

Chapter 2: Approaches to Studying Individuals and Families

Detecting Bias: Questions to Ask Yourself when Reading

Writers, researchers, journalists, politicians, even geography teachers all have a singular purpose to their communication - to convince you that they know what they're talking about, and that they have important insight into whatever it is they may be talking about. As readers, however, we have to find out how much of what we see and hear is really insightful and how much is just a load of **bias**.



Bias is the presentation of an issue from a single point of view. As young people in a technological society, it is possible for you as a student to be highly informed about what is happening all over the world. But be careful! Although some of the information you might read while researching may be true, sources may (consciously or unconsciously) have included only those facts that support their point of view. **Personal bias** may have led your sources to omit data that contradicts their point of view.

Take these two sentences for instance:

- "A well-organized, peaceful group of marchers arrived at the government offices."
- "An unruly mob descended upon the government offices"

These vastly different sentences were written about the same situation.

Sometimes, we see these biases backed up with visuals:

	<p>AP Associated Press AP - Tue Aug 30, 11:31 AM ET</p> <p>A young man walks through chest deep flood water after looting a grocery store in New Orleans on Tuesday, Aug. 30, 2005. Flood waters continue to rise in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina did extensive damage when it</p> <p>Email Photo Print Photo</p> <p>RECOMMEND THIS PHOTO » Recommended Photos Average (Loading) ☆☆☆☆☆</p> <p>RELATED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Looting Takes Place in View of La. Police AP - Ti
	<p>AFP AFP/Getty Images - Tue Aug 30, 3:47 AM ET</p> <p>Two residents wade through chest-deep water after finding bread and soda from a local grocery store after Hurricane Katrina came through the area in New Orleans, Louisiana (AFP/Getty Images/Chris Graythen)</p> <p>Email Photo Print Photo</p> <p>RECOMMEND THIS PHOTO » Recommended Photos Recommend It: Average (257 votes) ☆☆☆☆☆ ★★★★☆</p> <p>RELATED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Katrina's Effects, at a Glance AP - Wed Aug 31, 11:11 AM ET <p>Hurricanes & Tropical Storms</p> <p>ADD SLIDESHOW TO MY YAHOO! OR RSS READER XML MY Y! (About My Yahoo! and RSS)</p>

What bias do you think is represented here?

As you read through articles, always keep these questions in mind:

- Who wrote this document, and why did she/he write it?
- Was the author or organization closely involved in the event? Could that have affected what was written?
- What credentials does the author have to indicate that she/he is a reliable source?
- What organization published this document? Does this organization have a particular point of view or agenda that would bias the information?
- Do the arguments and evidence support only one side of an issue?
- Are generalizations and simplified solutions used to explain complex points of view?
- Are value-laden adjectives used?
- Are stereotypical comments used?
- If counter arguments are used, are they weak and poorly explained?

Source Confidence

Think of source reliability in terms of the following three levels of confidence:

1. **Confidence Level 1:** You should have the highest level of confidence in academic articles, professional journals, and most scholarly books because independent editorial boards review them before publication.
2. **Confidence Level 2:** You should have a lower level of confidence in magazines and newspapers that are not subject to peer review, although they can be held financially responsible for what they print.
3. **Confidence Level 3:** You should have the lowest level of confidence in those sources where peer review or financial accountability is absent. **Many websites, for example, have not been scrutinized by independent reviewers, and they are not accountable to anyone for their point of view.**