

Fallacy of Appeal to Authority

Sometimes when we make arguments, we justify our premises (or our conclusions) by citing some "expert" authority, someone who is supposed to be knowledgeable on a particular subject. Sometimes this is a good strategy, and sometimes it is not. To incorrectly use authority in your argument, constitutes fallacy of appeal to authority.

The following circumstances would constitute a fallacious appeal to authority:

1. When the person being cited has an obvious bias or conflict of interest. The best type of an authority is someone who is disinterested (i.e. they would have no incentive to lie or to distort the truth);
2. When the person being cited has no real credentials that would justify using them as an authority;
3. When authorities are divided on a particular issue, and you only cite authorities who agree with your point, while you ignore the rest;
4. When the person being cited as an authority has a long track record of being wrong, ill-informed, or dishonest;
5. When the person being cited is simply saying something that is incorrect, based on easily available information.