

Logic: What Stirs an Audience

Are we rational human beings? Do we follow all forms of logic? Do we only act if it feels right? Do we even want the facts all the time? Have you ever tried to persuade an emotional person with logic? We generally think we make decisions based on facts, but truly this is not the case. It has been found that when a person agrees with a particular message, they tend to perceive it as being more logical or rational. When a person disagrees with the message, on the other hand, they perceive it as an emotional plea. The truth is that our decision-making process relies on a mixture between emotion and its partner, logic. However, we cannot rely entirely on emotion until our logical side has been engaged.

In one study, twenty-one students prepared speeches that were written from either a logical or an emotional standpoint. The speeches were presented, filmed, and then evaluated by other college students. Interestingly, there was no real consistency in the findings except that speeches bearing a message that the evaluator agreed with were rated as more rational (even if they were intended to be emotional), while those the evaluator did not agree with were considered to be more emotional (even though some of those were intended to be logical). It seemed to be the case that whether a speech was logical or emotional depended on the listener. Researchers also concluded that, as a general rule, people seem unable to consistently distinguish between logical and emotional appeals.

The logical side of an argument appeals to our reason. Reasoning is the process of drawing a conclusion based on evidence. For an argument to be legitimate, it has to be true and valid, and logical reasoning must be used to back it up. Many persuaders and marketers use faulty forms of logic, leaving gaping holes that require the audience to make assumptions and fill in the blanks. These are called logical fallacies. A fallacy is, very generally, an error in reasoning. This differs from a factual error, which is simply being wrong about the facts. In other words, a fallacy is an “argument” in which the premises don’t completely support the conclusion. In the next section, some of the most common logical fallacies are outlined.

Common Logical Fallacies

1. Faulty Cause: assumes that because one thing follows another, the second thing was definitively caused by the first. **Example:** Shawn broke his mother’s mirror, and sure enough, he was in a car wreck the next week.

2. Sweeping Generalization: assumes that what is true in most cases must be true in all cases. **Example:** We can’t hire this candidate because he’s an ex-felon, and studies show that most ex-felons experience relapses.

3. Hasty Generalization: assumes that a small piece of information is soundly representative of the whole situation. **Example:** I don’t like Thai food very much. The food I tried at this one Thai restaurant just was terrible and I was sick for days.

4. Faulty Analogy: assumes that if two things are alike in some ways, they must be alike in all ways. **Example:** Britany Spears and Christina Aguilera dress the same and sing the same type of music, so they have very similar personalities.

5. Faulty Sign: assumes that one event is a reliable predictor of another. **Example:** That guy is wearing a big Starter jacket, has a tattoo, and wears baggy pants. He's probably a gang member.

6. Tautology: defining an argument in a manner that makes it impossible to disprove. **Example:** You are a disagreeable person and, if you disagree with me, it will just prove even more how disagreeable you are.

7. Appeal to Authority: justifies an argument by citing a famous or popular person who also supports the argument. **Example:** Those shoes are great for Michael Jordan, so they'll be great for me.

8. Slippery Slope: assumes that a particular step invariably leads to similar steps, culminating with a negative outcome. **Example:** If I let one student hand in their paper late, then I'll have to let others hand theirs in late, too, and before you know it, everyone will be begging for an extension.

9. Red Herring: attempts to divert attention away from the real issue. **Example:** When accused by his wife of cheating at cards, Frank says, "Nothing I do ever pleases you. I spent a whole week cleaning out the garage, and then all you did was complain about how I'd reorganized it."

10. Appeal to Ignorance: uses a person's inability to disprove a claim as proof that the claim is right. **Example:** We know there are people living on other planets in other galaxies because no one can prove that there're not.