



Media bias is ubiquitous (everywhere) and not easy to detect. It is always useful to compare several sources of information and, in doing so, it becomes clear that media coverage is never completely objective.

Here are some forms of media bias to watch for:

- **Bias by omission:** For every news story that is selected, there are many others that are left out. Do the news stories you see show a balanced view of real life? What are the characteristics they have in common? (e.g., Are they mostly about violence, famous people, wealth?) Do some news sources include items that are ignored by others?
- **Bias by emphasis:** What stories are on the front page or "at the top of the hour?" Which stories get the largest headlines, or the first and longest coverage on TV or radio? Consider how this placement influences people's sense of what is important.
- **Bias by use of language:** The use of labels such as "terrorist," "revolutionary," or "freedom fighter" can create completely different impressions of the same person or event.
- **Bias in photos:** Unflattering pictures can create bad impressions, and partial pictures of scenes can completely change the context of an event.
- **Bias in the source:** An article about a cure for cancer written by a drug company is not the same as an article by an independent researcher. Often, private companies, governments, public relations firms, and political groups produce press releases to gain media exposure and to influence the public.
- **Bias by headlines:** Some headlines can be deceptive, as their main purpose is to grab attention. Many people read only the headlines, which can create a distorted sense of what is really going on, or turn a non-event into a sensational event.
- **Bias by repetition:** The repetition of a particular event or idea can lead people to believe that it is true, very widespread, and much more important than it really is.
- **Bias in numbers and statistics:** Statistics need to be interpreted; they are often used to create false impressions. Of the following statements, which statistic would you use to try to convince someone that the death penalty is a good idea?
  - Almost 30% of those surveyed support the death penalty.
  - More than 70% of those surveyed are against the death penalty.

Always be critical and aware as you read, watch, or listen to mass media. Keep alert for these many forms of bias.

