

2008 Presidential Debate Logical Fallacy Cheat Sheet

Ad hominem

An argument that attacks the person, rather than addressing the argument itself.

- “He’s a celebrity.”

—Ad hominem Tu Quoque

Literally, you too. This is an attempt to justify wrong action because someone else also does it.

- “I’m not as unqualified for this office as much as *she* is!”

—Ad baculum

Abusive, directly or indirectly threatening.

Poisoning the Well

Where averse information is given to the audience to color the opponent before he has a chance to speak.

Argument from (false) authority

Stating that a claim is true because a person or group of perceived authority says it is true. The truth of a claim should ultimately rest on logic and evidence, not the authority of the person promoting it.

Cum hoc ergo propter hoc (correlation implies causation)

This fallacy is often used to give a statistical correlation a causal interpretation.

- “We haven’t been attacked since 9/11, thanks to the President.”

False Continuum

Because there is no definitive demarcation line between two extremes, that the distinction between the extremes is not real or meaningful.

- “We both want change, therefore, just pick me.”

False Dichotomy

Arbitrarily reducing a set of many possibilities to only two.

- “He didn’t support this bill, therefore he’s in favor of Herpes.”

Special Pleading (ad hoc reasoning)

This is a subtle fallacy in which one arbitrarily introduces new elements into an argument in order to fix them. Inconsistency, cherry picking.

Moving the Goalpost

A method of denial arbitrarily moving the criteria for ‘proof’ or acceptance out of range of whatever evidence currently exists.

Shifting the Burden of Proof

An attempt to argue that view A is to be preferred to view B because “B cannot be proven” when the burden of proof is laid on view B to an impossibly heavy level.

—Negative Proof Fallacy

That, because a premise cannot be proven false, the premise must be true; or that, because a premise cannot be proven true, the premise must be false.

Straw Man

Arguing against a position which you create specifically to be easy to argue against, rather than the position actually held by those who oppose your point of view.

- “He wants to teach sex ed to children in the womb!”

—Slippery Slope

Arguing a position is not consistent or tenable because accepting the position means that the extreme of the position must also be accepted.

- “His policies would have freed a convicted tree rapist to rape again.”

Red Herring

A red herring is an argument, given in response to another argument, which does not address the original issue.

- “But let’s not talk about that, let’s talk about the AIDS.”

Ignoratio elechi (irrelevant conclusion, irrelevant thesis)

Presenting an argument, possibly valid, that does not address the issue in question.

Bare assertion fallacy

In which something is assumed to be true purely because one says it is true.

- “I’m a Maverick.”

Appeal to Emotion (Ridicule, Anger, Sadness, Fear, etc.)

where an argument is made due to the manipulation of emotions, rather than the use of valid reasoning.

- “Do it for a sad person in a swing state: they have it bad.”

Begging the Question (petitio principii)

Assuming the conclusion in the premises.

- “Abortion is the killing of a human being, which is murder, thus Roe v. Wade should be outlawed.”