

# Rhetological Fallacies

Errors and manipulation of rhetoric and logical thinking

## Appeal to the Mind

**Appeal to Anonymous Authority**  
Using evidence from an unnamed 'expert' or 'study' or generalized group (like 'scientists') to claim something is true.  
"They say that it takes 7 years to digest chewing gum."

**Appeal to Authority**  
Claiming something is true because an unqualified or untrustworthy 'expert' says it is.  
"Over 400 prominent scientists and engineers dispute global warming."

**Appeal to Common Practice**  
Claiming something is true because it's commonly practiced.  
"This bank has some problems with corruption. But there's nothing going on here that doesn't go on in all the other banks."

**Appeal to Ignorance**  
A claim is true simply because it has not been proven false (or false because it has not been proven true).  
"Nobody has proved to me there is a God. So there is no God."

**Appeal to Incredulity**  
Because a claim sounds unbelievable, it must not be true.  
"The eye is an incredibly complex biomechanical machine with thousands of interlocking parts. How could that exist without an intelligent designer?"

**Appeal to Money**  
Supposing that, if someone is rich or something is expensive, then it affects the truth of the claim.  
"If it costs more, it must be better."

**Appeal to Novelty**  
Supposing something is better because it is new or newer.  
"Awesome! The latest version of this operating system is going to make my computer faster and better..."

**Appeal to Popular Belief**  
Claiming something is true because the majority of people believe it.  
"Milk is good for your bones."

**Appeal to Probability**  
Assuming because something could happen, it will inevitably happen.  
"There are billions of galaxies with billions of stars in the universe. So there must be another planet with intelligent life on it."

**Appeal to Tradition**  
Claiming something is true because it's (apparently) always been that way.  
"Marriage is the union between man and women. Therefore gay marriage is wrong."

## Appeal to Emotions

**Appeal to Consequences of a Belief**  
Arguing a belief is false because it implies something you'd rather not believe.  
"That can't be the Senator on that sextape. If it were, he'd be lying about not knowing her. And he's not the kind of man who would lie."

**Appeal to Fear**  
An argument is made by increasing fear and prejudice towards the opposing side.  
"Before you know it there will be more mosques than churches."

**Appeal to Flattery**  
Using an irrelevant compliment to slip in an unfounded claim which is accepted along with the compliment.  
"Intelligent and sophisticated readers will of course recognise a fallacy like this when they read one."

**Appeal to Nature**  
Making your claim seem more true by drawing a comparison with the "good" natural world.  
"Of course homosexuality is unnatural. You don't see same-sex animals copulating."

**Appeal to Pity**  
Attempt to induce pity to sway opponents.  
"The former dictator is an old, dying man. It's wrong to make him stand trial for these alleged offenses."

**Appeal to Ridicule**  
Presenting the opponent's argument in a way that makes it appear absurd.  
"Faith in God is like believing in Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy."

**Appeal to Spite**  
Dismissing a claim by appealing to personal bias against the claimant.  
"Don't you just hate how those rich Liberal Hollywood actors go on TV to promote their agendas?"

**Appeal to Wishful Thinking**  
Suggesting a claim is true or false just because you strongly hope it is.  
"The President wouldn't lie. He's our leader and a good American."

## Garbled Cause & Effect

**Affirming the Consequent**  
Assuming there's only one explanation for the observation you're making.  
"Marriage often results in the birth of children. So that's the reason why it exists."

**Circular Logic**  
A conclusion is derived from a premise based on the conclusion.  
"Stripping privacy rights only matters to those with something to hide. You must have something to hide if you oppose privacy protection."

**Cum Hoc Ergo Propter Hoc**  
Claiming two events that occur together must have a cause-and-effect relationship. (Correlation = cause).  
"Teenagers in gangs listen to rap music with violent themes. Rap music inspires violence in teenagers."

**Denying the Antecedent**  
There isn't only one explanation for an outcome. So it's false to assume the cause based on the effect.  
"If you get a degree, you'll get a good job. If you don't get a degree, you won't get a good job."

**Ignoring a Common Cause**  
Claiming one event must have caused the other when a third (unlooked for) event is probably the cause.  
"We had the 60s sexual revolution, and now people are dying of AIDS."

**Post Hoc Ergo Propter Hoc**  
Claiming that because one event followed another, it was also caused by it.  
"Since the election of the President more people than ever are unemployed. Therefore the President has damaged the economy."

