GLOSSARY OF FALLACIES

Accent, fallacy of: This fallacy consists in directing an opponent toward an unwarranted conclusion by placing improper or unusual emphasis upon a word, phrase, or particular aspect of an issue or claim. It is sometimes committed by lifting portions of a quotation out of context in a way that conveys a meaning not intended by the person quoted.

Ad Hominem, Abusive: This fallacy consists in attacking one’s opponent in a personal and abusive way as a means of ignoring or discrediting his or her position or argument.

Affirming the Consequent: This fallacy consists in affirming the consequent of a conditional statement and then inferring the affirmation of the antecedent.

Ambiguity: This fallacy consists in presenting a claim or argument that uses a word, phrase, or grammatical construction that can easily be interpreted in two or more distinctly different ways, without making clear which meaning is intended.

Apriorism: This fallacy consists in refusing to look at any evidence that might count against one’s claim or assumption. An extension of this fallacy consists in being unwilling or unable to specify any conceivable evidence that might possibly count against one’s claim.

Authority, Irrelevant or Questionable: This fallacy consists in attempting to support a claim by quoting the judgment of one who is not an authority in the field, the judgment of an unidentified authority, or the judgment of an authority who is likely to be significantly biased in some way.

Causal Oversimplification: This fallacy consists in oversimplifying the relevant causal antecedents of an event or series of events.

Circular Argument: This fallacy consists in either explicitly or implicitly asserting, in one of the premises of an argument, what is asserted in the conclusion of that argument. Moreover, it uses a premise that probably would not be regarded as true or acceptable unless the conclusion were already regarded as true or acceptable.

Cliche, Improper Use of a: This fallacy consists in using an aphorism or cliche in place of relevant evidence for a claim.

Common cause, Neglect of a: This fallacy consists in failing to recognize that two seemingly related events may not be causally related-at all, but rather are effects of a common cause.

Common Opinion, Appeal to: This fallacy consists in urging the acceptance of a position simply on the grounds that most or at least great numbers of people accept it. Conversely, it consists in urging the rejection of a position on the grounds that very few people accept it.
Composition, Fallacy of: This fallacy consists in assuming that what is true of the parts of some whole is also true of the whole.

Confusion of Cause and Effect: This fallacy consists in confusing the cause with the effect of an event or in failing to recognize that there may be a reciprocal causal relation between the two events in question.

Confusion Of A Necessary With A Sufficient Condition: This fallacy consists in assuming that a necessary condition of an event is also a sufficient one.

Continuum. Fallacy of the: This fallacy consists in assuming that small differences are always unimportant or that supposed contraries, as long as they are connected by intermediate small differences, are really very much the same. Hence, there is the failure to recognize the importance or necessity of sometimes making what might appear to be arbitrary distinctions or cut-off points.

Contrary-to-fact Hypothesis: This fallacy consists in making a poorly supported claim about what might have happened in the past if other conditions had been present, or about an event that might occur in the future. It also consists in treating hypothetical claims as if they were statements of fact.

Denying the Antecedent: This fallacy consists in denying the antecedent of a conditional statement and then inferring the denial of the consequent.

Distinction without a Difference: This fallacy consists in attempting to defend an action or point of view as different from some other one, with which it is allegedly confused, by means of a very careful distinction of language. In reality, however, the action or position defended is no different in substance from the one from which it is linguistically distinguished.

Division, fallacy of: This fallacy consists in assuming that what is true of some whole is also true of the parts of that whole.

Domino Fallacy: This fallacy consists in assuming, without appropriate evidence, that a particular action or event is just one, usually the first, in a series of steps that will lead inevitably to some specific consequence.

Equivocation: This fallacy consists in directing an opponent toward an unwarranted conclusion by making a word or phrase, employed in two different senses in an argument, appear to have the same meaning throughout.

Fake Precision, Fallacy of: This fallacy consists in making a claim with a kind of mathematical precision that is impossible to obtain.

False Alternatives: This fallacy consists in assuming too few alternatives and, at the same time, assuming that one of the suggested alternatives must be true.

False Conversion: This fallacy consists in exchanging the subject and predicate terms in a universal affirmative or a particular negative statement, or in reversing the antecedent and the consequent of a conditional statement and then inferring that such converted statements retain their original truth values.
Faulty Analogy: This fallacy consists in assuming that because two things are alike in one or more respects they necessarily are alike in some other respect.

Force or Threat, Appeal to: This fallacy consists in attempting to persuade others of one's point of view by threatening them with some undesirable state of affairs instead of presenting evidence for one's view.

Gallery, Playing to the: This fallacy consists in attempting to persuade others of one's point of view by appealing to their strong emotions or to popular sentiments instead of presenting evidence for one's view.

Gambler's Fallacy: This fallacy consists in arguing that, because a chance event has had a certain run in the past, the probability of its occurrence in the future is significantly altered.

