



Red Herring strategy/fallacy

Description

A **red herring** is something that misleads or distracts from a relevant or important issue. It may be either a logical [fallacy](#) or a [literary device](#) that leads readers or audiences towards a false conclusion. A red herring might be intentionally used, such as in mystery fiction or as part of [rhetorical strategies](#) (e.g., in politics), or it could be inadvertently used during argumentation.

The term was popularized in 1807 by English polemicist [William Cobbett](#), who told a story of having used a kipper (a strong-smelling smoked fish) to divert hounds from chasing a hare.

“When I was a boy, we used, in order to draw off’ the harriers from the trail of a hare that we had set down as our own private property, get to her haunt early in the morning, and drag a red-herring, tied to a string, four or five miles over hedges and ditches, across fields and through coppices, till we got to a point, whence we were pretty sure the hunters would not return to the spot where they had thrown off; and, though I would, by no means, be understood, as comparing the editors and proprietors of the London daily press to animals half so sagacious and so faithful as hounds, I cannot help thinking, that, in the case to which we are referring, they must have been misled, at first, by some political deceiver.”

–[William Cobbett](#), February 14, 1807, *Cobbett’s Political Register*, Volume XI[10]

Category

1. General

Tags

1. attention
2. distraction
3. Dual-process theory
4. fallacy
5. Logic
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Author

web45