**Two Wrongs Make a Right**  
Assuming that if one wrong is committed, another wrong will cancel it out.  
"Sure - the conditions in this prison are cruel and dehumanising. But these inmates are criminals!"

## On the Attack

**Ad Hominem**  
Bypassing the argument by launching an irrelevant attack on the person and not their claim.  
"Anyone that says we should build the Ground Zero Mosque is an American-hating liberal."

**Burden of Proof**  
I don't need to prove my claim - you must prove it is false.  
"I maintain long-term solar cycles are the cause of global warming. Show me I'm wrong."

**Circumstance Ad Hominem**  
Stating a claim isn't credible only because of the advocate's interests in their claim.  
"A study into the health risks of mobile phone involved mobile phone companies. Therefore, the study cannot be trusted."

**Genetic Fallacy**  
Attacking the cause or origin of a claim, rather than its substance.  
"Of course, mainstream liberal media aren't going to say Barack Obama is a Muslim."

**Guilt by Association**  
Discrediting an idea or claim by associating it with an undesirable person or group.  
"Oh you want to relax the anti-terrorism laws just like the terrorists want us to do. Are you saying you support terrorism?"

**Straw Man**  
Creating a distorted or simplified caricature of your opponent's argument, and then arguing against that.  
"You say Israel should stop building settlements on the West Bank in violation of treaty. So you're saying Israel doesn't have the right to be a nation?"

## Faulty Deduction

**Anecdotal Evidence**  
Discounting evidence arrived at by systematic search or testing in favor of a few firsthand stories.  
"I'm going to carry on smoking. My grandfather smoked 40 a day and he lived until he was 90!"

**Composition**  
Assuming that characteristics or beliefs of some or all of a group applies to the entire group.  
"Recent terrorist attacks have been carried out by radical Islamic groups. Therefore all terrorists are muslims."

**Division**  
Assuming that characteristics or beliefs of a group automatically apply to any individual member.  
"Many Conservatives wish to ban gay marriage, discredit climate change, and deny evolution. Therefore all conservatives are homophobic, anti-environmental creationists."

**Design Fallacy**  
Assuming that because something is nicely designed or beautifully visualized it's more true.  
"Er..."

**Gambler's Fallacy**  
Assuming the history of outcomes will affect future outcomes.  
"I've flipped this coin 10 times in a row, and it's been heads. Therefore the next coin flip is more likely to come up tails."

**Hasty Generalization**  
Drawing a general conclusion from a tiny sample.  
"I just got cut off by the woman driver in front. Women can't drive."

**Jumping to Conclusions**  
Drawing a quick conclusion without fairly considering relevant (and easily available) evidence.  
"She wants birth control in her medical coverage? What a slut!"

**Middle Ground**  
Assuming because two opposing arguments have merit, the answer must lie somewhere between them.  
"I rear ended your car but I don't think I should pay for the damage. You think I should pay for all the damage. A fair compromise would be to split the bill in half."

**Perfectionist Fallacy**  
Assuming that the only option on the table is perfect success, then rejecting anything that will not work perfectly.  
"What's the point of this anti-drunk driving campaign? People are still going to drink and drive no matter what."

**Relativist Fallacy**  
Rejecting a claim because of a belief that truth is relative to a person or group.  
"That's perhaps true for you. But it's not true for me."

**Spotlight**  
Assuming an observation from a small sample size applies to an entire group.  
"This large shoe manufacturer employs children in sweatshops. Therefore all shoe companies are evil child-slave owners!"

**Sweeping Generalisation**  
Applying a general rule too broadly.  
"Those young men rioted because they lacked morally responsible fathers."

**Undistributed Middle**  
Assuming because two things share a property, that makes them the same thing.  
"A theory can mean an unproven idea. Scientists use the term evolutionary theory. Therefore evolution is an unproven idea."

## Manipulating Content

**Ad Hoc Rescue**  
Trying to save a cherished belief by repeatedly revising the argument to explain away problems.  
"...But apart from better sanitation, medicine, education, irrigation, public health, roads, a freshwater system and public order... what have the Romans done for us?"

**Begging the Question**  
Making a claim while leaving out one or more major contributing factors that may affect the conclusion.  
"If we label food with warning labels, it will encourage people to eat more healthily."

**Biased Generalizing**  
Generalizing from an unrepresentative sample to increase the strength of your argument.  
"Our website poll found that 90% of internet users oppose online piracy laws."

