# Task Analysis – Information Bias (Arts & Humanities)

# List of Tasks:

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# Breakdown of Tasks:

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| Module | Specific Task | Assessment |
| 1 Introduction | In this lesson, you will be introduced to some of the different types of bias you may encounter in your research. |  |
| 1.1 Definition | Merriam-Webster provides a 4-part [definition of bias](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bias?utm_campaign=sd&utm_medium=serp&utm_source=jsonld), which explains that it can be:   1. An inclination of temperament or outlook, especially a personal and sometimes unreasoned judgment (PREJUDICE); 2. An instance of such prejudice; 3. BENT, TENDENCY; 4. a) Deviation of the expected value of a statistical estimate from the quantity it estimates;   b) Systematic error introduced into sampling or testing by selecting or encouraging one outcome or answer over others. |  |
| 1. Types of Bias |  |  |
| 2.3 Media Bias | [Media bias](https://palmbeachstate.libguides.com/c.php?g=627075&p=4374059) is the bias or perceived bias of journalists and news producers within the mass media in the selection of events and stories that are reported and how they are covered.  Before outlining the types of media bias that you may encounter in your research, it is important to outline some of the practical limits to media neutrality. These include:   1. Inability to report all available stories and facts 2. Requirement that selected facts be linked to a coherent story or narrative 3. Government influence (including overt and covert means of censorship) in some countries 4. Market forces (including ownership of the news source, concentration of media ownership, subjective selection of staff, and perceived preferences of an intended audience) | [University of Michigan Word Choice Buffet Activity](http://umich.edu/~newsbias/wcact.html) |
| 2.3.1 Reporting Bias | [Reporting biases](http://libguides.huhs.org/mediabias) occur during the processes of research and delivery of news. Reporters are people too, and that means they are also subject to biases.  There are 3 main ways biases can occur in media reporting:   1. **Bias in research:**  * **Expediency**: To meet important deadlines, writers often rely on sources they’ve used before to obtain information. Consequently, they may not take enough time to discover alternative perspectives. * **Witness**: If a reporter does not actively search for a variety of perspectives among witnesses they interview, the story can become skewed. * **Omission**: When reporters omit facts that would encourage critical consideration of an event, it can impact their audience’s perspective on that event.  1. **Bias in delivery:**  * **Narrative style**: Journalism uses a storytelling structure, which typically involves a progression from beginning to end, and includes both protagonists and antagonists. This expectation can put pressure on writers to present conclusions that are not fairly drawn. * **Proximity/point-of-view**: Reporters (especially TV journalists) are often framed within a story (interviewing or reporting to the camera). Being close to the story can tempt a writer to assume a point of view that is not objective.  1. **Bias in spin:**  * **Word choice/labels**: Choosing words with suggestive negative or positive connotations can affect the audience's emotional reaction to a story. |  |
| 2.3.2 Editorial Bias | [Editorial biases](http://libguides.huhs.org/mediabias) occur most frequently during the selection and placement of news stories. When coverage is focused on particular stories while other stories are ignored, it can direct the audience to support a particular political or social agenda.  There are 2 main ways editorial decisions can contribute to media bias:   1. **Placement bias:**  * **Layout**: "Burying" a story by placing it in a section of the paper that is less prominent, or by scheduling it to air at in the middle of the night keeps the story from surfacing as important in the mind of the audience. * **Temporal**: Because news is expected to be current and topical, editors will often give follow-up stories less attention. This can be especially problematic because follow-up stories often contain important clarifying information.  1. **Selection bias:**  * **Visual**: Images and graphics help to draw audience attention in different news media formats. The selection of visuals can skew audience perception of both a story's importance and of the events reported. * **Sensationalism**: Shock sells! The news media often focuses on the stories that promote fear, anger, and excitement. * **Commercial**: Advertisers are an important group of news media funders. In return for their support, they want larger audiences to view their sponsoring content. With this in mind, editors will select stories that they hope will draw larger audiences of readers and viewers. |  |
