

# Fallacies

## Chapter 5

### Everything's an Argument

A fallacy is a hole in an argument. Fallacies are dangerous because they break down civil conversation and make arguments more difficult.

Some people who use fallacies probably do not realize they do it. Some people do it for the sole purpose of confusing and/or tripping up people. Avoid fallacious reasoning in arguments.

Fallacies are grouped according to the appeals ethos, logos, and pathos.

Chapter 5 outlines the most common fallacies, but thousands of fallacies exist. For more information on fallacies, see the AP/CEP Symbaloo tiles on my webpage.

## Pathos Fallacies

**Scare Tactics-** An exaggeration on possible dangers beyond their statistical likelihood. These are dangerous because they close off rational thinking. People who are scared rarely act rationally.

Look at this presidential campaign from 2012:



This ad is unique in that the person running for president does not appear in the video. How is this ad a scare tactic? What appeal does this ad rely on? What part of the ad was the most frightening? The most believable? This was from 2012: did any of the events in the ad happen?

# EBOLA IS REAL

The Ebola virus causes a severe, often fatal illness.  
People who seek treatment early have a better chance of survival.



16 million

People living in Ebola-affected areas in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, including...

8.5 million

under 20-years-old.  
2.5 million of them are under 5.

4,963

Probable and confirmed cases in current outbreak as of 16 September.

2,453

Probable and confirmed deaths in current outbreak as of 16 September.

2014's outbreak has been the most severe ever, both in terms of number of cases and fatalities, but with a survival rate of around 50%.

