LifeSkills

IDENTIFYING BIAS

- Understand different types of bias.
- Consider who a writer is and who or what they represent.
- Look at the language a writer uses and what they emphasise or omit in order to decide whether their writing is biased or not.

A Work in pairs. Read the wiki entry about types of bias. Discuss what each type of bias involves. Have you ever heard or seen examples of each type of bias?

> **bias** /ˈbaɪəs/ **[SINGULAR/UNCOUNTABLE NOUN]** an attitude that you have that makes you treat someone in a way that is unfair or different from the way you treat other people
> *Ideally we'd choose judges who are without political **bias**.*

Types of bias

Sometimes writers appear to describe a situation objectively – that is to say, factually – but careful reading can reveal bias. There are a number of different types of bias, some of which are easier to identify than others. When someone is biased against a particular person or social group, they might directly state opinions that make the biased position obvious. However, there are other types of bias that may not be so obvious:

• Bias by selection of facts

When writers argue a point of view, they often refer to statistics or to things experts have said. However, bias can often be seen in the statistics or quotations chosen by a writer. A writer may select statistics or information that only support his/her view and omit statistics that do not directly support that point of view.

• Bias by labelling

It's possible to detect bias in the terms a writer uses. For example, the same activity could be called 'file sharing' or 'music piracy', depending on whether you are biased in favour of it or against it.

• Bias by exaggeration, emphasis or repetition

Writers might show their bias by using exaggeration. They might exaggerate the position they support to make it seem better than it is, or the position they are against to make it seem worse than it is. The use of strong language, emphasis and repetition often demonstrates this kind of bias.
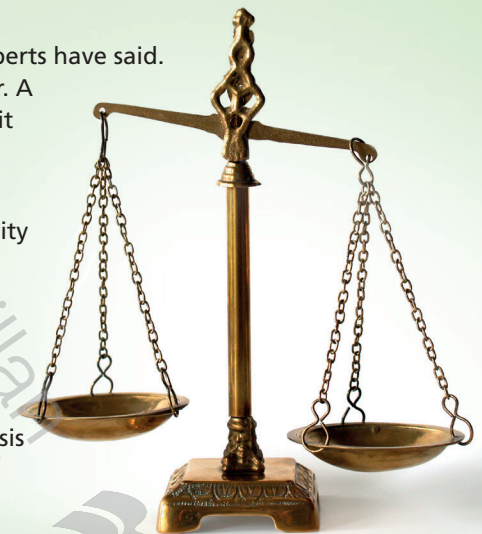
B Each person below has an interest in the issue of digital music distribution. In pairs, make notes on how you might expect them to be biased.

Jake: a successful musician

He has made money from selling music, so he might be biased towards protecting his income. He would probably argue that people should continue to pay for downloads. He might ignore the opinions of ordinary music fans and emphasise how difficult it is for musicians to make a living.

Blue: a struggling musician who is trying to break into the music business

Megan: an executive who works for a large record label

Luis: a music fan

C 🔊 Read the extracts. Match them to people from Exercise B who probably wrote them. Discuss the answers and reasons as a class.

1 _____

It's time the music industry learnt that they're never going to be able to control the distribution of music. I've read that 67% of downloaders don't care about copyright, and it's going to be impossible to change the minds of that many people. Some people argue that music streaming services are very cheap. Still, they cost around £10 a month and not everyone in the world has an extra £10 lying around, especially young people! Music wants to be free. Musicians are just going to have to learn to make their living from performing.

2 _____

It takes extremely long hours on the road and years of commitment to make it in music. People have no idea how hard musicians work! The reason why so much music exists is that musicians get paid for creating it. If artists are forced to give up their careers because they can't make enough money, we will all suffer. The bottom line is that music has to be paid for and not stolen. We can't just have anarchy in the digital world! We're in danger of letting piracy destroy the music industry in this country.

3 _____

One of the more interesting developments of the last few years is the rise of streaming services such as Spotify. These services offer thousands of tracks – all the music anyone could possibly want. When you subscribe, you can stream tracks to your computer or smartphone, and subscriptions cost on average only about £10 per month. It has the potential to get people off the habit of stealing music, while at the same time providing important income to artists, many of whom aren't particularly rich. We're always going to need ways of supporting young talent.

4 _____

Many people ask me what I think about people sharing music online, and I've thought about it a lot. On the one hand, I can see that technology is powerful and useful, but at the same time I understand that artists and labels need income. I guess the days of making a fortune off your CDs are gone, but people are probably prepared to pay something for music. In fact, there are now so many sites that offer inexpensive legal downloads that I don't think there's a real reason for downloading illegally any more.
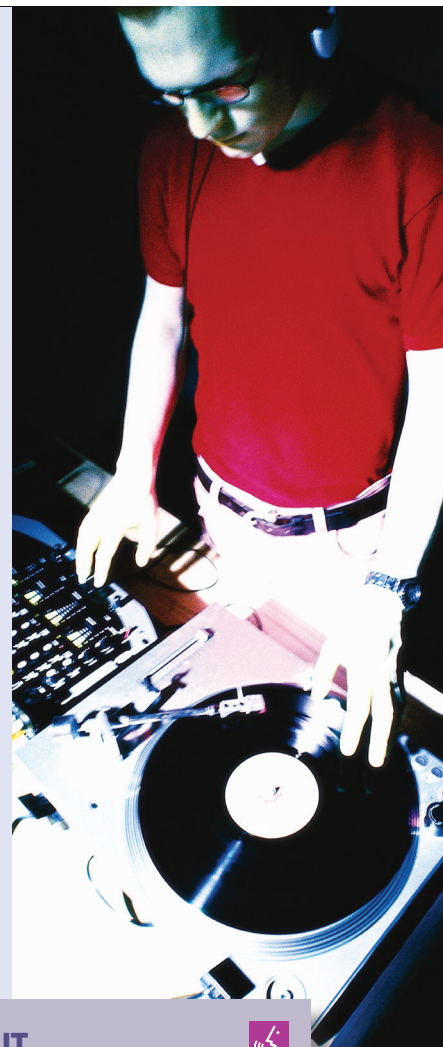
HOW TO SAY IT 🔊

The thing that I notice about this text is that …
The reason why I say this one is very / quite / not very biased is …

D 🔊 Work in pairs. Read the extracts again. Discuss whether each one is very biased, slightly biased or not particularly biased.

E 🔊 Look back at the types of bias mentioned in Exercise A. As a class, discuss whether the extracts include any of these types of bias.

F 🔊 Work in groups. Discuss these questions.
1 Is it easy to identify bias? How and in what situations will you try to identify it in the future?
2 Is bias always a bad thing? If not, in what situations might it be acceptable?

RESEARCH …

Find an article on a topic that involves different points of view. The topic can be related to music or it can be a different topic. Read the article carefully and underline any examples of bias. Tell your class what the article is about and why you think it is biased or not.

REFLECT … How can the skill of identifying bias be useful to you in **Study and Learning** and **Work and Career**?