**Confirmation Bias**  
Cherry-picking evidence that supports your idea while ignoring contradicting evidence.  
"It's obvious 9-11 was an American-government led conspiracy to justify war in Iraq and Afghanistan. No plane hit the Pentagon. The Twin Towers collapse was a controlled demolition... etc"

**False Dilemma**  
Presenting two opposing options as the only two options while hiding alternatives.  
"We're going to have to cut the education budget or go deeper into debt. We can't afford to go deeper into debt. So we'll have to cut the education budget."

**Lie**  
An outright untruth repeated knowingly as a fact.  
"I did not have sexual relations with that woman."

**Misleading Vividness**  
Describing an occurrence in vivid detail, even if it is a rare occurrence, to convince someone that it is a problem.  
"After a court decision to legalise gay marriage, school libraries were required to stock some-sex literature, primary school children were given homosexual fairy stories and even manuals of explicit homosexual advocacy"

**Red Herring**  
Introducing irrelevant material to the argument to distract and lead towards a different conclusion.  
"The Senator needs't account for irregularities in his expenses. After all, there are other senators who have done far worse things."

**Slippery Slope**  
Assuming a relatively small first step will inevitably lead to a chain of related (negative) events.  
"If we legalize marijuana, more people will start using crack and heroin. Then we'd have to legalize those too."

**Suppressed Evidence**  
Intentionally failing to use significant and relevant information which counts against one's own conclusion.  
"The Iraqi regime possesses and produces chemical and biological weapons. It is seeking nuclear weapons."

**Unfalsifiability**  
Offering a claim that cannot be proven false, because there is no way to check if it is false or not.  
"He lied because he's possessed by demons."

## InformationIsBeautiful.net

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sources: Wikipedia, Fallacy Files.org, Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Skeptic Dictionary, ChangingMinds.org, LogicallyFallacious.com, e-education.net, EvolutionWiki.org, Infidels.org, Philosophical Society, Spjued, TVTropes.org, Santaros.edu, A Concise Introduction to Logic (Patrick J Hurley), Beginners Guide to the Scientific Method (Stephen S. Carey)  
thanks to: Johnathan, Wes, Donbove, Rumley, DJ, Roberto Ruiz

# Rhetorical Fallacies Example


Errors and manipulations of rhetoric and logical thinking

**“Cardinal O’Brien** is President of the Bishops’ Conference of Scotland and Britain’s most senior Catholic. In an recent article for the Daily Telegraph newspaper, he laid out his and his institution’s objections to same-sex marriage. By our count he used close to **25** separate rhetorical techniques and fallacies to make his case.

“...” indicates a short edit for length

1 “The Government is this month launching a consultation on same-sex marriage, asking the public whether it should be introduced in England and Wales.”


**True**  
A fair and balanced statement



2 “On the surface, the question of same-sex marriage may seem to be an innocuous one. Civil partnerships have been in place for several years now, allowing same-sex couples to register their relationship and enjoy a variety of legal protections.”


3 “When these arrangements were introduced, supporters were at pains to point out that they didn’t want marriage, accepting that marriage had only ever meant the legal union of a man and a woman.”

**Composition**  
Assuming that characteristics or beliefs of some of a group applies to the entire group  
*Claims that “all” supporters as a single group did not want marriage.*



4 “Those of us who were not in favour of civil partnership, believing that such relationships are harmful to the physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing of those involved, warned that in time marriage would be demanded too. We were accused of scaremongering then, yet exactly such demands are upon us now.”

**Appeal to Pity**  
Attempt to induce pity to sway opponents.  
*“They called us ‘scaremongers!’”*




5 Since all the legal rights of marriage are already available to homosexual couples, it is clear that this proposal is not about rights, but rather is an attempt to redefine marriage for the whole of society at the behest of a small minority of activists.

**Appeal to Fear**  
An argument is made by increasing fear and prejudice towards the opposing side  
*“See? They’re out to corrupt the whole of society!”*




**Begging the Question**  
Hiding other contributory factors and supporting the truth of your claim without any evidence other than the conclusion of your claim.  
*“Ignores societal trends. Implies instead the only reason for gay marriage advocacy is because of a small minority of activists.”*

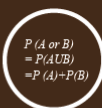


6 Redefining marriage will have huge implications for what is taught in our schools, and for wider society. It will redefine society since the institution of marriage is one of the fundamental building blocks of society. The repercussions of enacting same-sex marriage into law will be immense.

