

What is Media Bias in News Reporting?

Compelling Question: What is media bias and how can we spot it while consuming news?

Grade Level		Time	Standards/Competencies	
K-2	3-5	45 Minutes	Common Core Anchor: Reading: R1, R7 Writing: W2 Speaking & Listening: SL1, SL2, SL3 Language: L4, L6	SEL: Self-Awareness Social Awareness Relationship Skills Responsible Decision-Making
MS	HS			



Web Related Connections

Lessons

[Fake News and What We Can Do about It](#)

[Refugee Crisis in Europe: How Should the World Respond?](#)

[Stereotypes of Girls and Women in the Media](#)

[What is Algorithmic Bias?](#)

Student Learning

[What is Bias? \(mini-lesson\)](#)

Other Resources

[Guidelines for Achieving Bias-Free Communication](#)

[Helping Students Make Sense of News Stories about Bias and Injustice](#)

[Why is there a Refugee Crisis in Ukraine?](#)

Key Words

accuracy	political agenda
allegation	qualifying
bias	refugees
civilized	reputation
corroborated	sensational
discredit	slant
evidence	source
guise	attribution
hyperbole	stereotype
journalism	unsubstantiated
misinterpret	vague
objective	warranted
omission	
overt	
perspective	

LESSON OVERVIEW

The media is a large and influential part of our everyday lives. Through radio, podcasts, television, news, images, video and the internet, there is bias in all aspects of media—sometimes subtle and sometimes overt. During the 2022 war and refugee crisis in Ukraine, many have noticed a “double standard” in the way that some journalists have talked about the people of Ukraine and the refugees who are fleeing the country, especially in comparison to other refugee crises our world has faced. This example can serve as a way to introduce young people to bias in media and how it manifests in different ways.

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to learn what media bias is, reflect on the Ukraine example as well other examples of media bias, and then study one example in depth in order to learn how to analyze a piece of media for bias.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will understand what media bias is.
- Students will analyze the way that media bias manifests in reporting about Ukraine and will reflect on other examples of media bias.
- Students will choose and analyze an example of media bias.

MATERIALS & PREPARATION

- Video clips of Ukraine coverage (March 5, 2022, 42 secs., The Recount, <https://twitter.com/therecount/status/1500229669823692811?s=20&t=-znfQbH3rzjwep6c2hyYUw>)
- [12 Types of Media Bias](#) (one copy for each student)
- [Media Analysis Questions](#) (one copy for each student)

PROCEDURES



Information Sharing

- Ask students: *Do you know what's happening in Ukraine? Have you watched any of the news coverage of the war and refugee crisis in Ukraine?*
- Explain/elicite that in February 2022, Russia launched an unprovoked large-scale military invasion of Ukraine, a country in Eastern Europe that borders

Russia. The invasion and resulting war received widespread condemnation from countries around the world, many of which have imposed sanctions on Russia and provided foreign aid and weapons to Ukraine. A significant effect of the war has been that a serious humanitarian crisis has unfolded for the Ukrainian people. As of March 15, 2022, more than three million people have fled the country and are seeking safety in neighboring countries. They have become refugees. Refugees are people who flee war, violence, conflict or persecution (being continually treated in a cruel and harmful way) and cross an international border to find safety in another country.

Explain that today we are going to talk about some media coverage of the crisis in Ukraine as a way of exploring bias in media.

3. Play this [video clip of Ukraine coverage](#) and explain to students that it is a compilation of some of the reporting on Ukraine. Invite students to jot down notes or ideas as they are watching.
4. After watching, ask students: *What do you notice? What do you wonder?* Have students turn and talk with someone sitting next to them and about what they saw, wondered and noticed.
5. Reconvene students and play the video again, asking students to pay particular attention to the words and phrases being used by the news reporters. Ask students: *What words and phrases do you notice? What do they mean?* Record students' responses on the board/smartboard. Some of these words may include:
 - "middle class"
 - "developing third-world nation"
 - "civilized"
 - "prosperous"
 - "Iraq, Afghanistan"
 - "Christian"
 - "white"
 - "blue eyes and blonde hair"
 - "Middle East"
 - "Syria"
6. Engage students in a discussion by asking some or all the following questions.
 - How are these words being used to characterize the people of Ukraine?
 - How are the words being used to compare the people and refugees in Ukraine to other people and other refugees around the world (Iraq, Syria, etc.)?
 - What messages do these words convey?
 - How did you feel while watching the video?
 - Is there bias in the way that the clips were compiled? Please explain.



What is Media Bias?

1. Explain to students that we are going to discuss media bias. Ask students: *What is bias?* Explain/elicite the following definition.

Bias: An inclination or preference, either for or against an individual or group, that interferes with impartial judgment.
2. Ask students: *What is media?* Explain/elicite the following definition.

Media: The system and organization of communication (i.e., radio, television, news and newspapers, magazines, images, video, internet) that reach or influence a large number of people. Bring the two definitions

(bias and media) together and explain that **media bias** is the bias of journalists and news producers within the mass media in the selection of events and stories and how they are reported.