Genetic Fallacy: This fallacy consists in evaluating a thing in terms of its earlier context and then carrying over that evaluation to the thing in the present.

Hasty Generalization: This fallacy consists in drawing a conclusion or generalization from too small a sample of cases, from exceptional cases, or from unrepresentative or biased data.

Humor or Ridicule, Appeal to: This fallacy consists in intruding humor or ridicule into an argument in an effort to cover up an inability or unwillingness to respond appropriately to an opponent's position. Humor is thereby used as a substitute for relevant evidence.

Ignorance, Arguing from: This fallacy consists in assuming that a claim is true because there is no evidence or proof that it is false or because of the inability or refusal of an opponent to present convincing evidence against it. Conversely, it consists in assuming that a claim is false because there is no evidence or proof that it is true or because of the refusal or inability of an opponent to present convincing evidence for it.

Illicit Contrast: This fallacy consists in a listener directly inferring from a speaker's claim some related but unstated contrasting claim by placing improper or unusual emphasis upon the words or phrases in the statement.

Illicit Distribution of an End Term: This fallacy of syllogistic reasoning consists in drawing a conclusion that includes a distributed end term that is not distributed in one of the premises.

Innuendo, Argument by: This fallacy consists in directing one's listeners to a particular, usually derogatory, conclusion, by a skillful choice of words or the careful arrangement of sentences, which implicitly suggests but does not assert that conclusion. The force of the fallacy lies in the impression created that some veiled claim is true, although no relevant evidence is presented to support such a view.
Irrelevant Functions or Goals, Assigning: This fallacy consists in criticizing a policy or program because it does not or would not achieve certain goals that it was not designed or expected to achieve.

Is-Ought Fallacy: This fallacy consists in assuming that because something is now the practice, it ought to be the practice. Conversely, it consists in assuming that because something is not the practice, it ought not to be the practice.

Label, Inference from a: This fallacy consists in assuming that evaluative or identifying words or phrases attached to people or things constitute a sufficient reason for drawing conclusions about the objects to which such labels are attached.

Loaded or Complex Question: This fallacy consists in formulating a question in a way that presupposes that a definite answer has already been given to some other, unasked question, or in treating a series of questions as if it involved only one question.

Leading Question: This fallacy consists in "planting" a proposed answer to a question at issue by the manner in which the question is asked.

Missing the Point: This fallacy consists in drawing the wrong conclusion or one that "misses the point" of the evidence, which usually supports some other loosely related conclusion.

Moderation, Fallacy of: This fallacy consists in assuming that the moderate or middle view between two extremes must be the best or right one simply because it is the middle view.

Neglect of Relevant Evidence: This fallacy consists in arguing in a way that ignores or unfairly minimizes the importance of obvious evidence unfavorable to one's position.

Novelty, Fallacy of: This fallacy consists in assuming that a new idea, law, policy, or action is good simply because it is new.

Personal Circumstances, Appeal to: This fallacy consists in urging an opponent to accept a particular position by appealing solely to his or her personal circumstances or self-interest.

Pity, Appeal to: This fallacy consists in attempting to persuade others of one's point of view by appealing to their sympathy instead of presenting evidence.

Poisoning the Well: This fallacy consists in rejecting a claim defended by another because of that person's special circumstances or improper motives.

Post Hoc Fallacy: This fallacy consists in assuming that a particular event, B, is caused by another event, A, simply because B follows A in time.

Principle, Misuse of a: This fallacy consists in assuming that a principle or general rule has no exceptions and thus misapplying it in a particular instance.
Conversely, it consists in attempting to refute a principle or general rule by means of an exceptional case.

**Question-begging Definition:** This fallacy consists in attempting to establish an irrefutable position in an argument by means of a questionable definition. What appears to be a factual or empirical claim is often rendered impervious to counterevidence by being subtly, and sometimes unconsciously, interpreted by the claimant as a definitional statement. The claim at issue thereby becomes "true" by definition.

**Question-begging Expression:** This fallacy consists in discussing an issue by means of terms that imply a position on the very question at issue. Typically, certain evaluative terms or phrases are used as if they were purely descriptive terms, in such a way as to direct the listener to a particular conclusion about a situation or issue.

**Rationalization:** This fallacy consists in using plausible-sounding but usually false reasons to justify an action or belief that is held on other less respectable grounds.

**Red Herring:** This fallacy consists in attempting to hide the weakness of a position by drawing attention away from the real issue to a side issue.

**Special Pleading:** This fallacy consists in applying principles, rules, or criteria to another person, while failing or refusing to apply them to oneself or to a situation that is of special personal interest.

**Straw Person Argument:** This fallacy consists in misrepresenting an opponent's view or argument, usually for the purpose of making it easier to attack.