| 2.3.3 Situational Bias | [Situational biases](http://libguides.huhs.org/mediabias) can occur because audiences are subject to different conceptual and contextual circumstances when they encounter a news story.  Situational biases occur in 2 main ways:   1. **Conceptual bias:**  * **Complexity**: In general, the news tends to frame stories using the six-question rubric of "who, what, when, where, why and how." Real life is complicated (particularly when it comes to ideological issues) and rarely conforms to this standard. The audience may not consider important nuances when stories are presented starkly. * **Stereotypes**: People develop their understandings by classifying and categorizing knowledge. Stereotypes occur as a way of understanding groups and situations of which we are regular participants. Intentionally or not, journalists may use these stereotypes in their reporting, which can affect the way in which the story is perceived.  1. **Contextual bias:**  * **Geography**: The location of a story may be connected to particular cultural and social issues. Audiences located outside of that area may have different reactions to the same story. * **Definitions**: Words take on different meanings depending on context of use and the background/culture of the audience. * **Distraction**: TV and radio news is often delivered in a rapid-fire format, meaning there is little time to stop and carefully evaluate information. Print media provides more opportunity for contemplation; however, as this more traditional format moves online, the vast amount of available information serves as its own distraction. |  |
| 2.3.4 Bias vs. Fake News | [Fake news](https://guides.library.cornell.edu/evaluate_news/fakenews) is “fabricated information that mimics news media content in form but not in organizational process or intent. Fake-news outlets, in turn, lack the news media's editorial norms and processes for ensuring the accuracy and credibility of information. Fake news overlaps with other information disorders, such as misinformation (false or misleading information) and disinformation (false information that is purposely spread to deceive people)” [Lazar et al., (2018). The Science of Fake News. *Science, 359* (6380), pp. 1094-1096)].  [Fake news can be](https://libguides.tru.ca/fakenews/home):   * Factually inaccurate * Optimized for sharing * Intentionally designed to prey on an audience’s emotions, prejudice, or bias   Three common types of fake news products are:   1. **Clickbait**: a story, often with a sensational headline, aimed at getting “clicks” from an audience (usually to generate advertising revenue). 2. **Sponsored content**: a story that is made to look like independent journalism when it’s really public relations or advertising. 3. **Fabricated journalism**: news stories that are completely made up (e.g. fabricated quotes, sources, etc.).   It’s important to remember what fake news isn’t. It’s not:   * Satire (e.g. [*The Onion*](https://www.theonion.com/)*,* [*The Beaverton*](https://www.thebeaverton.com/)) * Honest reporting mistakes * Journalism you don’t like or agree with | [University of Akron: Fake News Quiz](https://akron.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_2bhqIwpegOtj5yZ) |
| 3. Avoiding Bias | To look for evidence of bias in your research, there are several [questions](https://stpauls-mb.libguides.com/gloabalissues/bias) to consider:   * Is the author a **known expert in the field**, with a background and credentials that can be verified? * Was the material written, published, or funded by an individual or organization with a **potential conflict of interest**? * Does the publication of this material serve to **advance a particular purpose or ideology**? * Does the author present any information obtained from source materials both **accurately and within the proper context**? * Does the author use **strong or emotional language, present opinion as fact, or use stereotypes**? * Are there any errors in the selection of source materials, the analysis, or the methodology, which might suggest a deliberate **attempt to** **satisfy or support a predetermined argument, outcome, or opinion**? * Does the material look like an **advertisement** for, or against, a particular product, service, or organization?   Sources in all formats (i.e. books, articles, websites) have the potential to exhibit a bias or agenda. Researchers should be ready to look at all materials with a critical eye and evaluate the item's contents in their entirety before using it as a source in their work.  \*\*[This is a good source](https://guides.library.oregonstate.edu/c.php?g=285991&p=1905251) that provides a chart to help students answer these questions with source examples.\*\* |  |