Note: You may also want to mention the influence of social media in general, and the large role social media is playing in the reporting of the war in Ukraine.

3. Ask students: *Do you think there is bias in the media?* If there is space in your classroom, have students who answer “yes” to the question move to one side of the room and those who answer “no” move to the other side of the room. For those who are unsure, they can move to the middle of the room. (If time and space do not allow for this process, have students raise hands or do a quick online poll in response to the questions).

Have students briefly talk among themselves about why they moved to the spot/chose the answer they did. Then, have a few students from each group share aloud why they took their position.

4. Have students return to their seats and ask: *Can you think of any examples of media bias?* Explain that in news reporting, whether that's on TV, online, newspaper, radio or social media, all news has some bias.



Reading Activity

1. Share with students the following information from AllSides™:

“Journalism is tied to a set of ethical standards and values, including truth and accuracy, fairness and impartiality, and accountability. However, journalism today often strays from objective fact; the result is biased news. Bias isn't necessarily a bad thing, but hidden media bias misleads, manipulates and divides us....

72 percent of Americans **believe** traditional news sources report **fake news**, falsehoods, or content that is purposely misleading. With trust in media declining, media consumers must learn how to spot types of media bias.”

2. Distribute a copy of the report “**12 Types of Media Bias**” (pages 3-23) to all students. Provide 10-15 minutes for students to read it silently or read aloud together with students taking turns reading.

Alternative: Divide the report into four sections, numbers 1-3, 4-6, 7-9 and 10-12 and have the students work in four small groups, each reading one of the sections and sharing what they learned with the rest of the class.

3. After reading, engage students in a discussion by asking some or all the following questions.

- What are some of the big ideas discussed in this article?
- What quotes, phrases or concepts jumped out at you?
- What did you learn that you didn't know before?
- What in the article challenged your thinking?
- What is your main takeaway after reading this article?
- What impact does media bias have on individuals? What impact does it have on society?
- What are your thoughts about what can be done about bias in the media?
- How do you think this information will help you when reading or watching the news?
- How can we hold the media accountable to challenge their own biases?

4. Have students write a short response to the article they read, answering the question: What is your main takeaway after reading this article?

Examples of Media Bias

1. Ask students: *How does bias happen in the news? What are some ways in which there is media bias?* Brainstorm a list, which may include some or all of these, and can include some ideas from the article:
 - What is reported and what isn't reported.

- Not covering certain stories, omitting information that supports a different viewpoint or omitting voices or perspectives with a different viewpoint.
 - The perspective of the person reporting or producing the news.
 - Who is interviewed for the news story (article or on camera) and what their perspective is and how those interviewed are treated and talked to.
 - How much time is allocated to a topic, including not covering it at all or covering it a great deal relative to other stories.
 - The emphasis on certain topics and not others.
 - Specific words and language that are used when describing a news event.
 - The use of different words to describe different identity groups or describe actions of different identity groups.
 - Opinion statements that are presented as facts.
 - Only telling part of the story or focusing on only one part or side of the story.
2. Remind students about the video they watched at the beginning of the lesson. Ask students: *To what extent was there bias in the reporting in that video of the Ukrainian people and refugees from Ukraine?* Please explain and elaborate.
 3. Ask students: *Now that we've discussed and seen examples of bias in the media, can you think of other examples of media bias?* Elicit some examples from students. If students don't have examples of their own, provide the following examples:
 - Even though the majority of the thousands of Black Lives Matters protests in Summer of 2020 were peaceful (the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data did a study and found that more than 93% of these protests involved no serious harm to people or damage to property), there was an over-emphasis in media reporting on the violence during these protests. Dr. Roudabeh Kishi, ACLED's Director of Research and Innovation stated, "There have been some violent demonstrations, and those tend to get a lot of media coverage. But if you were to look at all the demonstrations happening, it's overwhelmingly peaceful."
 - A Philadelphia journalist wrote two different articles about when Melania Trump and Hillary Clinton wore white. Melania Trump wearing white was described as a "scary statement" ("To many, that outfit could be another reminder that in the G.O.P. white is always right") and Hillary Clinton wearing white was described as "presidential" ("Hillary Clinton wears white pantsuit, captures hope & democratic essence of America").
 - During Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans (and other places) in 2005, there was criticism to the emergency response to a mostly Black population because the response was slow, ineffective and more than 1,500 people in New Orleans died. During the crisis, people were desperate for food and shelter. There were two news articles that were being circulated and compared, both showing people deep in water with food in their hands: one was of a young Black man who was described as "**looting**" a grocery store and the other one was of two white people described as "**finding**" food. This was widely regarded as an example of media bias.



Media Bias Project

1. Explain to students that they are going to work either alone or in pairs and analyze a piece of media or compare two pieces of media. This analysis can either be (1) one piece of media for analysis of bias, (2) two pieces of media about the same topic with different perspectives for comparison and contrast, or (3) two similar stories with different identity groups (i.e., refugee crisis in Ukraine vs. refugee crisis in Syria) for comparison of media coverage.