**Tradition, Appeal to:** This fallacy consists in attempting to persuade others of one's point of view by appealing to their feelings of reverence or respect for some tradition that supports that view rather than presenting appropriate evidence.

**Trivial Objections:** This fallacy consists in attacking an opponent's position by focusing critical attention on some point less significant than the main point or basic thrust of the argument.

**Tu Quoque Argument (Two Wrongs Make a Right):** This fallacy consists in responding to an attack on one's ideas or actions by accusing one's critic or others of thinking or acting in a similar way or in a way that is equally hard to defend.

**Undistributed Middle Term:** This fallacy of syllogistic reasoning consists in inferring a conclusion from two premises in which the middle term is not distributed.

**Wishful Thinking:** This fallacy consists in assuming that because one wants something to be true, it is or will be true. Conversely, it consists in assuming that because we do not want something to be true, then it is not or will not be true.
Vague Expressions, Misuse of: This fallacy consists in drawing an unjustified conclusion as a result of assigning a very precise meaning to another's word, phrase, or statement that is quite imprecise in its meaning or range of applicability. It may also be committed by one who attempts to establish a position by means of a vague expression.

Summary of chapter 6

In this chapter we have seen that a fallacy is a type of argument that may seem to be correct, but that proves on examination not to be so. Types of reasoning mistakes that commonly deceive have been given traditional names; three large groups of informal fallacies have been distinguished; the fallacies of relevance, the fallacies of presumption, and the fallacies of ambiguity.

Fallacies of Relevance. In these, the mistaken arguments rely on premises that may seem to be relevant to the conclusion but in fact are not. We have explained the types of reasoning mistakes in seven fallacies of relevance:

R1. Argument from ignorance (ad ignorantiam): When it is argued that a proposition is true on the ground that it has not been proved false, or when it is argued that a proposition is false because it has not been proved true.

R2. Appeal to inappropriate authority (ad verecundiam): When the premisses of an argument appeal to the judgement of some party or parties having no legitimate claim to authority in the matter at hand.

R3. Argument against the person (ad Hominem): When an attack is leveled not at the claims being made or the merits of the argument, but at the person of the opponent.

Arguments ad hominem take two forms. When the attack is directly against persons, seeking to defame or discredit them, it is called an “abusive ad hominem.” When the attack is indirectly against persons, suggesting that they hold their views chiefly because of their special circumstances or interests, it is called a “circumstantial ad hominem.”

R4. Appeal to emotion (ad populum): When careful reasoning is replaced with devices calculated to elicit enthusiasm and emotional support for the conclusion advanced.

R5. Appeal to pity (ad misericordiam): When careful reasoning is replaced by devices calculated to elicit sympathy on the part of the hearer for the object of the speaker’s concern.

R6. Appeal to force (ad baculum): When careful reasoning is replaced with direct or insinuated threats to bring about the acceptance of some conclusion.

R7. Irrelevant conclusion (ignoratio elenchi): When the premisses miss the point, purporting to support one conclusion while in fact supporting or establishing another.
Fallacies of Presumption. In these the mistaken arguments arise from reliance upon some proposition that is assumed to be true, but is in fact false, or dubious, or without warrant. We have explained the types of reasoning mistakes in five fallacies of presumption:

P1. Complex question: When a question is asked in such a way as to presuppose the truth of some assumption buried in that question.

P2. False cause: When one treats as the cause of a thing what is not really the cause of that thing, or more generally, when one blunders in reasoning that is based upon causal realtions.

P3. Begging the question (petitio principii): When one assumes in the premisses of an argument the truth of what one seeks to establish in the conclusion of that argument.

P4. Accident: When one applies a generalization to an individual case that it does not properly govern.

P5. Converse Accident: When one moves carelessly or too quickly from a single case to a indefensibly broad generalization.

Fallacies of Ambiguity. In these, the mistaken arguments are formulated in such a way as to rely on shifts in the meaning of words or phrases, from their use in the premisses to their use in the conclusion. We have explained the types of reasoning mistakes in five fallacies of ambiguity:

A1. Equivocation: When the same word or phrase is used with two or more meanings, deliberately or accidentally, in the formulation of an argument.

A2. Amphiboly: When one of the statements in an argument has more than one plausible meaning, because of the loose or awkward way in which the words in that statement have been combined.

A3. Accent: When a shift of meaning arises within an argument as a consequence of changes in the emphasis given to its words or parts.

A4. Composition: This fallacy is committed (a) when one reasons mistakenly from the attributes of a part to the attributes of the whole, and when one reasons mistakenly from the attributes of an individual member of some collection to the attributes of the totality of that collection.

A5. Division: This fallacy is committed (a) when one reasons mistakenly from the attributes of a whole to the attributes of one of its parts, and (b) when one reasons mistakenly from the attributes of a totality of some collection of entities to the attributes of the individual entities within that collection.