

WORKSHEET

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RESEARCHING SKILLS

Identifying Bias

Suppose that while researching nutrition, you run across the following:

Vitamin A is an important nutrient. It is used to make rhodopsin, a pigment in our eyes. Thus, Vitamin A is necessary for healthy vision. People can develop night blindness if they do not get enough of it. Carrots are an excellent source of vitamin A. Carrots should be a part of your daily diet.

At first, this paragraph seems to offer good information. Would you be more skeptical if you learned that it was written by people who grow carrots commercially? How would your opinion change? Explain your answer below.

Bias Is Everywhere

Bias is a subjective way of thinking that tells only one side of a story, sometimes leading to inaccurate information or a false impression. When you research, it is crucial that you identify the level of bias in potential sources. Below are some possible sources of bias.

- The writer is relying on incomplete information.
- The writer is trying to deceive the reader.
- The writer wants to believe what he or she is saying.
- The writer's past experience is influencing his or her thinking.
- The writer is trying to persuade the reader.

In the passage above, the writer does not mention that ingesting too much vitamin A can make people sick. The writer fails to tell the reader that eggs and sweet potatoes are also good sources of vitamin A.

Bias Rating

When reading information, think about what possible bias might be distorting the facts. You might use a scale such as the following:

- 1 = almost totally unbiased; highly objective; accurate
- 2 = mostly unbiased; fairly reliable
- 3 = somewhat biased; accuracy is questionable
- 4 = fairly biased; distorted; probably unreliable
- 5 = totally biased; highly subjective; inaccurate

Identifying Bias, continued

Bias Begone!

As you read the following paragraphs, determine the kind of bias being used. Explain your reasoning.

1. Returning wolves to their native habitats is critically important. The wolf is an original top predator in the natural ecosystems of North America. If these ecosystems are out of balance, they may collapse. If that happens, millions of organisms will go extinct. Even humans are in danger if we do not do something soon. We must make sure that there are wolves in all of North America's remaining natural areas.

2. Scientists use powerful computers to study the Earth's atmosphere. These computers help scientists predict changes in world climate. For instance, scientists use computers to study what might happen if pollution increases or decreases. Computers can also help scientists make recommendations to businesses, individuals, and other polluters. Eventually, we will know enough about climate changes to be able to control them.

TROUBLESHOOTING

When reading a passage, ask yourself, "Will the writer benefit if I believe what is being told to me?" If the answer is yes, then the passage is likely to be biased.

TRY THIS!

Debaters often use bias intentionally to strengthen their position. Select one of the topics above, and have a debate with your classmates. Do your research, choose your position, gather your evidence, and have a vigorous debate!

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