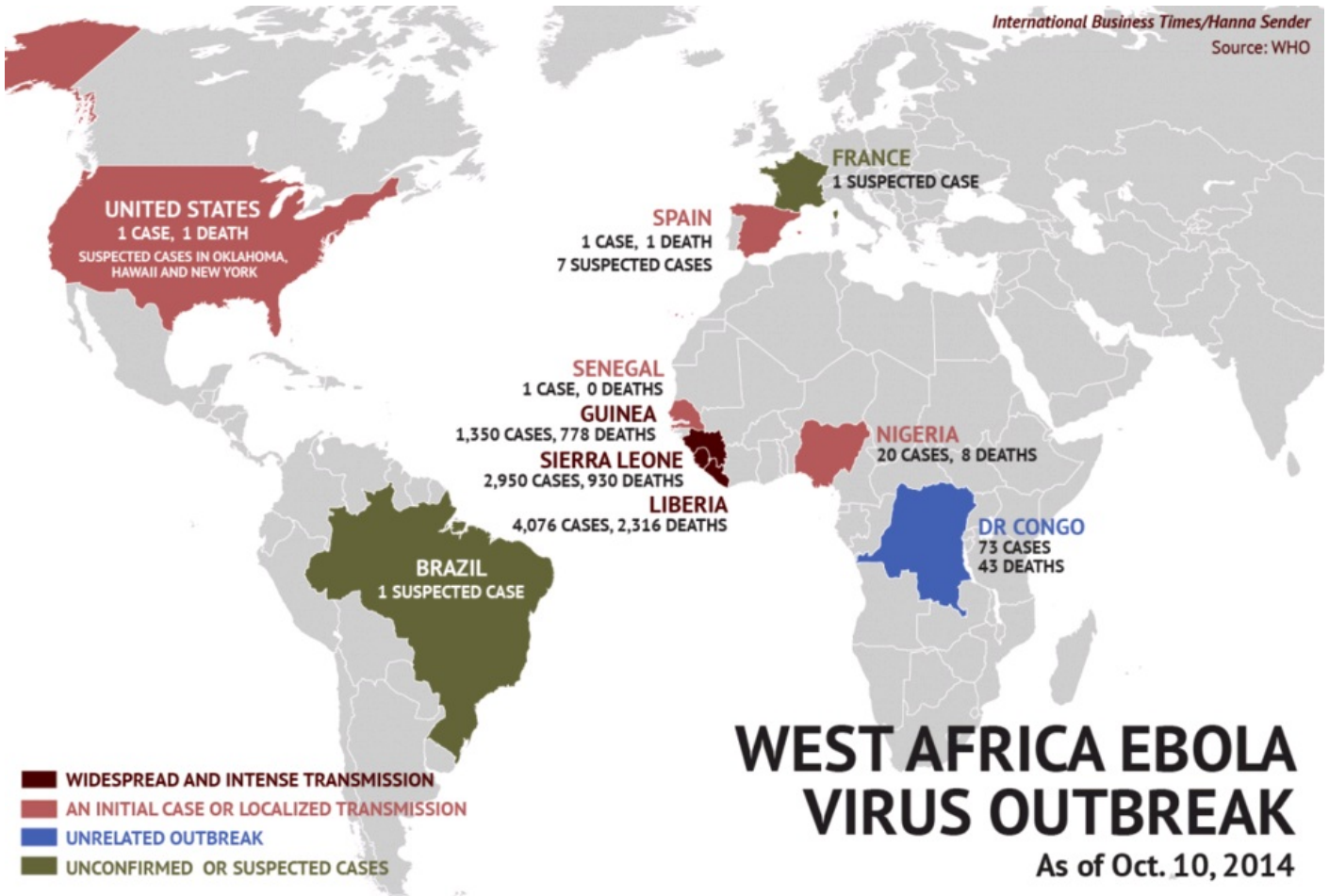


GRAPHIC © RAJ  
SOURCE: UNICEF, WHO  
RESEARCH: LAUREN HOLMES (WWW.LAURENHOLM.ES) - KATJA MISCHKE (WWW.ABOUT.ME/KATJA.MISCHKE)



What was the discussion we had about logos and numbers? What about other diseases/illnesses? How many people die every day from pneumonia? Car accidents? Choking? Heart attacks? This poster is dangerous because many people may associate anything from Africa as Ebola-ridden.

Look at this poster:



Ov^p^  
THE SACRAMENTO BEE  
©2014-10/9-TCA

**EBOLA!!!**

OBSESITY:  
300,000  
DEATHS PER YEAR

TOBACCO:  
450,000  
DEATHS PER YEAR

ALCOHOL:  
88,000  
DEATHS PER YEAR



Look at the size of the "widespread and intense transmission" on the map. Now look at the rest of the map. The horrors of Ebola spreading has been exaggerated because people rarely

act or think rationally when they are scared. Do you see the reality of this disease? Even the numbers on the map tell a different story from the previous poster.

**Either-Or-** This fallacy only gives two options—one preferred over the other. No “gray areas.” This is, basically, an ultimatum. Hardly anyone likes ultimatums.

Either-Or Fallacies are used to seduce those who do not know any better.

These become fallacious when they reduce a complicated issue to simple terms.



**Overly Sentimental Appeal-** These use tender emotions excessively to distract readers from the facts. Emotions become an impediment to rationality when they stop people from thinking clearly.



Read the following:



### A SENATE IN THE GUN LOBBY'S GRIP

WASHINGTON SENATORS say they fear the N.R.A. and the gun lobby. But I think that fear must be nothing compared

<http://www.nytimes.com>

And here is the rational side (with fallacies included):



### GABBY GIFFORDS POISONS THE WELL

When the mainstream media responded to the Tucson massacre of January 2011 by attempting to

<http://www.wsj.com>

**Bandwagon Appeal-** Urges people to follow the same path. Rather than be independent, sometimes it's easier to "get on board" with everyone else. The mentality of the bandwagon is that something has to be "DONE RIGHT NOW"!

**SEAHAWKS FANS THE LAST 20  
YEARS**



**SEAHAWKS FANS THIS YEAR... C'MON  
RIDE THE TRAIN**



**Slippery Slope-** Today's tiny misstep is tomorrow's slide into disaster. The slippery slope, like the scare tactic fallacy, could be a statistical unlikelihood.



Identify the fallacy...





Lost your pen = no pen  
No pen = no notes  
No notes = no study  
No study = Fail  
Fail = no diploma  
No diploma = no work  
No work = no money  
No money = no food  
No food = skinny  
Skinny = ugly  
Ugly = no love  
No love = no marriage  
No marriage = no children  
No children = alone  
Alone = depression  
Depression = sickness  
Sickness = death

