ENGLISH, LITERACY, AND COMMUNICATION

Identifying bias

Difficulty level: Advanced

English, Literacy, and Communication

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Overview of the concept

This is how you spot when a news story or an ad only tells one side, so you can check what has been left out before you believe it. Bias is not always a lie, it is often just the choice of which facts to show and which to leave out, and that choice shapes what you think. Knowing how to spot it helps you read the news, judge an ad, or weigh two sides of an argument instead of taking the first version you hear as the whole truth.



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Rule

Identifying bias: biased words are loaded, emotional words that judge instead of stating facts, such as terrible, selfish, brilliant, crushed, hopeless, and wonderful when it is used as a judgment.

Neutral words state plain facts, such as dates, numbers, and neutral descriptions: announced, will open in June, covers two hectares. A statement is also biased when it gives only one side, with no facts or opposing view.

Worked examples

EXAMPLE 1

Q **Is this biased? 'The terrible, selfish mayor ruined our wonderful town.'**

SOLUTION

Look at the word choices: terrible, selfish, wonderful are loaded, emotional words.

You hear just one side, with no facts and no opposing view.

Yes, it is biased.

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EXAMPLE 2

Q Is this biased? 'The mayor announced a new park. The park will open in June and cover two hectares.'

SOLUTION

Look at the word choices: neutral words, with facts (June, two hectares).

No loaded language or one-sided judgment is used.

No, it is not biased (it is neutral).

Practice questions

1 A sports report says: Our brilliant team crushed the hopeless opponents. Is this biased or neutral?

- A Biased
- B Neutral

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2 A sports report says: The team won 3 to 1 on Saturday. What makes this report neutral?

- **A** It gives facts (the score and the day) with no loaded words
- **B** It praises the team
- **C** It hides the score
- **D** It uses exciting words

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3 A letter about a plan says: Only a fool would disagree with this plan. Which word makes this sentence biased?

- **A** fool
- **B** plan
- **C** disagree
- **D** only

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4 **A meeting note says: The plan was approved by 12 votes to 8. Which side of the argument does this note take?**

- **A** Neither, it just gives the vote
- **B** The side for the plan
- **C** The side against the plan
- **D** Both sides equally

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5 **A news story says: The greedy company stole our jobs. Which of these says the same thing without the bias?**

- **A** The company closed the factory, and 40 jobs were lost.
- **B** The greedy company stole our jobs.
- **C** The terrible company ruined everything.
- **D** Our jobs were stolen by the greedy company.

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6 A news story says: The company closed the factory, and 40 jobs were lost. A biased version says: 'The greedy company stole our jobs.' What did the biased version add?

- **A** An opinion word (greedy) and a blame word (stole)
- **B** More facts about the factory
- **C** The number of jobs lost
- **D** The name of the company

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7 Two ads sell the same product. Which one is biased?

- **A** This amazing product will change your life forever!
- **B** The product costs 20 dollars and weighs 500 grams.

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8

A label says: The product costs 20 dollars and weighs 500 grams. Is the label trying to sell you the product, or just tell you facts?

A Trying to sell it

B Just telling facts

C Hiding the price

D Warning you

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9

A comment says: Everyone knows this is the worst idea ever. What does the phrase 'Everyone knows' do in this sentence?

A It states a fact

B It pressures the reader by claiming everyone agrees

C It gives a number

D It names the idea

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10

A report says: The survey found 60 percent in favour and 40 percent against. Which change would make this report biased?

A Reporting only the 60 percent in favour

B Reporting both numbers

C Saying 'the survey found'

D Giving the results as percentages

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ANSWER KEY

1. Biased

2. It gives facts (the score and the day) with no loaded words

3. fool

4. Neither, it just gives the vote

5. The company closed the factory, and 40 jobs were lost.

6. An opinion word (greedy) and a blame word (stole)

7. This amazing product will change your life forever!

8. Just telling facts

9. It pressures the reader by claiming everyone agrees

10. Reporting only the 60 percent in favour

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