

THINKING ABOUT BIAS

Keep in mind the following:

- Critical media literacy is essential for democracy: citizens should demand that news organizations be fair, independent, and accurate.
- Structural factors shape bias: ownership, funding sources, newsroom demographics, and established power structures influence media coverage.
- Bias can appear in multiple forms, including source selection, language choices, framing, visual representation, story placement, and use of fallacies.

To determine bias, ask yourself:

- **Who are the sources** quoted, and whose perspectives are centered or marginalized?
 - Are the sources diverse, or is there an overreliance on official government and corporate sources while underrepresenting affected communities?
 - If the source is anonymous, is the use of anonymity proper?
- **Who is telling the story**, and how does newsroom diversity impact coverage?
 - Demographics are important! U.S. newsrooms are overwhelmingly white (83%) despite the country being 37% people of color.
- **What is the funding model** behind this journalism? How could it create conflicts of interest?
 - Does the influence of the owner affect coverage of issues related to their interests?
- **What unchallenged assumptions or stereotypes** underlie the reporting?
- **Does the language used demonstrate bias** toward particular perspectives?
 - Loaded language: word choices like "government-run" vs. "public" healthcare subtly shape public perception.
- **Is there artificial "both-sides" equivalence** where evidence heavily favors one position?
 - False equivalence: presenting "both sides" equally on issues with clear factual consensus (like vaccine safety) can mislead audiences.
- **Do visuals accurately represent the situation** being reported?
 - Visual manipulation and selective imagery can misrepresent situations and facts.
- **Do headlines accurately reflect the content** of articles?
 - Headline distortion can contradict or mislead about the actual content of articles.
- **How prominently are different stories placed**, and what does this suggest about their perceived importance?
 - Strategic placement: placement of content can influence the public perception of issues' importance.

Source: FAIR. (n.d.). How to detect bias in news media. FAIR. <https://fair.org/take-action-now/media-activism-kit/how-to-detect-bias-in-news-media/>