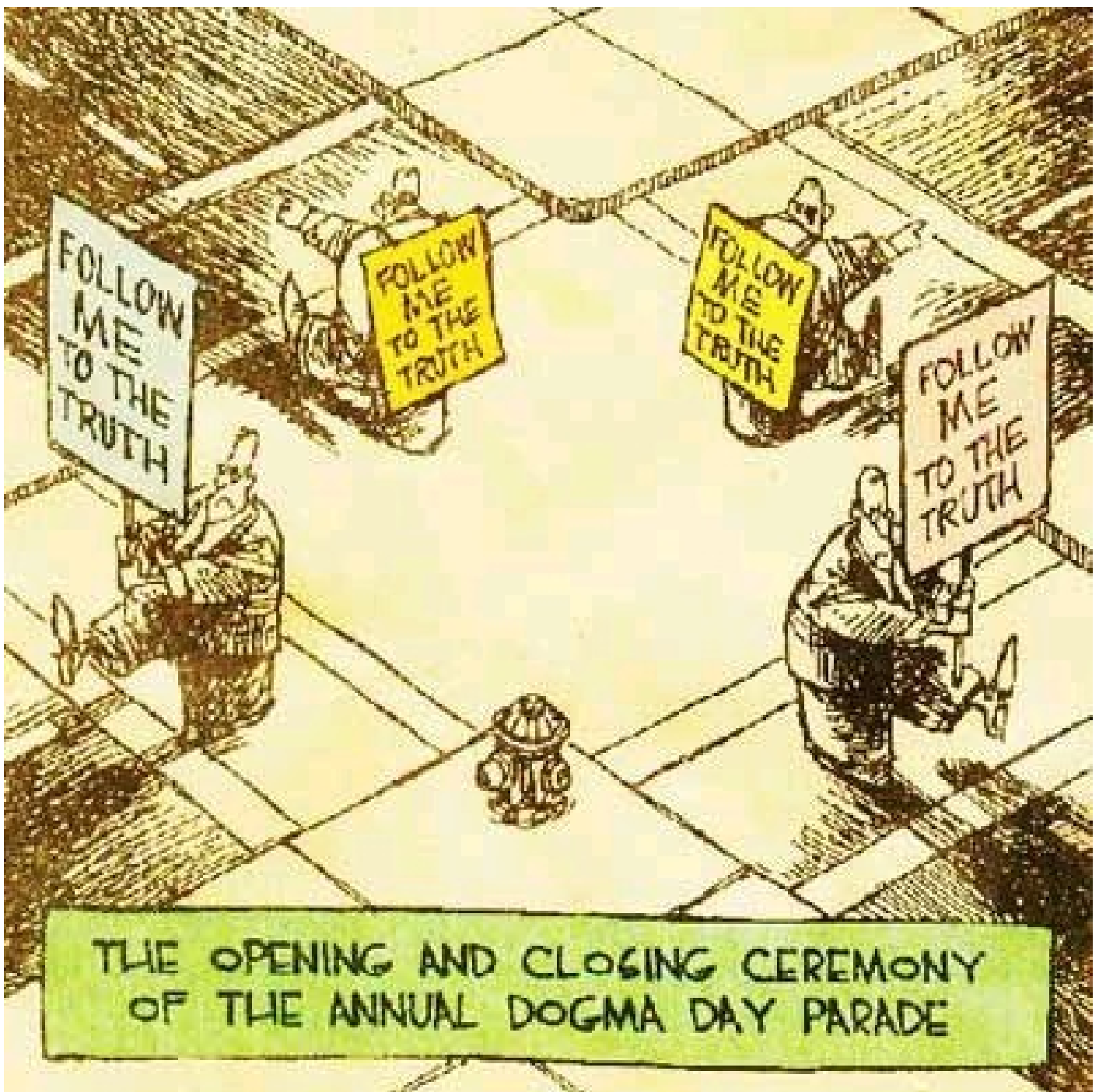
Lesson: Don't lose your pen, you will die

## Ethos Fallacies

**Appeals to False Authority-** Writers offer themselves or others as authorities to support or believe a claim. X is true because I say so; What I say must be true. "Trust, but verify" comes in to play here. Always question the authority.



**Dogmatism Fallacy**- A writer expresses a particular position is the only one that is acceptable. No arguments are necessary and the truth is self-evident. Dogmatists believe people are rational and should believe what the writer believes.



**Ad Hominem-** Means “to the man” in Latin. This fallacy is an attack on the person or the person’s character rather than the argument. This is for the sole purpose of destroying someone’s credibility. These often turn into two-sided affairs with the good guys vs. the bad guys.



