Informal Fallacies (a list)

Fallacies of relevance:

**How they work:** Present premises that are logically irrelevant to the conclusion but which are psychologically persuasive.

- Appeal to Force
  - Accept my conclusion or I’ll hurt you.
- Appeal to Pity
  - Accept my conclusion because things have been very sad for me.
- Appeal to the People (bandwagon/vanity/snobbery)
  - Accept this conclusion because everyone else does. (bandwagon)
  - A person of your intelligence and refinement should accept this conclusion. (vanity)
  - All the cool people accept this conclusion. (snobbery)
- Argument Against the Person (abusive/circumstantial/you too)
  - You can’t take what he says as a good reason, because he’s a rotten liar. (abusive)
  - You can’t take what he says as a good reason, because what he says is influenced by his employer. (circumstantial)
  - You can’t take his argument against smoking serious, because he himself smokes. (you too)
- Accident (stretching a general rule too far)
  - Incest, which involves physical contact between close family members, is wrong. So, it’s wrong for you to hold your mother’s hand.
- Straw Man
  - Person 1: We should reform tax laws./Person 2: No, abolishing taxes will mean that government doesn’t have the resources to provide necessary public services.
- Missing the Point
  - I stay up until 3 am every night, and then sleep through my alarm the next morning and end up late for school. Therefore, school should start later.
- Red Herring
  - We should make school lunches healthier. You should support this proposal, since it will help farmers to get better prices for their crops.

Fallacies of weak induction:

**How they work:** Draw conclusions that are too strong given the evidence presented by the premises.

- Appeal to Unqualified Authority
  - Take it from me, an award winning actor: this diet plan works.
Appeal to Ignorance
• I’ve never seen anyone tidying up the produce display at the supermarket, so there isn’t anyone who tidies it up – it must just stay tidy on its own.

Hasty Generalization
• The three people I met who were from Michigan spoke fluent Spanish. Thus, most people from Michigan speak fluent Spanish.

Slippery Slope
• If gay marriage becomes legal, the next thing you know, people will be able to marry 12 wives, or goats. And then, marriage will have no meaning at all.

Weak Analogy
• Like bananas, banana slugs are yellow, oblong, and easy to slip on. Thus, like bananas, banana slugs are also high in potassium.

Fallacies of causation:
How they work: Draw mistaken conclusions about the causes of a particular outcome.

Post Hoc
• My car worked fine until the day you got into it. Therefore, you must have broken my car.

Oversimplified Cause
• Why am I an Olympic Decathlon winner? Because I eat my Wheaties.

False Cause
• The fighter plane malfunctioned and crashed because of gremlins tampering with it.

Fallacies of presumption:
How they work: Ask you to accept premises that assume too much.

Begging the Question (controversial premise/circular reasoning)
• A vegetarian diet is the only moral option, since eating meat is murder. (controversial premise)
• Anyone who preaches revolution has a vision of the future for the simple reason that if a person has no vision of the future he could not possible preach revolution. (circular reasoning)

Complex Question
• When did you stop beating your wife?

False Dichotomy
• You either have to marry Captain von Trapp or go back to the convent.

Suppressed Evidence
• This website is accessible from nearly any computer with internet access. Thus, you’ll be able to access this website during your visit to China.
Fallacies of ambiguity:

How they work: Arguments draw faulty conclusions based on premises which are ambiguous due to words with more than one meaning or grammatical constructions that can be interpreted in more than one way.

Equivocation
• Some angles are obtuse. You can't teach anything to the obtuse. Thus, you can't teach anything to some angles.

Amphiboly
• They said on the news that someone gets mugged every night in this city. That guy must be really tired of being mugged so often.

Fallacies of grammatical analogy:

How they work: Draw a mistaken relationship between parts and wholes.

Composition
• Sodium and chlorine are deadly poisons. Therefore, table salt (which is made of sodium and chlorine) is a deadly poison.

Division
• The faculty of the university is half male and half female. Therefore, each professor at the university is half male, half female.