



Newspaper Bias (Teacher)

Discuss the following point of view.

In March 2017, Owen Jones went on record and described the UK press as:

“largely run by a very small group of very right-wing media moguls who defend the status quo of which they are part. If you are on the Left and want to change society, the media will always come and get you”.



<https://www.theguardian.com/profile/owen-jones>

Now read the following article and make some notes on your findings from it.

How left or right-wing are the UK's newspapers?



Complaints that the British press has a right-wing bias have long been made by left-wingers – but is this a state of affairs the public recognises?

<https://yougov.co.uk/news/2017/03/07/how-left-or-right-wing-are-uks-newspapers/>

How to spot newspaper bias

At one time or other we all complain about “bias in the news.” The fact is, despite the journalistic ideal of “objectivity,” every news story is influenced by the attitudes and background of its interviewers, writers, photographers and editors.



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Not all bias is deliberate. But you can become a more aware news reader or viewer by watching for the following journalistic techniques that allow bias to “creep in” to the news:

- Bias through selection and omission
- Bias through placement
- Bias by headline
- Bias by photos, captions and camera angles
- Bias through use of names and titles
- Bias through statistics and crowd counts
- Bias by source control
- Word choice and tone

Discuss how you think each of these points work and try to give an example of something you’ve seen recently in the news journalism.

Students should suggest the following:

Bias through selection and omission

An editor can express a bias by choosing to use or not to use a specific news item. Within a given story, some details can be ignored, and others included, to give readers or viewers a different opinion about the events reported. If, during a speech, a few people boo, the reaction can be described as “remarks greeted by jeers” or they can be ignored as “a handful of dissidents.”

Bias through omission is difficult to detect. Only by comparing news reports from a wide variety of outlets can the form of bias be observed.

Bias through placement

Readers of papers judge first page stories to be more significant than those buried in the back. Television and radio newscasts run the most important stories first and leave the less significant for later. Where a story is placed, therefore, influences what a reader or viewer thinks about its importance.

Bias by headline

Many people read only the headlines of a news item. Most people scan nearly all the headlines in a newspaper. Headlines are the most-read part of a paper. They can summarize as well as present carefully hidden bias and prejudices. They can convey excitement where little exists. They can express approval or condemnation.



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Bias by photos, captions and camera angles

Some pictures flatter a person, others make the person look unpleasant. A paper can choose photos to influence opinion about, for example, a candidate for election. On television, the choice of which visual images to display is extremely important. The captions newspapers run below photos are also potential sources of bias.

Bias through use of names and titles

News media often use labels and titles to describe people, places, and events. A person can be called an “ex-con” or be referred to as someone who “served time twenty years ago for a minor offence.” Whether a person is described as a “terrorist” or a “freedom fighter” is a clear indication of editorial bias.

Bias through statistics and crowd counts

To make a disaster seem more spectacular (and therefore worthy of reading about), numbers can be inflated. “A hundred injured in air crash” can be the same as “only minor injuries in air crash,” reflecting the opinion of the person doing the counting.

Bias by source control

To detect bias, always consider where the news item “comes from.” Is the information supplied by a reporter, an eyewitness, police or fire officials, executives, or elected or appointed government officials? Each may have a particular bias that is introduced into the story. Companies and public relations directors supply news outlets with puff pieces through news releases, photos or videos. Often news outlets depend on pseudo-events (demonstrations, sit-ins, ribbon cuttings, speeches and ceremonies) that take place mainly to gain news coverage.

Word choice and tone

Showing the same kind of bias that appears in headlines, the use of positive or negative words or words with a particular connotation can strongly influence the reader or viewer.