

HOW CAN I AVOID MEDIA BIAS?

Knowing media bias exists is the first step in avoiding it. People don't need to be experts in journalism to spot bias. They just need to know what to look for. Asking certain questions can help people find biased pieces quickly. No one can avoid bias all the time. But understanding



People can discuss whether they think a source is biased.

when a story is slanted can stop people from taking the story too seriously. Some news sources may show bias frequently. When this happens, people may want to question whether they should get news from those outlets.

SIGNS OF MEDIA BIAS

There are ways to find media bias. One way is to look at the language in a story. Do the words in the story lead the reader to a particular opinion? Reporters must describe what is happening. But the words they use

INFLUENCE OF ADVERTISERS

Newspapers and online websites have spaces for advertisements. Companies buy these. They want to promote their products. News outlets make their money from advertising. Sometimes this can lead to bias. For example, studies have shown that US newspapers are less likely to report an auto recall if the auto company buys its ad space. Auto recalls happen when a vehicle has a flaw that needs fixing. When a recall is serious, this lack of news coverage can actually cost lives due to accidents.

can slant a story. For example, a biased story might use words such as *admit*, *claim*, or *rant*. An unbiased piece may use the more neutral word *said*. The word *admit* implies wrongdoing. *Claim* makes it sound like the speaker is making something up. And *rant* implies the person is angry or even unstable. All of these words can be used to push the audience into thinking a certain way.

It is also important to look at a story's point of view. Audiences can ask themselves, did the reporter interview a range of people to represent different



Reporters may not mean to be biased. But their word choices have an impact on people.

sides of the issue? The least biased stories look at issues from several viewpoints.

For example, stories about the economy could include the viewpoints of workers and consumers. But some stories may note the thoughts of only stock traders and business executives.

A lack of diversity is also a sign of bias. People can ask, do all the people interviewed look and sound the same? When only certain individuals—such as males or white people—are interviewed, this limits the story’s point of view. Adrienne LaFrance is a reporter. She notes, “We need to work harder to highlight a variety of voices . . . to make our stories better. And isn’t that always the goal?”⁹

When looking at a news article, people can ask themselves: What are the sources used in this story? All stories need sources. Unbiased news comes from a variety of

them. A small number of sources can be evidence of bias. Imagine that a reporter is doing a story on a lawsuit. A woman who worked for a big company is suing the business. She believes that she was fired because of her age. Interviewing her is one place for a journalist to start. But this is not the only viewpoint that should be included. A responsible journalist will also try to interview a spokesperson for the company. The least biased story will also have quotes from other people. These include people who still work at the business. They could also include people who have been fired



Journalists can interview experts with different backgrounds to get several views on topics.

from the company in the past. Experts in employment law could be interviewed too.

People can also consider the news outlet itself. Have they heard of the news organization before? Does it have a good reputation? Many news stories get

shared on social media. In some cases, these social media posts link to stories from reliable news organizations. But sometimes they are from fake news sites that intentionally share false information. Some so-called news stories are even paid advertisements in disguise.

ACKNOWLEDGING BIAS

Nearly every news outlet will show bias at some point. Sometimes it may be on purpose. Other times it might be accidental. If readers accuse an outlet of bias, it may be telling to see how the outlet responds. A news organization that often denies bias



Social media makes sharing news easy. But people should still check to make sure the news source is legitimate.

is unlikely to fix the problem. But some attempt to do so.

For example, the *Kansas City Star* has been around for more than one hundred years. It has won several awards for journalism. Some people might think this is a sign of a good newspaper. But many

Kansas City Star readers have looked at the paper's history. In the past, it has been biased against Black people. An overwhelming number of stories about Black people in the paper linked them to crimes. Positive stories about Black people were relatively rare. In 2020, the newspaper

FACT-CHECKERS WANTED

Responsible news organizations use fact-checkers. These employees review stories. They look for inaccurate information. Fact-checkers double-check information such as dates and the spelling of names. They also make sure that quotes are accurate. This helps prevent the news organization from accidentally publishing incorrect facts. But sometimes wrong information still slips through the cracks.

apologized for its racial bias. President and editor Mike Fannin shared a plan to fix the problem. This included a promise to hire a more diverse staff.

READING OTHER SOURCES

Being able to spot bias is useful. Avoiding it altogether would be ideal. But another option is getting news from a variety of reliable sources. People can consider reading the same story from opposing viewpoints. No source may be entirely unbiased. But looking at multiple points of view can make it easier to uncover the facts.