Optional: Prepare some examples of media bias in advance for students to choose from.

2. Before having students work on their projects, brainstorm a list of questions that students should ask while conducting their research. Distribute a copy of the [Media Analysis Questions](#) and have students add questions as needed. Some of the questions may include:
 - How would someone come across this form of media?
 - Who is the target audience?
 - What is the perspective of the person who wrote or produced the content? How can you tell?
 - What groups of people are being represented or discussed and how are they being portrayed?
 - Are there stereotypes? If so, who are the stereotypes about and how are they being conveyed? Are any stereotypes dispelled or challenged? Please explain.
 - What values are being communicated through the media? Are they overt, subtle or both? Please explain.
 - How might the depiction of certain people be improved or bias or stereotypes reduced or eliminated?
 - What do you think are the motivations of the journalists for framing the piece of media the way they framed it?
 - What is your analysis of how this piece of media (or comparison of two pieces of media) is biased? How do you know?
3. Provide time in class for students to begin their projects and then give them time to complete the project as homework. When finished, have students share their findings with the rest of the class.

Closing

Have students respond to the question: *What is one thing I can do to better analyze bias in the media I consume?*

ADDITIONAL READING AND RESOURCES

- [“How AllSides Rates Media Bias”](#) (AllSides, January 14, 2019)
- [“How to Spot 12 Types of Media Bias”](#) (AllSides)
- [“The Media’s Racial Bias is also Happening Off Screen”](#) (*Fortune*, March 10, 2022)
- [“There’s a Double Standard in How News Media Cover Liberal and Conservative Protests”](#) (*The Washington Post*, January 13, 2021)
- [“They are ‘Civilised’ and ‘Look Like Us’: The Racist Coverage of Ukraine”](#) (*The Guardian*, March 2, 2022)

Common Core Standards

CONTENT AREA/STANDARD
Reading
R1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
R7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
Writing
W2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
Speaking & Listening
SL1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
SL2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
SL3: Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.
Language
L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.
L6: Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

CASEL's SEL Competencies

COMPETENCIES
Self-Awareness: The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.
Social Awareness: The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, & contexts.
Relationship Skills: The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups.
Responsible Decision-Making: The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.



By Julie Mastrine
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About Media Bias

Journalism is tied to a set of ethical standards and values, including truth and accuracy, fairness and impartiality, and accountability. However, journalism today often strays from objective fact; the result is biased news. Bias isn't necessarily a bad thing, but hidden media bias misleads, manipulates and divides us. This is why AllSides provides hundreds of [media bias ratings](#), a [balanced newsfeed](#), the [AllSides Media Bias Chart™](#), and the [AllSides Fact Check Bias Chart™](#).

72 percent of Americans [believe](#) traditional news sources report [fake news](#), falsehoods, or content that is purposely misleading. With trust in media declining, media consumers must learn how to spot types of media bias.

This page outlines 12 types of media bias, along with examples of their use in popular media outlets. Don't forget to check out the [14 types of ideological bias](#).

12 Types of Media Bias

1. Spin

Spin is vague, dramatic or sensational language. When journalists put a “spin” on a story, they push it away from objective, measurable facts. Spin is a form of media bias that clouds a reader’s view, preventing them from getting a precise take on what happened.

In the early 20th century, Public Relations and Advertising executives were referred to as “spin doctors.” They would use vague language and make unsupportable claims in order to promote a product, service or idea, downplaying any alternative views in order to make a sale. Increasingly, these tactics are appearing in journalism.

Examples of Spin Words and Phrases:

Emerge Refuse High-stakes Landmark Major Critical Offend Wary of offending Meaningful Monumental High-stakes	Serious Crucial Tirade Latest in a string of... Turn up the heat Decrying Stern talks Facing calls to... Even though Significant
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Sometimes the media uses spin words and phrase to **imply bad behavior**. These words are often used without providing hard facts, direct quotes, or witnessed behavior:

Finally Acknowledged Refusing to say Dodged Came to light	Surfaced Emerged Conceded Admission Admit to
-----------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------

To stir emotions, reports often include **colored, dramatic, or sensational words as a substitute for the word “said.”** For example:

Mocked Raged Bragged Fumed Lashed out Raged Incensed	Scoffed Frustration Erupted Rant Boasted Gloated
------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------

Examples of Spin Media Bias:

**BUSINESS
INSIDER**

TECH | FINANCE | POLITICS | STRATEGY | LIFE | ALL

President Donald Trump gloated over mass layoffs at multiple news outlets on Saturday, tweeting that "many others will follow" and attributing the loss to "Fake News."

"Fake News and bad journalism have caused a big downturn. Sadly, many others will follow. The people want the Truth!" he tweeted.

“Gloat” means “contemplate or dwell on one's own success or another's misfortune with smugness or malignant pleasure.” Is there evidence in Trump’s tweet to show he is being smug or taking pleasure in the layoffs, or is this a subjective interpretation?

