

ad hominen attacks: don't attack the person who holds the opposing view.

e.g. The Fraser Institute says that taxes are harmful to middle-income families, but they're a right-wing think tank, so we can't trust what they say.

Instead, attack his or her reasoning or evidence.

e.g. The Fraser Institute's report focuses on the cost of taxes for middle-income families, but it fails to point out how much families save by accessing publically funded services rather than private ones.

ad misericordiam: don't try to prove your point by evoking pity or arguing for special treatment.

e.g. My paper deserves an A because if I don't ace this assignment, my GPA won't be high enough for me to get into medical school, and my dreams of becoming a doctor will be crushed.

ad populum: don't appeal to the masses, or argue on the basis of "everyone else is doing it."

e.g. New Brunswick should allow shale gas development because Alberta and British Columbia already allow it.

e.g. New Brunswick should allow shale gas development because it will create job opportunities, and the people of New Brunswick demand job creation.

straw man: when arguing against a certain position, make sure that you represent that position accurately. Don't exaggerate or misrepresent the opposing view so that it is easier to disprove, or so that your position looks more reasonable by comparison. (The idea here is that the fake opponent—a "straw" man—is easier to knock down than the real thing.)

e.g. The White House: In order to make our streets safer, we should restrict the possession of assault rifles and require criminal background checks for all firearm sales.

The National Rifle Association: The White House wants to take away our guns and our ability to defend ourselves. We can't allow this to happen. It will make us less safe, not more safe.

In the above example, the NRA has exaggerated the recommendations made by the White House regarding gun control, and in doing so, has made their own (op)position to these recommendations seem more reasonable.

ad ignorantiam: this type of argument effectively says, "since this hasn't been proven false, it must be true."

e.g. No one has demonstrated that there isn't intelligent life in space; therefore, aliens exist.

Lack of evidence to the contrary is not evidence in support of a position.

circular arguments: in a circular argument, the reason you give to support a conclusion already anticipates that conclusion.

e.g. Witches float on water because water rejects witches.

e.g. Nuns are trustworthy, so you should trust nuns.

In these examples, the reasons given really just restate the conclusion, using almost the same wording: they do not provide new information that would help validate or explain the conclusion.

Sometimes, circular arguments are harder to spot because the reason repeats the *idea* of the conclusion without repeating the exact same words.

e.g. Abortion is murder because it is the pre-meditated killing of another person.

e.g. A free market economy is beneficial because it encourages competition between businesses without government intervention.

In the examples above, the reasons given after "because" are really just *definitions* of terms used in the conclusions. In the first example, the author is essentially saying "abortion is murder because it is [murder]." This type of statement is also known as a tautology. Although the word "because" is being used here, the author isn't really giving us a reason to support his conclusion. In the second example, the author is telling us *how* a free market economy works, rather than explaining *why* it work — i.e. why unrestricted competition between businesses is beneficial.

Sometimes in a circular argument two conclusions are given, but because these conclusions are also used as reasons to support each other (i.e. they depend on each other for truth), neither ends up being proven.

e.g. (A) Paranormal phenomena exist because (B) I have seen a ghost. (i.e. A is true because B.)

(B) I have seen a ghost because (A) paranormal phenomena exist. (i.e. B is true because A.)

In the first statement, the author is using the ghost sighting to prove that paranormal phenomena exist, but in order for the author to believe she saw a ghost, she would have to presuppose that paranormal phenomena (like ghosts) exist in the first place!