



15 Straw Man Fallacy Examples

By Chris Drew (PhD) / October 23, 2022



A [straw man fallacy](#) is a logical fallacy that occurs when a person rebuts an argument by misconstruing it.

The concept comes from the metaphor of a straw man (or scarecrow). The straw man is not a real man. It's a fake representation (e.g. a caricature) of one.

Similarly, in the strawman fallacy, the person rebutting an argument isn't engaging in good faith with the real argument. Instead, they will argue against a caricature of the real argument. They're "constructing a straw man" in their rebuttal.

For example, when one person says "I like Chinese more than Pizza", and the respondent says "Well, you must hate Pizza", they have created a strawman. The first person never said they hated pizza. They have been misrepresented.

No matter your political position, we all run the risk of creating strawmen. So, below, I've tried to present positions from both sides of the political spectrum to play "devil's advocate" and show various perspectives.



Straw Man Fallacy Examples

1. Changing The Curriculum

Scenario: A teacher says her class needs to spend more time on math tasks. A parent complains, saying the teacher doesn't care about literacy subjects.

This politically neutral straw man fallacy is a good one to start with. It shows the scenario of a teacher arguing for more math. The teacher hasn't said anything about needing to cut down on literacy. The parent, however, feels as if the teacher's statement betrays the teacher's true thoughts about literacy. In this scenario, the teacher may feel as if the parent has created a strawman by misrepresenting their position. The teacher may (or may not!) highly value literacy. Rather than attacking the teacher, the parent could request clarification on the teacher's thoughts about how to improve student literacy skills.

2. Why Do You Hate Me?

Scenario: A parent doesn't let their daughter go to a party. The daughter responds with "Why do you hate me?"

In this situation, the teenager has misconstrued the parent's position through hyperbolic reasoning. Instead of debating the topic of whether the daughter should be allowed to go to the party, she has [framed the debate](#) about whether or not the parent hates their child.

Teenagers are particularly good at strawman arguments. This may be due to their developmental level, where they struggle to identify nuance or because they see the world in black-and-white. Or, it may simply be a debating tactic to get the parents to cede ground.

3. Democrats Are Communists

Scenario: A Democrat politician says he wants to spend more money on the social safety net. His Republican opponents call him a communist.

Straw man fallacies exist on both sides of the political spectrum. On the right, we often see right-wingers calling Democrats communists because they support bigger government. Unless the democrat advocates for the dissolution of private industry and state control of everything, they're not really arguing for communism. The true position of the Democrat is for a welfare state, not a communist dictatorship. The accusation that they're communists may stir up the right-wing base, but it's a caricature of the true position of the Democrat.



4. Republicans Are Racists

Scenario: A man tells his Democrat friend that he thinks he's going to vote for the Republicans because he thinks they have a better stance on immigration. His friend accuses him of being a racist for even thinking of doing it!

Republicans aren't the only people guilty of creating straw man arguments. Democrats often accuse Republicans of being racist for wanting strong borders and a more orderly immigration process. This, of itself, is not racist. The Democrat makes inferences that the Republican must be racist for not wanting illegal immigration. Here, the Democrat is creating a straw man caricature of a Republican that hates non-white people even though the Republican hasn't actually said this.

5. The War On Christmas

Scenario: Starbucks decides to write "Happy Holidays" on their cups instead of "Merry Christmas". The media is outraged, accusing Starbucks of waging a war on Christmas.

The war on Christmas is one of the longest-running strawman arguments in the United States. The argument is that people who want to be more inclusive in their language around the holiday season are anti-Christian. The fear may stem from the notion that Christians would like to see Christianity remain at the center of public life around their important religious holiday. However, the other side may feel as if the claim that they are trying to destroy or nullify Christmas is a misrepresentation of their views. These people may love Christmas but also want to be inclusive of non-Christians during this time of celebration.

6. Relationship Disputes

Scenario: The boyfriend tells his girlfriend that he doesn't want to go out to eat tonight. The girlfriend rolls her eyes and tells him he never wants to go out anymore.

In this scenario, the boyfriend's argument that he doesn't want to eat tonight have been twisted into a statement about how he never wants to go out – ever. The girlfriend may genuinely believe this based on a pattern of behavior. However, from the boyfriend's eyes, she has changed the discussion from a productive one about this specific circumstance and turned it into an attack on something larger. He will feel slighted and attacked for the girlfriend constructing a strawman that she is attacking, while the girlfriend may simultaneously feel frustrated and sincere in her position. To escape this situation, the two arguments may need to be dealt with separately – each on their own merits.

7. Pizza Or Chinese Food

Scenario: The girlfriend tells the boyfriend she'd prefer Chinese food over Pizza tonight. The boyfriend rolls his eyes and tells her that she must hate pizza.



In this typical strawman fallacy, a statement of preference of A over B has led to an argument over whether the person *hates* option B. In reality, a statement of preference doesn't mean that the lesser-preferred thing is hated or even disliked. This strawman happens regularly in fights between couples, organized debates, and in the political sphere.

8. Job Appraisal

Scenario: At a regular performance review, the boss tells the employee that they need to make more of an effort to turn up to work on time. The employee responds, saying that the boss is discriminating against parents.

In this sensitive situation, the boss is asking for a minimum standard from an employee (that they turn up to work on time). The employee has turned this request into an argument about whether the workplace is inclusive of parents. For the employer, the idea that employees turn up is a basic necessity for the operation of the business. They may be empathetic to parents' needs, but also has their own needs for their business. The parent's focus is more on trying to juggle work and parenthood, which is proving a hassle. As a result, the two people are talking across each other and not engaging in the same discussion. For the employer, it may appear as if the employee is constructing a strawman to misrepresent their requirement.

9. Pay Rise

Scenario: The teacher's union argues that teachers should get a 4% pay rise. The school district says it can only afford 2.5%. The union releases an ad saying the school district doesn't care about quality education.

This is another situation where employer and employee begin to construct strawmen that misrepresent one another. Here, the union is turning a debate about budgeting into a fatalistic misrepresentation of the school district. The school district's request may come from a care about the sustainability of the education system's budgeted, and may therefore actually be about making sure the education system continues to operate in the long term. But the union feels as if low pay for teachers shows misplaced priorities and, perhaps for political leverage, has tried to emphasize this. The school district will likely feel like this argument is a strawman.

10. Electric Vehicles

Scenario: The opposition party proposes a law that within 10 years, all vehicles should be electric powered. The government calls it a "war on the weekend" because you won't be able to take long weekend drives anymore.

This scenario actually occurred, in the 2019 federal election in Australia. The opposition party wanted to push harder on the roll-out of electric vehicles. The government turned this into a narrative about whether



people would be unable to go for long weekend drives. This strawman misrepresented the nuances of the opposition's position, which included the roll-out of charging stations to ensure electric vehicles can make it all over Australia.

11. You Didn't Listen To Me

Scenario: Two travelers are deciding where to travel to. One wants to go to Spain, China, and France. The other says that they could do Spain and France because they're right next to each other, but China will have to wait for another time. The traveler who wants to go to China accuses their companion of not listening to her.

In this scenario, the traveler who argues that it's not feasible to go to China has a nuanced argument. They are aware that China is a long detour away from France and Spain. But the other traveler isn't engaging in the same conversation. Instead, they have turned it into a less nuanced discussion about whether their companions listens to their concerns. As with other examples listed above, you can see frustrations on both sides of this debate, but one traveler would feel like a strawman has been created because the nuances of the discussion have been stripped out during the argument.

12. You Think I'm Fat

Scenario: A wife asks her husband which pair of pants look better. He says that the second pair make her look slim. She scowls at him, saying he thinks she looks fat in the other pair of pants.

The age-old argument about "do I look good in these pants?" can be seen as a strawman argument as well. The husband finds himself in an impossible situation. If he says he prefers one pair over another, he runs the risk of his wife creating a strawman: "you think I'm fat". From the husband's perspective, his position has nuance. He has a preference, and he's been asked to express it. But from the wife's perspective, the idea that her husband might prefer one outfit over the other may bring up feelings of insecurity. Instead of engaging with the comparison of outfits, her reaction is to accuse the husband of something that is more black-and-white than the husband's true position.

13. We Can't Afford It

Scenario: A man tells his daughter that he thinks they can't afford to take a holiday this year. The daughter sulks, saying he doesn't want her to have any fun.

In this argument, the father's position is related to financial constraints. According to the daughter, the problem isn't money. It's that her father is boring and wants his daughter's life to be boring as well. Here, the daughter's and the father's priorities and perspectives are different, and this is expressed in the debate. On the one hand, we have a father who has a set of reasons why he can't take a holiday. On the other, we have a daughter who has misconstrued his position and re-constructed it as his dislike of her personally.



14. You Don't Appreciate Me

Scenario: The wife is on a phone call for work while the husband is unpacking the dishwasher. The wife asks him to please keep the noise down while she's on the phone. The husband says she doesn't even appreciate him cleaning.

In this situation, the husband has misconstrued the wife's request for quiet. The wife's argument is that she needs quiet temporarily for an important work call. The husband, perhaps unreasonably, has disregarded her argument and instead insisted that she has shown lack of appreciation. In reality, she may greatly appreciate the husband cleaning, but also needs it to happen after the call has concluded.

15. You Think You're Better Than Everyone!

Scenario: A proud patriot flies his flag on July 4. "I love America! I'm so proud of my country!" A French tourist passes by looking out at the patriot and rolls his eyes. "Americans think they're better than everyone," he says.

This is a typical example of misrepresentation of someone's position. The American patriot demonstrated their love of their country without reference to anyone else's. They didn't say other people can't be proud of their countries, or even use the phrase "best country in the world". They simply showed love for their own country.

The Frenchman may have more of a leg to stand on if the American was claiming he had the best country in the world because then there would be grounds for the construction of a hierarchy. But as it stands, the Frenchman created the false hierarchy through his strawman argument, not the American, and therefore he misrepresented the original argument.

Other Types Of Fallacies

- [Slippery Slope Fallacy Examples](#)
- [Red Herring Fallacy Examples](#)
- [Hasty Generalization Examples](#)
- [Ad Hominem Fallacy](#)
- [Fundamental Attribution Error Examples](#)
- [Equivocation Falalcy Examples](#)
- [Bandwagon Fallacy Examples](#)

Conclusion

Understanding what a strawman argument is can help you to engage in good-faith dialogue with others. It's a reminder to discuss people's positions in good faith, not to misrepresent them, and to actually listen to their viewpoints.



Similarly, being able to identify straw men in other people's arguments can help you to identify when a debate is going off the rails and try to bring nuance back into a discussion in order for it to be resolved more amicably.

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