[Source: Business Insider](#)

The Washington Post

As he jetted to Paris last Friday, President Trump received a congratulatory phone call aboard Air Force One. British Prime Minister Theresa May was calling to celebrate the Republican Party's wins in the midterm elections — never mind that Democrats seized control of the House — but her appeal to the American president's vanity was met with an ornery outburst.

Trump berated May for Britain not doing enough, in his assessment, to contain Iran. He questioned her over Brexit and complained about the trade deals he sees as unfair with European countries. May has endured Trump's churlish temper before, but still her aides were shaken by his especially foul mood, according to U.S. and European officials briefed on the conversation.

In this example of spin media bias, the Washington Post uses a variety of dramatic, sensationalist words to spin the story to make Trump appear emotional and unhinged. They also refer to the president's "vanity" without providing supporting evidence.

[Source: Washington Post](#)

2. Unsubstantiated Claims

Journalists sometimes make claims in their reporting without including evidence to back them up. This can occur in the headline of an article, or in the body.

Statements that appear to be fact, but do not include specific evidence, are a key indication of this type of media bias.

Examples of Unsubstantiated Claims Media Bias



Socialist Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) continued her longstanding pattern of not understanding how things work on Thursday, this time indicating that she does not know the difference between a media company and a political party.

In this media bias instance, The Daily Wire references a "longstanding pattern," but does not back this up with evidence.

Source: [The Daily Wire](#)



Sen. Kamala Harris (D-Calif.) condemned the violent attack on actor Jussie Smollett, calling it "an attempted modern day lynching."

"[Smollett] is one of the kindest, most gentle human beings I know. I'm praying for his quick recovery," the 2020 presidential candidate tweeted.

"This was an attempted modern day lynching. No one should have to fear for their life because of their sexuality or color of their skin. We must confront this hate."

In late January 2019, actor Jussie Smollett claimed he was attacked by two men who hurled racial and homophobic slurs. The Hill refers to "the violent attack" without using the word "alleged" or "allegations." The incident was revealed to be a hoax created by Smollett himself.

Source: [The Hill](#)

The Washington Post

First, Sanders's complaint isn't that millionaires exist *per se*. After all, if America's household wealth were distributed evenly across the population, then every family of four would have a net worth of \$1.2 million. Sanders's critique is that the United States' super-rich are symptomatic of a system that churns out a small class of extremely wealthy people who rule over the vast remainder. Key

This Washington Post columnist makes a claim about wealth distribution without noting where it came from. Who determined this number and how? [Source: Washington Post](#)

3. Opinion Statements Presented as Facts

Sometimes journalists use subjective language or statements under the guise of reporting objectively. Even when a media outlet presents an article as a factual, hard news piece, it may employ subjective statements or language.

A subjective statement is one that is based on **personal opinions, assumptions, beliefs, tastes, preferences, or interpretations**. It reflects how the writer views reality, what they presuppose to be the truth. It is a statement colored by their specific perspective or lens and cannot be verified using concrete facts and figures within the article.

There are objective modifiers — “blue” “old” “single-handedly” “statistically” “domestic” — for which the meaning can be verified. On the other hand, there are subjective modifiers — “suspicious,” “dangerous,” “extreme,” “dismissively,” “apparently” — which are a matter of interpretation.

Interpretation can present the same events as two very different incidents. A political protest in some people sat down in the middle of a street blocking traffic to draw attention to their cause can be described as “peaceful” and “productive,” or, others may describe it as “aggressive” and “disruptive.”

Words that signal subjective statements include:

Good/better/best Bad/worse/worst Is considered to be It's likely that Seemingly Dangerous	Extreme Suggests May mean that Would seem Could Possibly Apparently
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[Source: Butte College Critical Thinking Tipsheet](#)

An objective statement, on the other hand, is an observation of **observable facts**. It is not based on emotions or personal opinion and is based on empirical evidence — what is **quantifiable and measurable**.

It's important to note that an objective statement may not actually be *true*. The following statements are objective statements, but can be verified as true or false:

Taipei 101 is the world's tallest building.

Five plus four equals ten.

There are nine planets in our solar system.

Now, the first statement of fact is true (as of this writing); the other two are false. It is possible to verify the height of buildings and determine that Taipei 101 tops them all. It is possible to devise an experiment to demonstrate that five plus four does *not* equal ten or to use established criteria to determine whether Pluto is a planet.

[Source: Butte College Critical Thinking Tipsheet](#)

Editorial reviews by AllSides found that some media outlets blur the line between subjective statements and objective statements, leading to potential confusion for readers, in two key ways:

- Including subjective statements in their writing and not attributing them to a source. (see Omission of Source Attribution, page 16)
- Placing opinion or editorial content on the homepage next to hard news, or otherwise not clearly marking opinion content as “opinion.”

Examples of Opinion Statements Presented as Fact

Vox

The EPA is lifting greenhouse gas limits on coal power plants

The latest proposal won't stop the steady decline of the coal industry.

The sub-headline Vox uses is an opinion statement — some people likely believe the lifting of the gas limit will strengthen the coal industry — but Vox included this statement in a piece not labeled “Opinion.”

