

Functional Skills English

Identifying bias

Name _____ Date _____



Identifying BIAS

As you improve your reading skills, you will understand more about a text and why the writer has used particular words or phrases. You will learn that there is more to reading than just knowing what individual words mean.

Writers create texts for a number of reasons. The purpose of the text will determine the tools and techniques that writers use.

You must be able to 'read between the lines' to get the full meaning of the text. That means understanding how some techniques are used. One technique that writers use is BIAS.

TASK A

What is BIAS?

Look the word up in any dictionary and write down the meaning you find.

BIAS -

bias *noun* (PREFERENCE)

The action of supporting or opposing a particular person or thing in an unfair way, because of allowing personal opinions to influence your judgment:

The government has accused the media of bias.

Reporters must be impartial and not show political bias.

There was clear evidence of a strong bias against her.

There has always been a slight bias in favour of employing arts graduates in the company.

Source: <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/bias>

Compare the meaning you have found with the definition above.

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How can you tell if a piece of text is biased?

There are things that you can look for to help you:

- **Does the piece of writing contain any facts?**

Facts are pieces of information that can be verified, knowledge that we know or can prove to be true.

- **Does the piece of writing contain any opinions?**

Opinions are views or judgements made on a personal level. They are usually based on personal likes or dislikes or personal experience.

- **Is the tone of the text positive or negative?** Is this because the writer expresses **negative opinions**?

If the **opinions** are mainly in one direction or the other, this is a clear indication that the writer's purpose is to share these opinions and convince others.

- **Do you know anything about the writer of the text?**

It could be that the writer has a personal interest in the subject matter.

For example, the purpose of a review is to guide you about a product or service, but the words used in a review are influenced by the experience of the writer.

If the writer wants to sell something, he or she will describe it in positive words. This is because it is in the writer's interest to persuade the reader to buy.

Equally, if the writer has had a bad experience of a person, place or event, then he or she may use negative language.

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TASK B

Read this excerpt. **Highlight** the words that the writer has used that show BIAS.

Reading for pleasure is a waste of time. People who spend hour upon hour reading don't get to live in the real world. They don't really learn anything that is useful about how to deal with everyday people and problems. Plus, teachers always make us read things that are boring.

Parents always talk about how if schools had uniforms, everything would be so much easier. You wouldn't get caught up on looks and would learn the skills you need. I disagree with this, I think that school uniforms would put a restriction on our creativity. We dress the way we do for a certain reason. Clothes give us expression and the ability to use colour and patterns. The first impression we get of people is usually clothes, facial expression and language. If we all wear the same thing, we don't get to really see what people are like on the inside. Usually girly girls wear the pink and frilly things. Skaters wear baggy pants and Goths usually wear black. Clothes don't distract is from learning the studies we need to, it simply lets us inspire our imaginations and lights up our worlds.

Anonymous writer on TeenInk.com

1. What do you think the writer thinks about reading for pleasure?
2. Is the writer in favour of school uniforms?
3. What is the writer's opinion of the stereotypical 'pink for girls' attitude to gender clothing?
4. Do you think that the writer is a creative, artistic person?

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TASK C

One way to practise looking for BIAS in texts is to read different types of writing. The best place to find the same information written in different ways is to read news articles. These appear both online as electronic newspapers and articles, and in print as newspapers.

In the UK, we have two main kinds of newspaper, TABLOID and BROADSHEET, and because different groups of people read different types of newspapers, each has its own target or typical audience.

To find the differences, you need to compare the two kinds of newspapers. Choose a day and read one TABLOID (e.g. The Sun, Daily Mail, Daily Express, or the Mirror) and one BROADSHEET (The Times, The Financial Times, The Telegraph, Independent, or Guardian).

List the characteristics of BROADSHEET and TABLOID newspapers.

BROADSHEET

TABLOID

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TASK D

Look at the two news articles (pages 6 & 7).

One appeared in a **BROADSHEET** newspaper and the other is from a **NEWS WEBSITE**.

Can you tell which is which at first glance?

Read the Article One and:

- underline any new or unfamiliar words
- highlight the facts
- highlight the opinions.

Now do the same with Article Two.

Now answer these questions.

- Does one article contain more new words than the other? Why do you think this might be?
- Does one article contain more facts?
- What about opinions?
- Who do you think the target audience is for each article?
- How old would you expect the people reading the newspaper to be? Do you think that this makes a difference to the way the articles have been written?
- Do you think that the fact that one is only available online and the other is a printed article makes any difference to the language that is used?
- Are the two articles based on the same information? How do you know this?

Article One

Three in 10 Conservative voters would prefer Ukip coalition in 2015 – poll

Nearly a third of Conservative voters would prefer their party to form a coalition with Nigel Farage's party rather than any other, according to a survey. The figure of 30% support for a coalition with Ukip compares with 31% who would favour a continuation of the current partnership with Liberal Democrats in the event of a hung parliament in 2015.

The survey by TNS UK found that the Liberal Democrats were the favoured party of coalition for supporters of both the Conservatives (31%) and Labour (32%) if either party does not win an outright majority.

Lib Dem voters preferred a coalition with the Tories rather than Labour by a margin of 36% to 26%, with 13% saying the party should go into opposition rather than joining another coalition.

Tory voters' enthusiasm for a linkup with Nigel Farage's Eurosceptic party was not matched by Ukip voters, 39% of whom said any MPs they secured next May should remain refuse to join a coalition at Westminster. Another 24% said they should enter government with the Conservatives, 13% with Labour and 8% with the Lib Dems.

Among Labour voters, 27% said they preferred opposition to coalition. Among Conservatives the figure was lower at 16%. More than a quarter of Labour supporters (29%) said they did not know what Ed Miliband should do if he finds himself in coalition negotiations after the election.

