

## Fallacies / Propaganda Techniques

Definition: A fallacy is an **error in logic** or a **mistaken belief** especially one **based on unsound logic**. Fallacies present bias, one-sided messages that are designed to appeal to emotions (pathos), create an **illusion** of trust (ethos) OR disguise their message so that appears as if it is based on facts and statistics (logos).

Fallacies have existed ever since people have been trying to persuade one another of something. Ironically though, while fallacies should be avoided because of these flaws, many people deliberately use them hoping their audience will be deceived. In fact they are used so much in the media and propaganda, fallacies are sometimes called propaganda techniques. Commonly used fallacies have been given names and there are MANY of them. Below are just a few of.

### a. Testimonials

Testimonials usually involve **celebrities** or **other respected** people **endorsing**, or officially supporting, a product or idea. The person giving the testimonial could be famous, knowledgeable about the product (such as a doctor talking about medicine or a dentist about a brand of toothpaste), or just **an ordinary person** who claims the product has worked for them. When the testimonial comes from a celebrity, the hope is that you will want to use the product or support the idea simply because he or she does. Other testimonials try to persuade you to use or support something because it is good for you or it worked for others. Beware, though, because people are usually paid to give endorsements.

Ask yourself: Who is quoted in the testimonial? Is this person actually an expert about this product or idea? Does the product or idea have value without the testimony or endorsement?

### b. Bandwagon

"Jumping on the bandwagon" describes people choosing to **go along with the rest of the crowd** and creates the impression that because something is hugely **popular** or the **majority of people support an idea or buy a product, you should too**. People tend to want to be on the winning team and try to avoid being the odd one out. These messages create a sense of **peer pressure** to join in.

Example: If you have ever tried to convince your parents to let you do something because all your friends do it and their parents let them, then you have used bandwagon to try and persuade them.

Ask yourself: Does the message provide reasons or evidence besides that it is popular or the majority of people support this idea or buy this product?

### c. Name-calling

Name-calling is exactly what it sounds like: using **negative words** and **bad names** to **create fear** and **dislike** for people, ideas, or institutions. Name-calling can be **verbal** or **visual**. When done visually, it shows a person or thing in an **unflattering way**. You can find both kinds of this technique in political cartoons, political attack ads, and on news talk shows.

Example: If you have ever tried to convince your parents that the reason you are not doing well in a class is because your teacher is MEAN and "barks" at her students because she is always angry, then you have tried to create dislike for her and shift focus away from your work.

Ask yourself: Who is being called what? Is there a real connection between the names and the person/idea being attacked? Does the message involve words with strong **negative connotations**?

### d. Glittering Generalities

This technique always shows the subject of the message in a positive light and uses **simple, clever slogans** that are **easy to remember** or appeal to people's emotions, but **provide little or no information**.

Examples: Nike's "Just Do It" and McDonald's "Lovin' It" ads feature their product or logo with no other info except these slogans.

Ask yourself: What do these slogans or catchphrases really mean?

### e. Card Stacking

Card stacking uses **facts and figures** to **show one side as positive** and the **other side as negative**. The message shows only positive information about the person, product, or idea being promoted, and it shows only damaging information about the opposition or competition.

This technique is designed to make you think you are hearing both sides. In reality, you are actually hearing only one perspective.

Example: Credit card companies are notorious for using this type of strategy as they often feature ads about very low interest rates which in fact only apply for a short period of time when you first receive the card and then go up quite significantly.

Ask yourself: Are facts being changed or left out? What other pieces of information do I need to make an informed decision?

## f. Plain Folks

The plain folks technique is designed to send the message that a product or person is **just like you**. An advertiser will show an **ordinary-looking person** who vouches for how well a product works.

Example: Politicians have their picture taken visiting coffee shops, riding on tractors, and doing other things that everyday people do. The goal is to gain your trust by showing that people just like you use the product or support the person.

Ask yourself: Can I trust the person who is speaking or acting? What are the person's motives for visiting this place? Is this person really just like me?

## g. Transfer

The transfer technique **uses your feelings about one thing to get you to feel the same way about something else**. Transfer can use a **positive image** to persuade you **to like something** or a **negative image** to persuade you **to dislike something**.

Example: Natural settings, fruit and plants are often used to suggest beauty products are naturally made and will give you that same natural quality if you use them.

Ask yourself: What is the image trying to get me to feel? Is there an actual connection between the image and the person or product?

## h. False Cause & Effect

A claim that if one small thing happens, it will lead to a larger, much, much worse thing happening.

Examples:

- ☑ Students should not be allowed to leave the classroom to go to the restroom, because if we allow them to leave for the restroom, pretty soon we will have mayhem in the Quad and students running around all over the place.
- ☑ Violent video game sales should be restricted because several young criminals played the games before they committed their crimes.

## i. Red Herring

Introducing an irrelevant issue in order to distract the audience from the real issue under discussion

Example:

- ☑ "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, look at the bloody clothes, the murder weapon. Imagine the helpless screams of the victim. Such a crime deserves no verdict except guilty, guilty!"

->The fact that the crime was horrible doesn't prove the defendant's guilt.

## j. Begging the Question

Anytime you restate a claim in a different way as evidence to show it's true you are using this fallacy also referred to as **circular reasoning**.

Examples:

- ☑ Juveniles should not be treated the same as adults in a court of law because they are still teens.
- ☑ Eighteen-year-olds have the right to vote because the law allows them to.

## k. Either Or

A suggestion that there are only two choices available in a situation that really offers more than two options.

Examples:

- ☑ You can either spend your time studying and working hard to be successful, or you can just go out and party every night and never amount to anything.