Source: [Vox](#)



Clinton was asked if she'd make a prediction on the 2020 election and said she joked, saying she'd save that insight for her upcoming book, "What Will Happen: A Book of Predictions: Hillary Clinton and Paul the Psychic Octopus."

Her appearance on the friendly show may be another sign that she intends on staying relevant prior to 2020.

In this article about Hillary Clinton's appearance on "The Late Show With Stephen Colbert," the author makes an assumption about Clinton's motives and jumps to a subjective conclusion.

Source: [Fox News](#)

4. Sensationalism/Emotionalism

Sensationalism is the presentation of information in a way that gives a shock or makes a deep impression. Often it gives readers a false sense of culmination, that all previous reporting has led to this ultimate story.

Sensationalist language is often dramatic, yet vague. It often involves hyperbole — at the expense of accuracy — or warping reality to mislead or provoke a strong reaction in the reader.

In recent years, some media outlets have been criticised for overusing the term “breaking” or “breaking news,” which historically was reserved for stories of deep impact or wide-scale importance.

Many reporters increase the readability of their pieces using vivid verbs. But there are many verbs that are heavy with implications that can't be objectively corroborated: "blast" "slam" "bury" "abuse" "destroy" "worry."

Words and phrases that signal sensationalism/emotionalism include:

Shocking Explosive Remarkable Slams Rips Forcing Chaotic	Warning Lashed out Embroided in... Onslaught Torrent of tweets Scathing Desperate Showdown
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Examples of Sensationalism/Emotionalism Media Bias



GOYANG, South Korea (AP) – There will be plenty to gawk at Friday when North Korean leader Kim Jong Un walks south across the world's most heavily armed border and stands face-to-face with South Korean President Moon Jae-in. Two men who seemed on the verge of war months ago will take a pleasant walk, plant a commemorative tree, inspect an honor guard and belly-up to a lavish banquet.

"Gawk" means to stare open and stupidly. Does AP's language treat this event as serious and diplomatic, or as entertainment?

[Source: AP](#)



The skinny version: There are more than a hundred Republican-held congressional districts across the country that have a narrower margin than 17. If seats that look like this one in Pennsylvania are toss-ups in November, it's going to be a bloodbath.

Here, BBC uses sensationalism in the form of hyperbole, as the election is unlikely to involve bloodshed in the literal sense. [Source: BBC](#)



Democrats continued to rage at President Trump over his income taxes and criticism of Rep. Ilhan Omar.

The Democrat-controlled House Ways and Means Committee set a 10-day deadline Saturday for Trump to cough up his tax returns—and threatened legal action if the administration refuses.

Omar has come under fire for remarks widely viewed as anti-Semitic, though some Democrats have tried to stand up for her. Ilhan in February suggested that lawmakers and activists who support Israel hold “allegiance to a foreign country.”

Pelosi, in Europe as Congress began a two-week recess, attempted to turn the Twitter battle in a patriotic direction, posting a photo of herself with two American service members.

“It is wrong for the President, as Commander-in-Chief, to fan the flames to make anyone less safe,” she scolded in a separate tweet.

But Pelosi couldn’t keep Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.) from setting off fresh waves of outrage with a defense of Omar that cited a famous quote about the Holocaust.



Trump goes after Ilhan Omar with 9/11 attack montage video

In this piece from the New York Post, the author uses multiple sensationalist phrases and emotional language to dramatize the “Twitter battle” it is describing.

Source: [New York Post](#)

5. Mudslinging/Ad Hominem

Mudslinging is a type of media bias when unfair or insulting things are said about someone in order to damage their reputation. Similarly, ad hominem (Latin for “to the person”) attacks are attacks on a person’s motive or character traits instead of the content of their argument or idea. Ad hominem attacks can be used overtly, or as a way to subtly discredit someone without having to engage with their argument.

Examples of Mudslinging



CAMPUS FREE SPEECH

Bret Stephens Is Not a Bedbug. He's a Delicate Snowflake.

The *New York Times* columnist emailed a professor to complain about a mean tweet—and cc'ed the provost.

A Reason editor calls a New York Times columnist a "snowflake" after the columnist emailed a professor and his provost to complain about a tweet calling him a bedbug.

Source: [Reason](#)



In March 2019, The Economist ran a piece describing political commentator and author Ben Shapiro as “alt-right.” Readers pointed out that Shapiro is Jewish (the alt-right is largely anti-Semitic) and has condemned the alt-right. The Economist issued a retraction and instead

referred to Shapiro as a “radical conservative.”

Source: [Twitter](#)

6. Mind Reading

Mind reading occurs in journalism when a writer assumes they know what another person thinks, or thinks that the way they see the world reflects the way the world really is.

Examples of Mind Reading



(CNN) — [Donald Trump's hatred of looking foolish](#) and [Democrats' conviction that they have a winning hand](#) is leaving the President with no way out of the stalemate over his border wall.

We can't objectively measure that Trump hates looking foolish, because we can't read his mind or know what he is feeling. There is also no evidence provided to demonstrate that Democrats believe they have a winning hand.

