Since they depend on distracting, fooling, or manipulating the emotions of an audience, the use of fallacies can undermine attempts at persuasion. Fallacies are simply errors in argument, and they fall into three basic categories: evasions, inappropriate appeals, and oversimplifications. If fallacies were universally unsuccessful every time they were employed, they would not be as common as they are. Generally, fallacies can be effective in the short run with an unreflective, emotionally volatile audience; thus, they show a low regard for the thoughtfulness and emotional balance of those you are trying to persuade.

One of the best ways to avoid fallacies is to recognize the difference between facts and assumptions. Assumptions comprise what we believe to be true; facts comprise what we know to be true from observation, experiment, and logic. Many of our assumptions are certainly true: “The sun will rise in the east tomorrow morning.” On the other hand, other assumptions, like “All Arabs are sympathetic to terrorists,” may be dangerously untrue.

Evasions

Begging the question: treating an opinion that is open to question as if it were already proved or disproved, or restating a general claim as evidence

Non sequitur (“it does not follow”): drawing a conclusion from irrelevant evidence; or, in strict deductive reasoning, affirming the consequent (All human beings are mortal; Socrates is mortal; therefore, Socrates is a human being.)

Straw man: setting up another’s position in a way that can be easily rejected

Polarization: characterizing a idea or anyone holding that idea as extreme or divisive

Inappropriate Appeals

Bandwagon Appeal: appealing to general values, such as patriotism or love of family, or appealing strictly on the basis of popularity.

Name-calling: attacking an opponent personally rather than the opponent’s argument.

Oversimplifications

Hasty generalization: asserting an opinion on too little evidence. Stereotype, or drawing a conclusion based on an unwarranted assumption about a group or type is a variation.

Post hoc (“after this”): assuming A caused B because B followed A in time.

Either/or: reducing a complicated question to two alternatives.

False analogy: exaggerating the similarities in a comparison or ignoring key differences.