Alternative explanations are NOT ruled out, especially the following
   1. Just coincidence
   2. It’s reversed, Y causes X
   3. Third thing, Z, causes both

Pattern 2: The Gambler’s Fallacy

1. Concerns a series of independent events or turns, where X is one possible result among others
2. Premises say that X has not come up as often as statistically expected in previous turns
3. Concludes X is more likely on the next turn

**Slippery Slope**

1. Argument that can be paraphrased:
   * A leads to B
   * B leads to C
   * …
   * … leads to Z.
   * Z is a catastrophe or an absurdity.
   * So, A must be rejected.
2. It’s NOT really likely that the “chain reaction” will follow.

**Weak Analogy**

1. Makes a comparison
2. The similarities are not relevant to the conclusion, and/or
3. There are differences that are relevant to the conclusion.

Fallacies of Presumption, Ambiguity and Grammatical Analogy

**Begging the Question (Circular Argument)**

1. Either:
   1. It has a premise that just restates the conclusion, typically in different words, or
   2. It would be impossible to have knowledge of the premises without already having prior knowledge of the conclusion.
2. The conclusion is not self-evident

**Complex Question**

1. Asks a question
2. The question suggests a range of legitimate answers
3. Either:
   1. All of the suggested answers are false; or
   2. All of the suggested answers are misleading; or
   3. There are, or at least might be, other legitimate answers.

**False Dichotomy**

1. A range of options is specified
2. Either:
   1. All of the specified options are false; or
   2. There are, or at least might be, other options.

**Suppressed Evidence**

1. The premises do provide some evidence to believe the conclusion, but
2. There is another argument against the conclusion, which
   1. Is clearly better than this argument; and
   2. The person should have realized it.

**Equivocation**

1. A word or phrase has more than one meaning.
2. One premise seems true if the word or phrase has the first meaning.
3. Another premise seems true if the word or phrase has the other meaning.
4. The support for the conclusion depends on the word meaning the same thing in both premises.

**Composition**

1. The premises say that each part of X has property P
2. The conclusion is that X, as a whole, has property P
3. Property P is not a type of feature that can be expected to compose.

**Division**

1. The premises say that X, as a whole, has property P
2. The conclusion says that each part of X has property P
3. Property P is not a type of feature that can be expected to divide.

1. \* \*It can happen that the opponent’s claim is misrepresented in a way that also reflects negatively on his or her character, e.g. “My opponent seems to think molesting children is an educational tool!” We will label this Straw Man. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)