Source: [CNN](#)

NATIONAL REVIEW

Criticizing the president the other day, Joe Scarborough nonetheless conceded, “**Presidents are always working, whether on a golf course or behind a desk.**” But is that actually so? What, exactly, does President Obama do? He seems to learn everything from the papers — from the IRS scandal to the VA scandal to the mobilization of the Missouri National Guard. International events routinely take him by surprise. His professional activities include fundraising — **40 events this year so far** — and perfunctory addresses to the public. He goes through the presidential motions: meeting with officials and foreign dignitaries, holding press conferences, sitting for interviews, shipping MREs to endangered populations, ordering air strikes. But there is no passion behind these activities, no restless energy, no managerial competence, no sense of purpose or mission or strategy, none of the qualities associated with leadership in business, politics, and culture.

How do we know that Obama doesn't have passion or sense of purpose? Here, the National Review writer assumes they know what is going on in Obama's head.

[Source: National Review](#)

Vox

One of the most pertinent moments in Neeson's follow-up interview with Roberts came when he confidently asserted that "this was 40 years ago" and stated that he isn't racist.

Despite Neeson also saying that he worked to get rid of his racist feelings, his reminder that decades have passed since this incident might be interpreted as a declaration that racism and bias are problems that go away with time. If that were true, racism wouldn't exist today.

Vox is upfront about the fact that they are interpreting what Neeson said, yet this interpretation ran in a piece labeled objective news — not a piece in the Opinion section. Despite being overt about interpreting, by drifting away from what Neeson actually said, Vox is mind reading.

[Source: Vox](#)

7. Slant

Slant occurs when journalists tell only part of a story. It can include cherry-picking information or data to support one side. Slant prevents readers from getting the full story, and narrows the scope of our understanding.

Examples of Slant



Ocasio-Cortez has been portrayed as one of the leaders of the progressive wing in the Democratic Party. She, along with Sanders, has received intense criticism for policy proposals like the "Green New Deal."

In the above example, Fox News notes that Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s policy proposals have received “intense criticism.” While this is true, it is only one side of the picture, as the Green New Deal was well received by other groups. Source: [Fox News](#)

8. Flawed Logic

Flawed logic or faulty reasoning is a way to misrepresent people’s opinions or to arrive at conclusions that are not justified by the given evidence. Flawed logic can involve jumping to conclusions or arriving at a conclusion that doesn’t follow from the premise.

Examples of Flawed Logic

THE DAILY WIRE

Two-time failed Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton snubbed Melania Trump during George H.W. Bush’s funeral on Wednesday, refusing to shake her hand or wave at the First Lady after the other former presidents and their wives did.

Melania shook hands with former President Barack Obama, Michelle Obama, and former President Bill Clinton as she then waved in the direction of Hillary and former President Jimmy Carter – only to receive a wave back from Carter and an awkward and bitter nod back from Hillary.

Here, the Daily Wire interprets a video to draw conclusions that aren’t clearly supported by the available evidence. The video shows Melania did not extend her hand to shake, but it could be because Clinton was too far away to reach, or perhaps there was no particular reason at all. By jumping to conclusions that this amounted to a “snub” or was the result of “bitterness” instead of limitations of physical reality or some other reason, The Daily Wire is engaging in flawed logic.

Source: [The Daily Wire](#)

9. Bias by Omission

Bias by omission is a type of media bias in which media outlets choose not to cover certain stories, omit information that would support an alternative viewpoint, or omit voices and perspectives on the other side.

Media outlets sometimes omit stories in order to serve a political agenda. Sometimes, a story will only be covered by media outlets on a certain side of the political spectrum. Bias by omission also occurs when a reporter does not interview both sides of a story — for instance, interviewing only supporters of a bill, and not including perspectives against it.

Examples of Bias by Omission



CNN previously reported on the FBI's hate crime statistics released last November, which showed the number of hate crimes reported to the bureau rose about 17% in 2017 compared to 2016. 2017 is the latest year for which those statistics are available.

It was the third-straight year that hate crime incidents rose.

In a piece titled, "Hate crimes are rising, regardless of Jussie Smollett's case. Here's why," CNN claims that hate crime incidents rose for three years, but omits information that may lead the reader to different conclusions. According to [the FBI's website](#), reports of hate crime incidents rose from previous years, but so did the number of agencies reporting, "with approximately 1,000 additional agencies contributing information." This makes it unclear as to whether hate crimes are actually on the rise, as the headline claims, or simply appear to be because more agencies are reporting.

Source: CNN

10. Omission of Source Attribution

An informative, balanced article should provide the background or context of a story, including naming sources (publishing “on-the-record” information).

Sometimes, reporters will mention “immigration opponents” or “supporters of the bill” without identifying who these sources are.

It is sometimes useful or necessary to use unnamed sources, because insider information is only available if the reporter agrees to keep their identity secret. But responsible journalists should be aware and make it clear that they are offering second-hand information on sensitive matters. This fact doesn’t necessarily make the statements false, but it does make them less than reliable.

