

Is a Hot Dog a Sandwich?

Walking back from a logic course in college, a friend asked me if I had heard of the “[Is a Hot Dog a Sandwich?](#)” debate raging on reddit. “No,” I told him, “what a silly thing for people to waste their time on.”

Curiosity got the best of me, however, and I checked out the debate. I soon discovered that the petty fight exploded when the *National Hot Dog and Sausage Council* (NHDSC) declared that it was wrong to classify a hot dog as a sandwich.

But as I scoured through the hundreds of comments (instead of doing my logic homework), I realized something else: Most people have no idea how to incorporate logic into everyday argumentation. Here are three things many miss:

1. Avoid Red Herrings

The NHDSC’s [press release](#) states: “Limiting the hot dog’s significance by saying it’s ‘just a sandwich’ category is like calling the Dalai Lama ‘just a guy.’”

This statement showcases the need to have debates centered around a question. Without one, it is easy to divert into reasonings that have nothing to do with the essence of the argument. In this case, the NHDSC is asserting that a hot dog is not a sandwich, but their provided evidence does not support their assertion. Instead it only draws attention away from the central question.

This is commonly known as a *red herring*. Watch any presidential debate for prime examples of this.

2. Use Facts to Support Premises

A second common mistake in argumentation is to appeal to

subjective experience. This often happens in social media debates when someone opens their argument with the line, “Personally, I feel...”. Such an opening suggests that feelings are unique experiences, and thus one cannot argue against them. To avoid this, one must appeal to objectivity when debating any point.

Take for example this [comment](#):

✘ The most important thing to note is any lack of a definition of what a sandwich is. This argument *begs the question* by assuming the conclusion as its main premise.

We have names for various food items such as burgers and hot dogs, but that does not mean they are not also broadly categorized as sandwiches as well. Without a definition of what a sandwich is, there is no way to assess and see if each of these foods meet the criteria of a “sandwich.”□

Another comment takes things a step farther, but not far enough:

✘

This redditor appeals to the authority of “[Merriam Webster](#)” to admit that yes, a hot dog is definitionally a sandwich. However, the redditor then proceeds to state that it does not matter because once again it is all about how we use it in every day speech.

This highlights a common problem in society. Instead of applying objective definitions and standards to our reasonings, we rely on subjective experiences, and end up with faulty reasoning.

3. Counter by Refuting Supporting

Claims

There are a couple of ways to show that an argument is unsound. The most common, however, is to establish that one of the premises is false. This can be seen in the following comment from our reddit thread about the definition of a sandwich: