

# Know Your Logical Fallacies

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Ever found yourself reacting with disbelief – rage, even – to any kind of public debate where there are massive holes in the logic of the arguments?

Even more maddening is when these holes are not pointed out by anyone who is moderating, or others participating, and the debate proceeds based on a flawed basis.

The field of sustainability is no exception – watched a debate on climate change or the carbon tax lately? If we could improve the quality of debate on sustainability issues, and public issues in general, we could cut out all the superfluous, time-wasting diversions faulty logic enables, and get to the core of what we need to resolve.

Logic and rational appeal won't necessarily change someone's views on an issue – but where logic is used, it's important to be able to spot when someone is using a dodgy basis for making a point, and be able to call them out on it.

It's also crucial that you become aware of any fallacies you yourself may commit, so you can purge them from your communication repertoire! But how do would-be fallacy-spotters, with little training in rhetoric and reasoning, know what to look for?

[thou shalt not commit logical fallacies](#) is a clever, well designed and useful site that has condensed the wisdom of Plato, Socrates, Aristotle (and others) into a bite-size form, using easy to understand language.

A logical fallacy is:

*...usually what has happened when someone is wrong about something. It's a flaw in reasoning. They're like tricks or illusions of thought, and they're often very sneakily used by politicians and the media to fool people.*

The site creators have developed icons to represent each of the 24 identified fallacies, which include [ad-hominem](#) – attacking your opponent's personality traits or character instead of engaging with the issue; and [strawman](#) – misrepresenting your opponent's argument to make it easier to attack.

The site suggests that if a logical fallacy is spotted, the link to the relevant fallacy from the site be forwarded to the fallacy-committer, or included in a comment or response to them!

Even more entertaining would be if the site could also collect and publish fallacies submitted by people who spot them – like a crowdsourced rogues' gallery of logic-underminers.

The site - which also offers the content in a [wall poster and card deck](#) - is a useful teaching tool for sharpening critical thinking and debating skills. It is a simple idea, but it serves an important function – it allows this knowledge to be quickly accessible without needing to have studied the Greek philosophers, and it supports a healthy democratic process.

The quality of much of what passes for 'debate' in the public domain can only improve with a citizenry well-equipped to spot a [strawman](#) or a [tu quoque](#).

Do you recall a time when you were watching a debate, or when someone with whom you were having a debate came out with a lapse in logic that left you incredulous, or in fits of laughter?

Have you ever caught yourself using any of the identified fallacies? Which ones?