

Mistakes in Argument: How to Argue Effectively

Argumentation is the process of presenting evidence and reasoning to support a claim. It is a fundamental skill in many areas of life, from academic to professional to personal. However, even the most intelligent and well-educated people can make mistakes in argument.



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by Pierre Longuenesse

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In this article, we will discuss some of the most common mistakes in argument and how to avoid them. We will also provide some tips for arguing effectively.

Common Mistakes in Argument

1. Begging the Question

Begging the question is a logical fallacy that occurs when the of an argument is assumed in one of the premises. For example:

Premise 1: God exists.

Premise 2: The Bible says that God exists.

: Therefore, God exists.

In this argument, the (God exists) is assumed in the second premise (the Bible says that God exists).

2. Circular Reasoning

Circular reasoning is a logical fallacy that occurs when the of an argument is used to support one of the premises. For example:

Premise 1: Abortion is wrong because it kills a human being.

Premise 2: A human being is a person who is alive.

: Therefore, abortion is wrong because it kills a person.

In this argument, the (abortion is wrong) is used to support the first premise (abortion is wrong because it kills a human being).

3. Ad Hominem Attacks

Ad hominem attacks are a logical fallacy that occurs when an argument attacks the person making the argument rather than the argument itself. For example:

"You're just a liberal snowflake who doesn't understand the real world."

This argument attacks the person (you) rather than the argument (the person is a liberal snowflake who doesn't understand the real world).

4. Straw Man Arguments

Straw man arguments are a logical fallacy that occurs when an argument misrepresents the opposing view in order to make it easier to attack. For example:

"Proponents of gun control want to take away all of our guns."

This argument misrepresents the view of proponents of gun control in order to make it easier to attack (no one is proposing taking away all guns).

5. False Dichotomies

False dichotomies are a logical fallacy that occurs when an argument presents two options as the only possible choices when in reality there are more than two options. For example:

"Either you support the war or you support the terrorists."

This argument presents two options (support the war or support the terrorists) when in reality there are more than two options (e.g., oppose the war, support a negotiated settlement, etc.).

Tips for Arguing Effectively

1. Define Your Terms

One of the most important things you can do when arguing is to define your terms. This will help to prevent misunderstandings and confusion.

2. Be Clear and Concise

When you are arguing, it is important to be clear and concise. This will help to make your argument easier to understand and follow.

3. Be Respectful

Even if you disagree with someone, it is important to be respectful. This will help to create a positive environment for discussion.

4. Be Willing to Compromise

In most cases, there is no one right answer to an argument. It is important to be willing to compromise in order to reach a solution that both parties can agree on.

5. Practice

The best way to improve your argumentation skills is to practice. The more you argue, the better you will become.

Arguing effectively is a skill that can be learned and improved upon. By avoiding the common mistakes in argument and following the tips outlined in this article, you can become a more effective communicator.



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