



10 LOGICAL FALLACIES

THE MEDIA USES TO MANIPULATE YOU

How to Recognize, Counter, and Call Out the Tricks They Use Every Single Day

They call it journalism. But what happens on your screen every day is not journalism — it is persuasion. And the tools of that persuasion have names.

A logical fallacy is an argument that sounds convincing but is built on a flaw in reasoning. The mainstream media, political pundits, and talking heads use these tricks constantly — not because the facts are on their side, but because emotion, pressure, and misdirection are more effective than truth when you don't know what to look for.

This guide gives you the ten most common weapons in the media's arsenal. For each one you'll find the definition, a real-world media example, how to counter it logically, and exactly what to say when you call it out.

Once you see these, you cannot unsee them.

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FALLACIES 01 – 05

Ad Hominem · Appeal to Authority · False Dilemma · Straw Man · Appeal to Emotion

01

Ad Hominem

Also known as: Character Assassination / Personal Attack

Instead of addressing your argument, the media attacks you personally — your motives, your background, your character, or the people who agree with you. The goal is to make you unworthy of being heard, so your point never has to be answered.

MEDIA EXAMPLE:

"We don't need to take this seriously — it's coming from right-wing extremists and conspiracy theorists."

HOW TO COUNTER IT:

Notice that your argument was never actually addressed. Ask: Is what they said true or false? The character of the speaker is irrelevant to the truth of the claim.

CALL IT OUT:

When you see this: Restate the original argument and demand it be addressed on its merits. Say — 'That's about the person, not the point. What's wrong with the argument itself?'

02

Appeal to Authority

Also known as: Expert Says So / Science Is Settled

The media presents a claim as true simply because an authority figure, expert panel, or government agency says so — without presenting the underlying evidence. Disagreement is framed as ignorance or dangerous misinformation.

MEDIA EXAMPLE:

"The CDC has spoken. The science is settled. Anyone questioning this is putting lives at risk."

HOW TO COUNTER IT:

Authorities can be wrong, conflicted, or politically motivated. Ask: What is the actual evidence? Who funded the study? Are there credentialed experts who disagree, and why are they being silenced?

CALL IT OUT:

When you see this: Ask for the primary source data. 'I respect the expert — now show me the evidence they based that on.' Authority is not a substitute for proof.

03

False Dilemma

Also known as: Either/Or Fallacy / Black-and-White Thinking

The media presents only two possible positions on a complex issue — usually one reasonable and one extreme — forcing you to choose sides and hiding the dozens of legitimate options in between.

MEDIA EXAMPLE:

"You either support this gun control bill or you don't care about children dying. Which is it?"

HOW TO COUNTER IT:

Almost every major policy issue has more than two positions. Rejecting a specific policy does not mean endorsing its supposed opposite. The middle ground is where most truth lives.

CALL IT OUT:

When you see this: Name a third option. 'There are actually many ways to approach this. You've only presented two, and neither one is the only choice.'

04

Straw Man

Also known as: Misrepresentation / Distortion

The media misrepresents your position — usually making it more extreme, more heartless, or more absurd than it actually is — and then attacks that distorted version instead of what you actually believe.

MEDIA EXAMPLE:

"Conservatives want to abolish all regulations and let corporations poison your water and air."

HOW TO COUNTER IT:

No serious conservative is arguing for zero regulations. The actual position — that regulations should be limited, constitutional, and cost-effective — was never engaged with at all.

CALL IT OUT:

When you see this: Restate the actual position clearly. 'That's not the argument being made. The real position is _____. Can we discuss that instead?'

05

Appeal to Emotion

Also known as: Emotional Manipulation / Sob Story Journalism

Rather than making a logical case, the media leads with heart-wrenching stories, alarming imagery, or outrage-inducing anecdotes designed to bypass your critical thinking and get you to react emotionally before you can think clearly.

MEDIA EXAMPLE:

A fifteen-minute segment on a single sympathetic illegal immigrant family, with no discussion of policy tradeoffs, crime statistics, or rule of law.

HOW TO COUNTER IT:

Individual stories are powerful but they are not policy arguments. Ask: Is this one case representative of the broader reality? What are the actual data and tradeoffs involved?

CALL IT OUT:

When you see this: Acknowledge the emotion, then ask for the evidence. 'That story is moving — now what do the statistics actually show across the whole population?'