**Slippery Slope**  
Assuming a relatively small first step will inevitably lead to a chain of related (negative) events  
*“If we allow this, the whole of society will come tumbling down.”*



**Appeal to Probability**  
Assuming because something could happen, it will inevitably happen.  
$$P(A \text{ or } B) = P(A \cup B) = P(A) + P(B)$$



7 But can we simply redefine terms at a whim? Can a word whose meaning has been clearly understood in every society throughout history suddenly be changed to mean something else?

**Appeal to Tradition**  
Claiming something is true because it’s (apparently) always been that way.  
*“Marriage cannot be changed because it’s always been the same. And things must not change.”*



**Genetic Fallacy**  
Attacking the cause or origin of a claim, rather than its substance.  
*Claiming the request for gay marriage is a ‘whim’*




**Suppressed Evidence**  
Intentionally failing to use significant and relevant information which counts against one’s own conclusion.  
*Asserts a single male-female configuration for marriage. Yet same sex marriage has been practiced in several societies for thousands of years.*




8 If same-sex marriage is enacted into law what will happen to the teacher who wants to tell pupils that marriage can only mean – and has only ever meant – the union of a man and a woman?

**Appeal to Consequences of a Belief**  
Arguing a belief is false because it implies something you’d rather not believe.  
*That teacher will be in a nasty professional predicament.*




9 Will that teacher’s right to hold and teach this view be respected or will it be removed? Will both teacher and pupils simply become the next victims of the tyranny of tolerance, heretics, whose dissent from state-imposed orthodoxy must be crushed at all costs?

**Slippery Slope**  
Assuming a relatively small first step will inevitably lead to a chain of related (negative) events  
*Implying that teachers and pupils will become victims of tyranny.*



10 “In Article 16 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, marriage is defined as a relationship between men and women. But when our politicians suggest jettisoning the established understanding of marriage and subverting its meaning they aren’t derided.”


**Lie**  
An outright untruth repeated knowingly as a fact.  
*“The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states men and women have a right to marry, but does not say who they can and can’t marry.”*



**Appeal to Tradition**  
Claiming something is true because it’s (apparently) always been that way.  
*The declaration of human rights was written in 1949 when homosexuality was illegal in most Western countries.*



**Appeal to Spite**  
Dismissing a claim by appealing to personal bias against the claimant.  
*Encouraging derision of his opponents.*



11 “Instead, their attempt to redefine reality is given a polite hearing, their madness is indulged. Their proposal represents a grotesque subversion of a universally accepted human right.”

**Ad Hominem**  
Bypassing the argument by launching an irrelevant attack on the person and not their claim.  
*“Implies opponents are mad and their views grotesque.”*



12 As an institution, marriage long predates the existence of any state or government. It was not created by governments and should not be changed by them.

**Appeal to Tradition**  
Claiming something is true because it’s (apparently) always been that way.



13 Instead, recognising the innumerable benefits which marriage brings to society, they should act to protect and uphold marriage, not attack or dismantle it.

## Categories

Faulty Deduction

Garbled Cause & Effect

Appeal to Emotions

Appeal to the Mind

Manipulating Content

On the Attack

14 "This is a point of view that would have been endorsed and accepted only a few years ago, yet today advancing a traditional understanding of marriage risks one being labelled an intolerant bigot."

15 "There is no doubt that, as a society, we have become blasé about the importance of marriage as a stabilising influence and less inclined to prize it as a worthwhile institution."

16 "It has been damaged and undermined over the course of a generation, yet marriage has always existed in order to bring men and women together so that the children born of those unions will have a mother and a father."

17 "This brings us to the one perspective which seems to be completely lost or ignored: ...the child. All children deserve to begin life with a mother and father; the evidence in favour of the stability and well-being which this provides is overwhelming and unequivocal. It cannot be provided by a same-sex couple, however well-intentioned they may be."

18 "Same-sex marriage would eliminate entirely in law the basic idea of a mother and a father for every child. It would create a society which deliberately chooses to deprive a child of either a mother or a father."

19 Other dangers exist. If marriage can be redefined so that it no longer means a man and a woman but two men or two women, why stop there? Why not allow three men or a woman and two men to constitute a marriage..? If marriage is simply about adults who love each other, on what basis can three adults ...be prevented from marrying?

20 In November 2003, after Massachusetts ... legalise[d] gay marriage, school libraries were required to stock same-sex literature; primary schoolchildren were given homosexual fairy stories such as King & King. Some high school students were even given an explicit manual of homosexual advocacy entitled The Little Black Book: Queer in the 21st Century.