## DEBATE STRATEGY: WIN ARGUMENTS WITH AD HOMINEM ATTACKS



**Stacking the Deck-** This happens when the arguer shows only one side of the story—the one in his/her favor. Be careful not to do this! You **MUST** consider the other side and admit you have no ulterior motives. If you fail to address the other side, you are setting yourself up for this fallacy.

“You know teenagers today: they are lazy, incompetent, druggies, criminals,” said the middle-aged employee to his elderly boss. (BTW, the middle-aged employee is vying for a promotion over a teenager and is “stacking the deck” in his favor.

### LOGOS FALLACIES

**Hasty Generalization-** A conclusion built on insufficient evidence: because my sister is dumb and is a blonde, ALL blondes and sisters are dumb. This fallacy is the basis for most

stereotypes. Lady Macbeth uses this against Macbeth (as well as many other fallacies) when she said, "Screw your courage to the sticking place and we'll not fail."

To avoid this fallacy you MUST use QUALIFYING words: few, many, most, rarely, occasionally, possibly, in some cases, under certain circumstances, in my limited experience, etc.

# AXE



AXE is a unique all-over bodyspray that combines a seductive fragrance with effective deodorant protection to keep you smelling great all day or all night. Spray it all over including your chest, neck, underarms - all the hot spots.

**Faulty Causality**-Also known as Post Hoc, Ergo Prompter Hoc = after this, because of this.

This fallacy leads others to believe that one event caused the second.

Example-A writer sued the Coors beer company claiming his consumption of vast amounts of Coors beer prevented him from writing a novel. (He didn't win, by the way.)



The commercial claims a roughneck street thug will be a better person just by drinking a Coke. The cause of the thug's good mood? Drinking a Coke. Faulty Causality fallacy is similar to Non Sequitur because "it is not as simple as it is presented."

**Begging the Question-** This is also known as Circular Reasoning. This claim literally goes in a circle and cannot be disputed: this cannot be questioned.

Example-You can't give me a C in this class because I am an A student. So, an A student can never earn a C (and vice versa).

Example-Manning would never throw the Super Bowl because he's an honest person. So, an honest person would never do anything dishonest (and vice-versa).



**Equivocation-** A half truth or double meaning. These are tricks of language. Macbeth curses the witches' predictions when he realizes he has believed "half truths": "...to doubt the equivocation of the fiend that lies like truth."

Example- A plagiarist who copies a paper word for word from another declares, "I wrote that paper myself!"

Example- "Do you have any change?" "No, I don't." (But he has a \$20.00 bill.)





The audience has two interpretations of the players. If the audience listens closer, two different conversations are occurring, but the words used have different meanings.

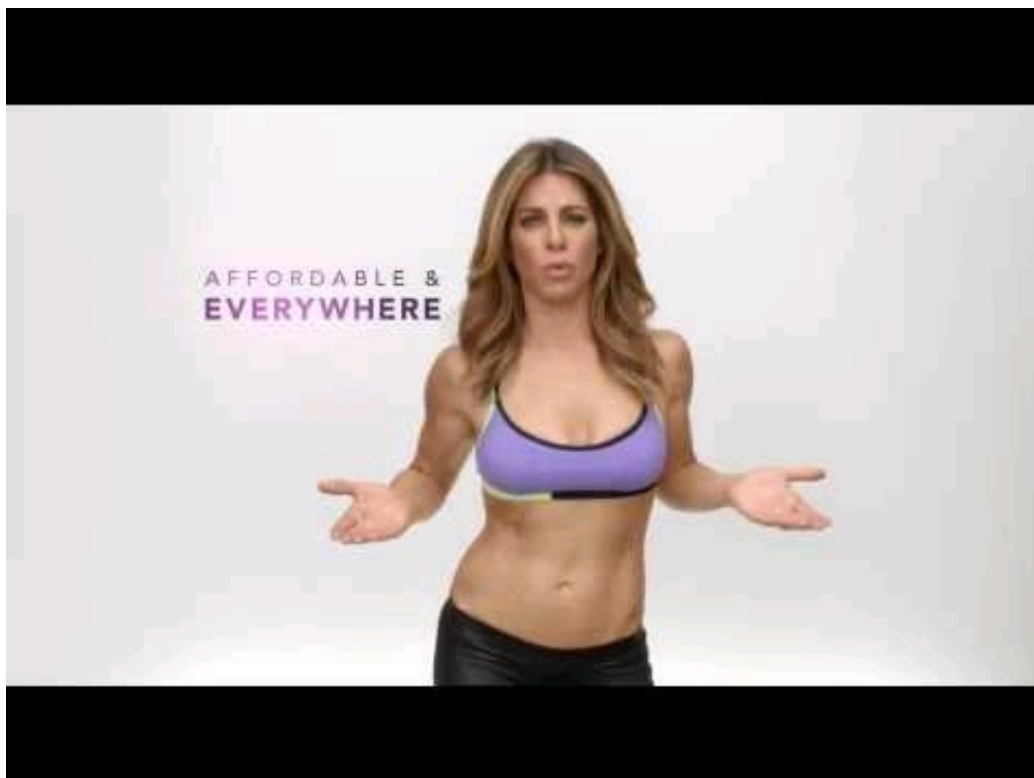
And the most infamous equivocation.....