Examples of Omission of Source Attribution



Critics say the Montgomery, Alabama-based SPLC, whose founder, Morris Dees, and president, Richard Cohen, were ousted earlier this year—allegedly for employee abuse—treats all opposition to illegal or legal immigration, open borders, and multiculturalism as hate, and all political expression of those views as hate speech. The SPLC also has a record of promoting hate crime hoaxes, the critics say, as well as ignoring bias incidents against white people and Jews targeted on university campuses by Islamist and anti-Israel groups.

In this paragraph, the Epoch Times repeatedly states "critics say" without attributing the views to anyone specific.

Source: [The Epoch Times](#)

The New York Times

WASHINGTON — Some of Robert S. Mueller III's investigators have told associates that Attorney General William P. Barr failed to adequately portray the findings of their inquiry and that they were more troubling for President Trump than Mr. Barr indicated, according to government officials and others familiar with their simmering frustrations.

In a piece about the Mueller investigation, The New York Times never names the investigators, officials or associates mentioned. Source: [The New York Times](#)

11. Bias by Story Choice and Placement

Story and viewpoint placement can reveal media bias by showing which stories or viewpoints the editor finds most important.

Bias by story choice

This is when a media outlet's bias is revealed by which stories the outlet chooses to cover or to omit. For example, an outlet that chooses to cover the topic of climate change frequently can reveal a different political leaning than an outlet that chooses to cover stories about gun laws. The implication is that the outlet's editors and writers find certain topics more notable, meaningful, or important than others, which can tune us into the outlet's political bias or partisan agenda. Bias by story choice is closely linked to [media bias by omission](#) and [slant](#).

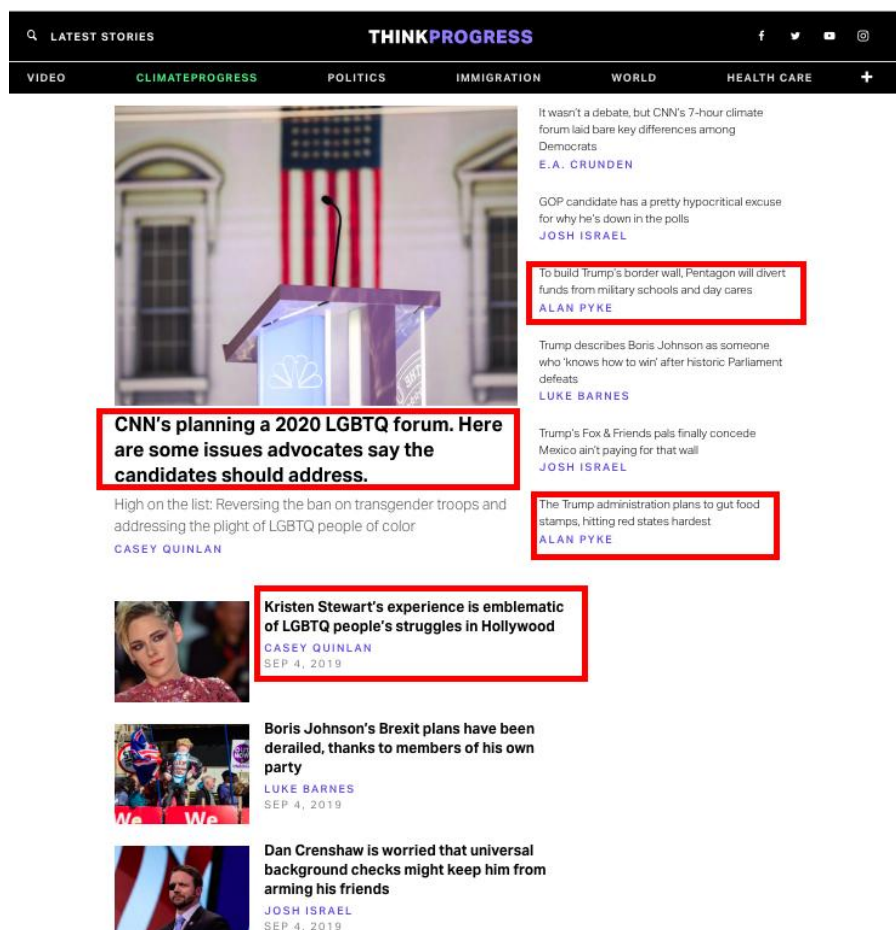
Bias by story placement

The stories that a media outlet features "above the fold" or prominently on its homepage and in print show which stories they really want you to read, even if you read nothing else on the site or in the publication. Many people will quickly scan a homepage or read only a headline, so the stories that are featured first can reveal what the editor hopes you take away or keep top of mind from that day.

Bias by viewpoint placement

This can often be seen in political stories. A balanced piece of journalism will include perspectives from both the left and the right in equal measure. If a story only features viewpoints from left-leaning sources and commentators, or includes them near the top of the story/in the first few paragraphs, and does not include right-leaning viewpoints, or buries them at the end of a story, this is an example of bias by viewpoint.