21 Disingenuously, the Government has suggested that same-sex marriage wouldn't be compulsory and churches could choose to opt out. This is staggeringly arrogant.

22 No Government has the moral authority to dismantle the universally understood meaning of marriage.

23 Imagine for a moment that the Government had decided to legalise slavery but assured us that "no one will be forced to keep a slave". Would such worthless assurances calm our fury? Would they justify dismantling a fundamental human right? Or would they simply amount to weasel words masking a great wrong?

24 The Universal Declaration on Human Rights is crystal clear: marriage is a right which applies to men and women, "the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State".

25 "This universal truth is so self-evident that it shouldn't need to be repeated."

26 If the Government attempts to demolish a universally recognised human right, they will have forfeited the trust which society has placed in them and their intolerance will shame the United Kingdom in the eyes of the world.

**Appeal to Pity**  
Attempt to induce pity to sway opponents.  
*"See? They're calling 'me' a bigot!"*

**Red Herring**  
Introducing irrelevant material to the argument to distract and lead towards a different conclusion.  
*Suddenly widening scope to the whole of society.*

**Affirming the Consequent**  
Assuming there's only one explanation for the observation you're making.  
*"Marriage often results in the birth of children. So that's the main reason why it exists."*

**Suppressed Evidence**  
Intentionally failing to use significant and relevant information which counts against one's own conclusion.  
*There is ample evidence that same-sex parents do not cause harm to children.*

**False Dilemma**  
Presenting two opposing options as the only two options while hiding alternatives.  
*"The only outcome of society which allows same-sex marriage: deprivation."*

**Slippery Slope**  
Assuming a relatively small first step will inevitably lead to a chain of related (negative) events

**Misleading Vividness**  
Describing an occurrence in vivid detail, even if it is a rare occurrence, to convince someone that it is a problem.

**Ad Hominem**  
Bypassing the argument by launching an irrelevant attack on the person and not their claim.  
*"The government is arrogant for making concessions."*

**Appeal to Tradition**  
Claiming something is true because it's (apparently) always been that way.  
*"Marriage as defined by the arguer has existed since the beginning of the universe."*

**Red Herring**  
Introducing irrelevant material to the argument to distract and lead towards a different conclusion.

**Appeal to Authority**  
Claiming something is true because an unqualified or untrustworthy 'expert' says it is.  
*"The document was written in 1948, when homosexuality was still considered illegal in most Western nations."*

**Appeal to Popular Belief**  
Claiming something is true because the majority of people believe it.

**Appeal to Fear**  
An argument is made by increasing fear and prejudice towards the opposing side  
*"Our country will be shamed in front of the world, except in the 20 countries that permit or are debating same-sex marriage."*

**Composition**  
Assuming that characteristics or beliefs of some or all of a group applies to the entire group  
*Assumes his perception is shared by "we" (i.e. all of us)*

**Appeal to Tradition**  
Claiming something is true because it's (apparently) always been that way.

**Ignoring a Common Cause**  
Claiming one event must have caused the other when a third (unlooked for) event is probably the cause  
*"Love and a safe home also causes stability and well-being in children."*

**Straw Man**  
Creating a distorted or simplified caricature of your opponent's argument, and then arguing against that.

**Confirmation Bias**  
Cherry-picking evidence that supports your idea while ignoring contradicting evidence.

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**Ad Hominem**  
Bypassing the argument by launching an irrelevant attack on the person and not their claim.  
*"The government is arrogant for making concessions."*

**Composition**  
Assuming that characteristics or beliefs of some or all of a group applies to the entire group  
*"Claim we all universally understand the meaning of marriage."*

**Guilt by Association**  
Discrediting an idea or claim by associating it with an undesirable person or group.  
*"Legalised slavery is bad. Ergo legalised same-sex marriage is bad."*

**Anecdotal Evidence**  
Discounting evidence arrived at by systematic search or testing in favor of a few firsthand stories.  
*Asserts claim but offers no evidence that marriage is less important, more stabilising and less prized.*

**Appeal to Common Practice**  
Claiming something is true because it's commonly practiced.

# SCORECARD



estimated fallacies

38

one every 26 words

different fallacies

24

one every 40 words

most common fallacies



appeal to fear



appeal to tradition

most common category



manipulating content

see a full index of rhetological fallacies at: [bit.ly/rhetological2](http://bit.ly/rhetological2)

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