FALLACIES 06 – 10

Bandwagon · Slippery Slope · Loaded Question · False Equivalence · Appeal to Nature/Novelty

06

Bandwagon Fallacy

Also known as: Appeal to Popularity / Everyone Believes This

The media uses polls, consensus language, and social pressure to make you feel like an outlier for disagreeing — implying that because most people believe something, or the right people believe it, it must be true.

MEDIA EXAMPLE:

"Poll after poll shows the overwhelming majority of Americans support this policy. Only a fringe minority opposes it."

HOW TO COUNTER IT:

Popularity is not proof. Majorities have been wrong throughout history — about slavery, about eugenics, about countless things. Truth is not determined by vote.

CALL IT OUT:

When you see this: Ask what the evidence is independent of the consensus. 'How many people believe it is irrelevant. What are the actual facts that support it?'

07

Slippery Slope

Also known as: Catastrophizing / The Domino Effect

The media claims that if one policy or event occurs, a catastrophic chain reaction is inevitable — without any evidence that the intermediate steps will actually happen. Used to make moderate positions seem dangerous.

MEDIA EXAMPLE:

"If we allow any restrictions on abortion, the next step is women being jailed for miscarriages and a total ban on contraception."

HOW TO COUNTER IT:

Each step in a chain of events requires its own evidence and argument. Assuming inevitable catastrophe without demonstrating why each step must follow is manipulation, not reasoning.

CALL IT OUT:

When you see this: Break the chain. 'That assumes step A leads to B leads to C. What's the evidence each of those steps is likely to actually occur?'

08

Loaded Question

Also known as: Begging the Question / Presumptuous Framing

The media embeds a false or contested assumption directly into a question, forcing you to either accept the premise or look like you're dodging. Either way, the narrative is shaped before you answer.

MEDIA EXAMPLE:

"When did Republicans decide it was acceptable to let poor people die without healthcare?"

HOW TO COUNTER IT:

The premise — that Republicans want people to die — is false and was never proven. The question assumes its own conclusion. You are not obligated to answer a question built on a lie.

CALL IT OUT:

When you see this: Reject the premise before answering. 'That question contains a false assumption. I'm not going to answer it as asked — here's what the actual debate is about.'

09

False Equivalence

Also known as: Both-Sidesing / Manufactured Balance

The media presents two things as equivalent when they are not — either by treating vastly different situations as the same, or by manufacturing a false sense of balance between a well-supported position and a fringe one.

MEDIA EXAMPLE:

Treating a politician's mild verbal gaffe as morally equivalent to another's documented criminal conduct — because 'both sides do it.'

HOW TO COUNTER IT:

Not everything is equal. Saying 'both sides' when one side's conduct is objectively more severe is not balance — it's dishonesty dressed up as fairness.

CALL IT OUT:

When you see this: Demand the distinction. 'Are these situations actually comparable in severity and evidence? Let's look at the specifics rather than treating them as the same.'

10

Appeal to Nature / Novelty

Also known as: It's Natural / It's New So It's Better

The media alternately argues that something is good because it's natural or traditional, or good because it's new and progressive — depending on which serves the narrative. Both assume that origin determines value.

MEDIA EXAMPLE:

"This policy is outdated and old-fashioned." OR "This is a natural solution unlike those artificial corporate alternatives."

HOW TO COUNTER IT:

Whether something is old or new, natural or artificial, tells you nothing about whether it is true, safe, effective, or wise. Evaluate the substance — not the framing.

CALL IT OUT:

When you see this: Redirect to evidence. 'Whether it's old or new is irrelevant. Does it actually work? What does the evidence show?'

QUICK REFERENCE CARD

Tear this out. Keep it handy. Use it every time you watch the news.

01 Ad Hominem Attacks the person, not the argument.	02 Appeal to Authority "An expert said so" is not proof.
03 False Dilemma More than two options always exist.	04 Straw Man They attacked a position you never held.
05 Appeal to Emotion Feelings bypass logic — by design.	06 Bandwagon Popularity proves nothing about truth.
07 Slippery Slope Each step in a chain needs its own proof.	08 Loaded Question The premise is false — reject it first.
09 False Equivalence Not everything deserves equal weight.	10 Appeal to Nature/Novelty Old or new tells you nothing about true.

THE UNIVERSAL QUESTION: "Is this a logical argument — or just a manipulation tactic?"



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