

# Ad Hominem

## Definition of Ad Hominem

*Ad hominem* is a Latin word that means “against the man.” As the name suggests, it is a literary term that involves commenting on or against an opponent, to undermine him instead of his arguments.

There are cases in which, whether consciously or unconsciously, people start to question the opponent or his personal associations, rather than evaluating the soundness and validity of the [argument](#) that he presents. These types of arguments are usually mistaken for personal insults, but they are somehow different in nature, and the distinction is very subtle.

Arguers who are not familiar with the principles of making logical arguments commonly end up saying something that would draw the [audience](#)’s attention to the distasteful characteristics of the individual. Such people use this [fallacy](#) as a tool to deceive their audiences. Making such a blatant personal comment against somebody makes it hard for people to believe it isn’t true. Typically, even the arguer himself believes that such personal traits or circumstances are not enough to dispose of an individual’s opinion or argument. However, if looked at rationally, such arguments – even if true – never provide a valid reason to disregard someone’s criticism.

## Examples of Ad Hominem

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### Example #1:

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“How can you argue your case for vegetarianism when you are enjoying that steak?”

This clearly shows how a person is attacked instead of being addressed for or against his argument.

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### **Example #2:**

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A classic example of ad hominem fallacy is given below:

A: "All murderers are criminals, but a thief isn't a murderer, and so can't be a criminal."

B: "Well, you're a thief and a criminal, so there goes your argument."

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### **Example #3: *VeloNews: The Journal of Competitive Cycling***

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After an article about the retirement of Lance Armstrong, the VeloNews webpage shared a post with its readers. A commenter posted a comment saying how great an athlete Armstrong was, and that people should be proud of his achievements.

Another commenter wrote in response to the first commenter:

"He's not a great athlete; he's a fraud, a cheat and a liar. That's why not everybody is 'happy for Lance.'"

The reasons given by the arguer may very well be true, but he does not support his argument with reason and logic. He rather takes the disregarding approach. He does not say anything to prove that the premises he proposes are problematic. Instead, he goes on attacking the person who proposed them.

### **Function of Ad Hominem**

A writer's background is considered to be a very important factor when it comes to judging his work. A book written on a particular subject in history will be perceived differently, keeping in mind the background of the author. Therefore, it is important to understand that a writer's traits and

circumstances have a pivotal role to play in his feelings, thinking, and the construction of his arguments.

To put it simply, the considerations regarding the use of ad hominem can explain certain arguments and the motives behind them better.

Nevertheless, such considerations are not enough on their own to evaluate an individual's opinion, and are certainly not sufficient to disregard them as false or invalid.

The fact is that ad hominem is a kind of fallacy that leaves a great impression on the audience's mind. It is an argumentative flaw that is hard to spot in our daily lives. Although, the personal attack that has been made on the opponent might not have even a speck of truth in it, it somehow makes the audience biased. Ironically, despite being flawed, ad hominem has an amazing power of [persuasion](#).

The worst thing about using ad hominem purposely is that an opponent insults you publicly. Whenever this happens to you, you must recover from the humiliation and then point out the false connection in the argument, which was used as a trap for the audience. Moreover, the [dilemma](#) with ad hominem is that, once it has been used against a person, it smears his reputation. Once somebody makes such a judgmental argument about someone, the audience instead of evaluating it on logical grounds takes it to be true.