

# Understanding Bias

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn where bias comes from and how to recognize it in a source. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

## 1. Causes of Bias

**Bias** means presenting facts and arguments in a way that consciously favors one side or another in an argument.

Bias can result from the way you have organized your experiences in your own mind. You have lumped some experiences into the "good" box and some experiences into the "bad" box. Just about everybody does this.

If, through your own experiences and reflection on those experiences, you have a better understanding of something, your bias can be a good thing.

➞ **EXAMPLE** If you have been a traffic policeman, and have seen lots of disasters due to speed and alcohol, it is not "wrong" for you to be biased against fast cars and drinking at parties and bars. Your bias is due to your better understanding of the issue, but you still have to argue logically.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### **Bias**

Presenting information in a way that favors one side over another in an argument.

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## 2. Recognizing Bias

Even writers who claim to be objective or neutral may still present their bias in subtle ways.

1. **Placement of material:** If the support for one side of the argument is mainly at the top of the article, and the reasons to support the opposite side of the issue are mainly at the bottom end of the article, that might be an example of subtle bias.
2. **Quotation usage:** Quotations from real people have more emotional weight than statements made by the writer. This is especially true if the person being quoted is an authority on the subject, or a celebrity. So if one side of the issue is being supported by lots of quotations while the other side isn't, that is a subtle

form of bias.

3. Monetary gain: Common sense tells us that if someone is making money from something, the person will be biased in favor of it.

➞ **EXAMPLE** A person who makes money out of building nuclear reactors in Europe or China could be expected to support a change in policy in Australia towards developing nuclear energy. On the other hand, a manufacturer of cigarettes is unlikely to be in favor of health warnings on cigarette packets or bans on smoking in bars.

Keep in mind, however, that you have to listen to arguments as they come up. You cannot just assume that someone is biased; rather, you have to show that someone is biased and use evidence to support your assertion.



## SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that writers' own experiences and beliefs are common **causes of bias**. Additionally, you learned that **recognizing bias** can be tricky when the bias is presented in subtle ways. Understanding bias will help you both evaluate it in your research sources and address it in your own writing.

Best of luck in your learning!

Source: This content has been adapted from Lumen Learning's "Understanding Bias" tutorial.



## TERMS TO KNOW

### **Bias**

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