Examples of Bias by Story Choice and Placement



In this screenshot of ThinkProgress' homepage taken at 1 p.m. EST on Sept. 6, 2019, the media outlet chooses to prominently display coverage of LGBTQ issues and cuts to welfare and schools programs. In the next screenshot of The Epoch Times homepage taken at the same time on the same day, the outlet privileges very different stories.

(Continued on next page)



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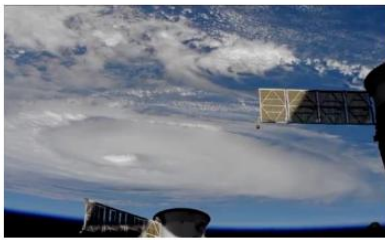
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Taken at the same time on the same day as the screenshot above, The Epoch Times chooses to prominently feature stories about a hurricane, the arrest of illegal immigrants, Hong Kong activists, and the building of the border wall. Notice that ThinkProgress' headline on the border wall focuses on diverting funds from schools and daycares, while the Epoch Times headline focuses on the wall's completion.

12. Subjective Qualifying Adjectives

Journalists can reveal bias when they include subjective, [qualifying adjectives](#) in front of specific words or phrases. Qualifying adjectives are words that characterize or attribute specific properties to a noun. When a journalist uses qualifying adjectives, they are suggesting a way for you to think about or interpret the issue, instead of just giving you the facts and letting you make judgements for yourself. This can manipulate your view. Subjective qualifiers are closely related to [spin words and phrases](#), because they obscure the objective truth and insert subjectivity.

For example, a journalist who writes that a politician made a "serious allegation" is interpreting the weight of that allegation for you. An unbiased piece of writing would simply tell you what the allegation is, and allow you to make your own judgement call as to whether it is serious or not.

In opinion pieces, subjective adjectives are okay; they become a problem when they are inserted outside of the opinion pages and into hard news pieces.

Sometimes, the use of an adjective may be warranted, but journalists have to be careful in exercising their judgement. For instance, it may be warranted to call a Supreme Court ruling that overturned a major law a "landmark case." But often, adjectives are included in ways that not everyone may agree with; for instance, people who are in favor of limiting abortion would likely not agree with a journalist who characterizes new laws restricting the act as a "disturbing trend." Therefore, it's important to be aware of subjective qualifiers and adjectives so that you can be on alert and then decide for yourself whether it should be accepted or not. It is important to notice, question and challenge adjectives that journalists use.

Examples of Subjective Qualifying Adjectives

disturbing rise serious accusations troubling trend sharp rise sinister warning critical bill	extreme law baseless claim debunked theory (<i>this phrase could coincide with <u>bias by omission</u>, if the journalist doesn't include information for you to determine why the theory is false.</i>)	awkward flaw offensive statement harsh rebuke extremist group far-right/far-left organization
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POLITICS

Rep. Madison Cawthorn Issues Sinister Warning To Anyone Opposing Him

The extremist Republican ranted about liberals trying to make people "sexless," then threatened people who "stand in the way."



By Lee Moran

11/05/2021 05:16am EDT | Updated November 5, 2021

Rep. Madison Cawthorn (R-N.C.) raised eyebrows with a wild rant about the left and a warning about what will happen to anyone who disagrees with the right's agenda during a frothy interview on the far-right network OAN this week.

HuffPost's headline includes the phrases "sinister warning" and "extremist Republican." It goes on to note the politician's "wild rant" in a "frothy interview" and calls a competing network "far-right." These qualifying adjectives encourage the reader to think a certain way. A more neutral piece would have told the reader what Cawthorn said without telling the reader how to interpret it.

[Source article](#)
[HuffPost bias rating](#)

Some Final Notes on Bias

Everyone is biased. It is part of human nature to have perspectives, preferences, prejudices, leanings, and partialities. But sometimes, bias — especially media bias — can become invisible to us. This is why AllSides provides hundreds of [media bias ratings](#) and a [media bias chart](#).

We are all biased toward things that show us in the right. We are biased toward

information that confirms our existing beliefs. We are biased toward the people or information that supports us, makes us look good, and affirms our judgments and virtues. And we are biased toward the more moral choice of action — at least, that which seems moral to us.

Journalism as a profession is biased toward vibrant communication, timeliness, and providing audiences with a sense of the current moment — whether or not that sense is politically slanted. Editors are biased toward strong narrative, stunning photographs, pithy quotes, and powerful prose. Every aspiring journalist has encountered media bias — sometimes the hard way. If they stay in the profession, often it will be because they have incorporated the biases of their editor.

But sometimes, bias can manipulate and blind us. It can put important information and perspectives in the shadows and prevent us from getting the whole view. For this reason, there is not a single type of media bias that can't, and shouldn't occasionally, be isolated and examined. This is just as true for journalists as it is for their audiences.

Good reporting can shed valuable light on our biases — good and bad. By learning how to spot media bias, how it works, and how it might blind us, we can avoid being fooled by media bias and fake news. We can learn to identify and appreciate different perspectives — and ultimately, come to a more wholesome view.

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