

## **Fallacies: How to Recognize and Avoid Them - Joe Conlon**

- A. Activists
  - 1. Frequently wrong
  - 2. Never in doubt
- B. What is a fallacy
  - 1. Logical errors that weaken arguments
  - 2. Commonplace
  - 3. Can be persuasive
  - 4. Are often driven by strong feelings or agendas
- C. Some fallacies
  - 1. Begging the question
    - a) Circular reasoning
    - b) Example - there is a demand because everyone wants it
    - c) Accepts as fact something that has yet to be proven
    - d) Premise says the same thing as the conclusion just using different words
  - 2. Straw Man
    - a) Sets up a weak version of the opponent's position and knocks it down
    - b) Often involves exaggeration
    - c) Only refers to specific point, not whole issue
  - 3. Red herring
    - a) Tangential reasoning
    - b) Argument is plausible but irrelevant
    - c) Need to explain how each premise supports the conclusion
  - 4. Post hoc
    - a) Correlation is not the same as causation
    - b) Assumes that A causes B because A follow B
    - c) May not be wrong but needs to be proven
    - d) Ex - bee kill caused by mosquito control because mosquito control sprayed before the bee kill
  - 5. Ad Hominem
    - a) Attack the person not the issue
    - b) Ex - the chemical industry only cares about selling chemicals so if you work for the industry you can not be trusted
  - 6. Tu Quoque
    - a) Focus attention on people rather than argument or evidence
    - b) I can use household chemicals because you use chemicals to control mosquitoes
  - 7. Slippery slope
    - a) Chain reaction leading to dire consequences
    - b) No proof that the cascade will occur
  - 8. Appeal to authority
    - a) Add strength to argument by referring to a supposed authority
    - b) Check the credentials of the authority
  - 9. False dichotomy
    - a) Argument states that there are only two choices and then eliminates one
    - b) Rarely is only one choice possible
- D. Dealing with opponents
  - 1. Be aware of the fallacies you use
  - 2. Know your opponents fallacies
  - 3. Keep your claims narrow and supportable
  - 4. Double check characterization

5. List opponents main points and your evidence to refute them
  6. Call opponent of fallacies
- E. What about sound bites
1. Be calm
  2. Do not be emotional
  3. Be prepared
  4. Redirect
- F. Bottom line - the argument they make may not be wrong but it is not supported by the evidence they are using