The poll gave Labour a seven-point lead on 36%, to the Tories' 29%, with Ukip on 19% and the Liberal Democrats trailing on 7%. But despite Ukip's apparent advantage over the Lib Dems, the first-past-the-post electoral system is likely to deny the party any more than a handful of MPs.

Michelle Harrison, an executive at TNS, said it was questionable whether a Tory-Ukip coalition could be considered a viable option. "While it is perhaps no surprise that a sizeable number of Conservative supporters favour a coalition with Ukip, the probability of that being a viable option at the next election is open to question," she said.

The poll suggested that Lib Dem support was much softer than that for the other parties. Of those saying they would vote Lib Dem in 2015, 47% said they might change their minds over the coming nine months, compared to 34% of Ukip backers, 24% of those supporting the Tories and 22% of Labour voters.

David Cameron's offer to renegotiate Britain's membership of the EU may not sway many voters, according to the poll. It was placed 10th out of a list of 10 possible policy priorities, with just 5% of those questioned naming it as their top priority, against 28% who said it was their lowest.

Topping the list were reducing unemployment, where the Tories were rated the party most likely to deliver, and investing more in healthcare, where Labour were most trusted.

Just over a third (34%) of those questioned said the economy had improved over the last 12 months, against 14% who said it had got worse. Looking ahead, just 29% expected it to get better over the coming year, while 59% said it would stay the same and 11% that it would decline.

• TNS Omnibus interviewed 1,191 adults in Great Britain between 15 and 17 July.

Article Two

'Tory Voters 'Favour Lib Dem Over UKIP Deal'

Nigel Farage's UKIP is narrowly pipped by the Lib Dems as Conservative voters' preferred coalition partners, a survey suggests. A poll found many Tory voters favoured the Lib Dems as coalition partners

Nearly a third of Tory voters back the party forming a coalition with UKIP if it fails to win next year's general election outright - but more still favour continuing the partnership with the Liberal Democrats, a new poll has found.

Some 30% of Conservative supporters want to team up with Nigel Farage's eurosceptic party in the event of a hung parliament in 2015, compared to 31% who prefer their current power-sharing partners.

But despite its triumph over the main parties in the European elections, which saw the Lib Dems all but wiped out, Britain's first-past-the-post electoral system is set to deny Mr Farage's party more than a handful of MPs, casting doubt on the viability of a Tory-Ukip coalition. A majority of UKIP voters are against any coalition at Westminster

And the significant Tory support to join with Nigel Farage is not reciprocated by UKIP voters, with 39% saying any MPs they secure next May should refuse to join any coalition at Westminster - compared to 24% who said they should enter government with the Conservatives, 13% with Labour and 8% with Lib Dems.

The survey by pollsters TNS UK also found Liberal Democrats were the favoured party of coalition for supporters of both Conservatives (31%) and Labour (32%) if either party does not win an outright majority.

Liberal Democrat voters preferred a coalition with Tories rather than Labour by a margin of 36% to 26%, with 13% saying that the party should go into opposition rather than joining another coalition. Among Labour voters, some 27% said they preferred opposition to coalition, while the figure for Conservatives was lower at 16%.

The poll gave Labour a seven-point lead on 36%, to the Tories' 29%, with UKIP on 19% and Lib Dems trailing on 7%. The poll suggests support for the Lib Dems is not as solid as other parties

TNS chief executive Michelle Harrison said: "Successive polls have indicated the possibility of no party winning an overall majority at the next election.

"In such an eventuality, this research suggests both Conservative and Labour supporters favour coalition with the Liberal Democrats.

"While it is perhaps no surprise that a sizeable number of Conservative supporters favour a coalition with UKIP, the probability of that being a viable option at the next election is open to question."

But while a preferred coalition partner, the poll indicates support for the Lib Dems is not as solid as other parties.

Of those saying they would vote Lib Dem in 2015, almost half (47%) said they might change their minds over the coming nine months, compared to 34% of UKIP backers, 24% of those supporting the Tories and 22% of Labour voters.

The poll also suggested that David Cameron's offer to renegotiate Britain's membership of the EU may not sway many voters. It was placed tenth out of a list of 10 possible policy priorities, with just 5% of those questioned naming it as their top priority against 28% who said it was their lowest.

TNS Omnibus interviewed 1,191 adults in Great Britain between July 15 and 17 2014

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Sources (pages 6 and 7)

1 Guardian (also available online)

<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/aug/01/conservative-voters-ukip-coalition-poll>

2 Sky News online

<http://news.sky.com/story/1311548/tory-voters-favour-lib-dem-over-ukip-deal>

Functional Skills English mapping

Coverage and range statements provide an indication of the type of content candidates are expected to apply in functional contexts. Relevant content can also be drawn from equivalent (school) National Curriculum levels and the Adult Literacy standards.

✓ indicates the main coverage and range skills that are (or can be) covered in this resource.

However, these will vary with the student group and how the resource is used by the teacher.

Reference: Ofqual (2009), *Functional Skills criteria for English: Entry 1, Entry 2, Entry 3, level 1 and level 2*. <http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/>

Level 2 Reading Select, read, understand and compare texts and use them to
skill standard: gather information, ideas, arguments and opinions ✓

Coverage and range statements

- a) Select and use different types of texts to obtain and utilise relevant information
- b) Read and summarise, succinctly, information/ideas from different sources
- c) Identify the purposes of texts and comment on how meaning is conveyed ✓
- d) Detect point of view, implicit meaning and/or bias ✓
- e) Analyse texts in relation to audience needs and consider suitable responses ✓