Twitter Thread by Sahil Bloom



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Logical fallacies are errors in reasoning that undermine the quality of an argument.

THREAD: 20 common logical fallacies to learn, identify, and avoid:

Ad Hominem

Latin for "to the person" - an attack of the person rather than the argument.

Instead of addressing the argument and its points and merits, the offender attempts to refute the opposition on the basis of personal characteristics.

All-too-common in politics.

The Texas Sharpshooter

A Texan fires a gun at a barn wall and then paints a target around the closest cluster of bullet holes to create the appearance of accuracy.

Selecting and highlighting evidence that supports the conclusion while ignoring evidence that may refute it.

The Bandwagon Fallacy

An assumption of truth on the basis of the majority of people believing it to be true.

"Everyone believes X, so obviously X is true."

Typically offered without regard for the qualifications or ability of the people in question to validate the claim.

Straw Man

The offender ignores the actual argument and replaces it with a flimsy, distorted, easily-refuted argument (a “straw man”).

By replacing a strong argument with a weak one, the offender can create the illusion of an easy, swift victory.

Red Herring

The kippered herring was a smelly fish used to distract hunting dogs while training them to stay focused on a scent.

"Red herring" is now synonymous with distraction.

The offender distracts from the argument with a seemingly related (but actually unrelated) point.

Hasty Generalization

Jumping to conclusions.

Material, wide-ranging conclusions are made on the basis of an immaterial, narrow body of evidence.

Insufficient evidence has been gathered to justify the claimed conclusions.

Appeal to Authority

The over-reliance on the perspective of an "expert" to support the legitimacy of an argument.

The qualifications of the authority figure in the field of question must be considered.

Their support can be a feature - but not a pillar - of the argument.

No True Scotsman

The "appeal to purity" - the changing of the original argument to evade a counter-argument.

You claim a Scotsman never drinks scotch with soda. Charles says he is a Scotsman and drinks scotch with soda. You exclaim that Charles must not be a true Scotsman!

Sunk Cost Fallacy

Sunk costs are the economic costs already invested in an activity that cannot be recovered.

The fallacy is found in thinking that you should continue on the basis of all that you've put in, with no regard for future costs or likelihood of ultimate success.

Non-Sequitur

The conclusion does not follow logically from the premises.

Presented evidence provides little or no actual support for the argument.

“Charles ate fish for dinner and is well-spoken, so he must be a banker.”

False Dilemma

Presenting only two choices or alternatives when there are many more that exist.

Ignores nuance and lends itself to extreme positions.

Typically reduces the potential for compromise, as the two options are painted as being extremely far apart.

Tu Quoque

Latin for “you too” - attempting to discredit an opponent’s argument by pointing out personal behavior as being inconsistent with their argument.

Targeting the hypocrisy of the opponent.

“Don’t question my integrity, look at all of the bad things you’ve done!”

Slippery Slope

An argument that begins with a benign starting point before using a series of successive steps to get to a more radical, extreme end point.

No single step appears ridiculous on the surface, but the connection of multiple steps into a series is highly-improbable.

Begging the Question

A form of circular reasoning in which the argument is presented in such a way that the conclusion is included in the premise.

“Ghosts are real because I once experienced something that had to be a ghost.”

Easy to identify. The logic collapses on itself.

Loaded Question

Asking a question with a presumption built into the question (pre-loaded!).

Typically intended to be inflammatory in nature.

The individual on the receiving end of the question is forced to respond despite the baseless, irrelevant nature of the presumption.

Post Hoc Ergo Propter Hoc

Argues that since Event B followed Event A, Event B must have been caused by Event A.

Just because B followed A, doesn’t necessarily mean that B was caused by A.

Correlation ≠ Causation.

Equivocation

Comes from the roots “equal” and “voice” - a single word or phrase can say two very different things.

Occurs when the offender uses a word or phrase in an intentionally misleading manner that sounds like it’s saying one thing but is actually saying something else.

Personal Incredulity

You are unable to understand or believe something, therefore you argue that it cannot be true.

Complex topics often require significant upfront work to understand, so an inability to understand cannot be used to argue the illegitimacy of a claim.

Burden of Proof

The inability to provide evidence that a claim is false is used as justification that the claim is true.

The burden of proof lies with the person making the claim to provide supporting evidence.

The lack of refuting evidence is not supporting evidence.

The Fallacy Fallacy

Incorrectly assumes that a claim must be false if a fallacy was used to argue the claim.

Just because someone has poorly argued a claim, does not mean the claim itself is definitively false.

So those are 20 common logical fallacies to learn, identify, and avoid.

I will be turning this thread into a longer-form piece for my newsletter, where I will explore these in greater depth (including examples!).

Subscribe below so you don’t miss it: https://t.co/qMB8i60ney

And if you are a job seeker looking to leverage your improved reasoning and debate skills to advance your career, check out my curated job board, where I share unique roles at high-growth companies in finance and tech.

New roles drop every week! https://t.co/33hwlEqYaW

And follow me @SahilBloom for more writing on decision-making, mental models, business, and finance.

You can find all of my threads (120+!) in the meta-thread below: https://t.co/Q2PggDyCJM

1/ An Allegory of Finance

I have been posting a lot of educational (and humorous!) threads on finance, money, and economics.

My mission is simple: to demystify these concepts and make them accessible to everyone.

All of the threads can be found below. Enjoy and please share!

— Sahil Bloom (@SahilBloom) July 18, 2020