Hmmmm.....

Be wary of this. As Eric Schlosser indicated in *Fast Food Nation*, natural flavors are not necessarily "natural": "Consumers prefer to see natural flavors on a label, out of a belief they are healthier...Natural flavors and artificial flavors sometimes contain exactly the same chemicals, produced through different methods...A natural flavor is not necessarily healthier or purer than an artificial one...Calling any of these flavors 'natural' requires a flexible attitude toward the English language and a fair amount of irony" (Schlosser 126-7). Chemicals are still used to extract the flavor from the food only to be added back to the product during processing: "Natural and artificial flavors are now manufactured at the same chemical plants, places that few people would associate with Mother Nature" (127). Hence, no flavor is natural unless we see the person prepare the food using whole foods and real foods for flavoring.

**Non Sequitur-** Does not follow. Does not connect. I call this the "Is it really that simple?" fallacy. In a non sequitur, a step is omitted or a sequence of two unrelated events is stated.



Is "loving your life" as easy as going to Curves for 30 minutes every other day? Steps are left out: diet, additional exercise, lifestyle change, sleeping more, natural supplements, etc.

**THERE IS A SHARK IN MY ROOF**



**Red Herring**- A distraction. This comes from the act of dragging a dried red herring fish across the path of the fox to throw the hounds off the trail. A red herring occurs when someone tries to “distract” the audience from the topic.



Even cartoons know the infamous red herring:



#### RED HERRING.MP4

Dropbox is a free service that lets you bring your photos, docs, and videos anywhere and share them easily. Never

<https://www.dropbox.com>

**Faulty Analogy-** An inaccurate comparison. Comparisons are useful but when they are pushed too far—stretched too far—they become inaccurate comparisons. Example-A president who has no military experience will not make a good president—that is the same as electing a passerby on the street to be president.



Say WHAT???????



How about this commercial:



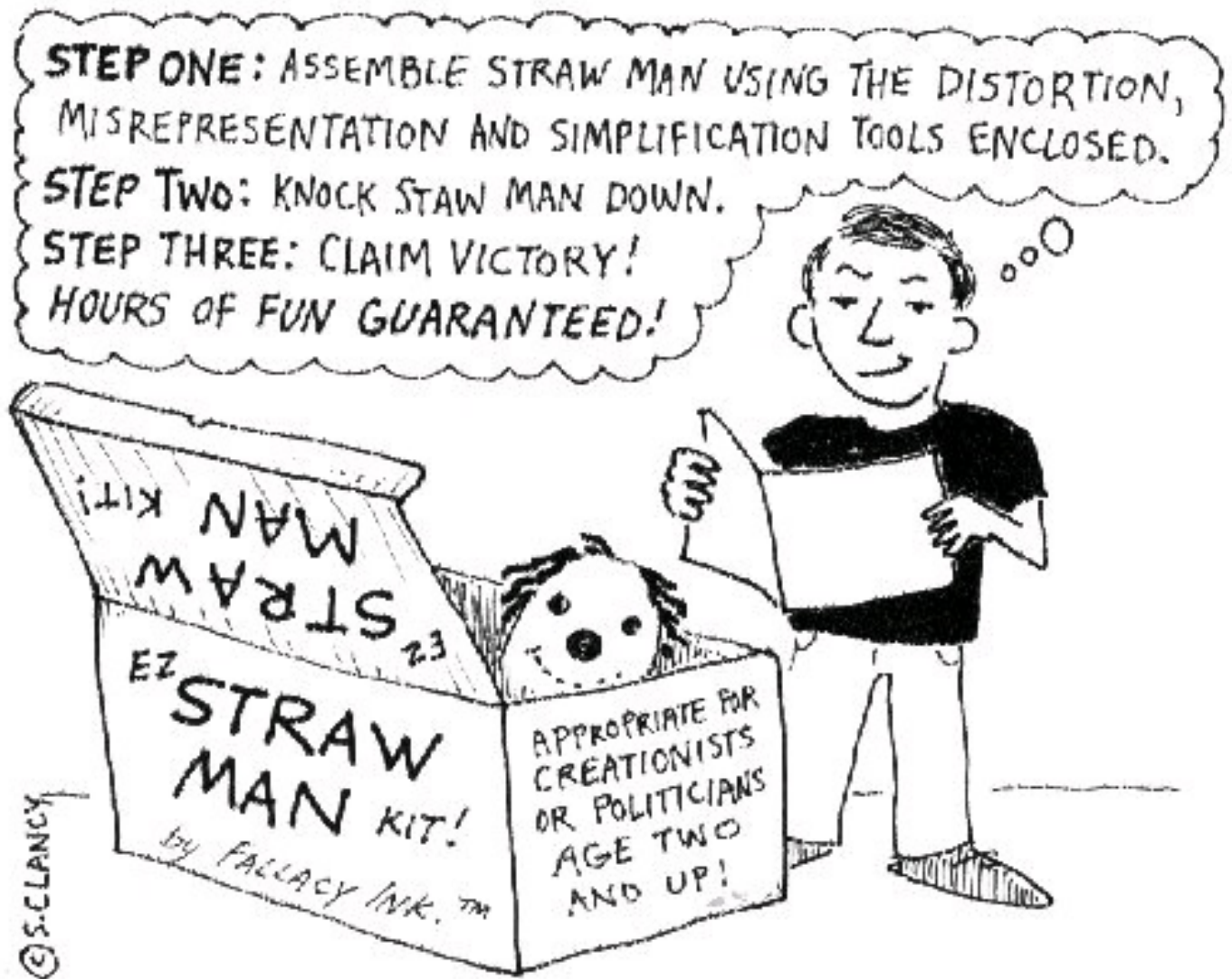
**The Straw Man-** Attacking an argument that is not strong or non-existent. The arguer may make the argument stronger or more extreme than it really is.

Example: Women are physically weaker than men, so they need protection and for men to lead them. This is why women do not receive more pay for the jobs they do.

The above is attacking a small argument (women are physically weaker) and making it a larger aspect of the wage war argument.



*“New guy in accounts. He’s nice enough but don’t try to argue with him.”*



## Typical Straw Man

"Obama may not be eloquent, but he is glib and clever and at times persuasive. One of his favorite rhetorical devices is setting up a straw man, then knocking it down. He invoked this classic ploy subtly in his inaugural address, crudely in his press conference. "We will restore science to its rightful place," Obama said at his inauguration. Really? Where had science been? "We are ready to lead once more," he said, as if we--America--hadn't been. He may have disapproved of the prior administration's policies in the world, but that doesn't mean it wasn't leading. Also in his inaugural speech, Obama said, 'we can no longer afford indifference to suffering outside our borders.' When were we indifferent? Not in Obama's lifetime." --Fred Barnes, "Obama's First Month"





## And the Most Infamous Fallacy:

**The Fallacy Fallacy-** Being too eager to find fallacies in an argument. Be careful whipping out fallacies on someone. Be sure the person has committed a fallacy. Be humble if you are wrong and admit you are incorrect.

### THE ADVENTURES OF FALLACY MAN



A philosophy webcomic about the inevitable anguish of living a brief life in an absurd world. Also Jokes

<http://existentialcomics.com>

## On That Note...

Fallacies are holes in reasoning. They impede rational arguments. Do not use them in arguments. Be nice when pointing out fallacies in others' arguments. No one wants an ad hominem argument thrown on the table.



**LOGICAL FALLACIES**



**LOGICAL FALLACIES EVERYWHERE**