

Lesson plan: Identifying bias

Critical thinking is a skill that sits across different domains or aspects of our lives. Since it is not restricted to just our working or academic lives, as a transferable skill across domains it is invaluable. One example of a critical thinking skill is the ability to identify bias when dealing with texts, opinions and the news. Having this skill can help in all aspects of our students' lives. Use this engaging lesson plan about the music industry from *Open Mind Advanced (C1)**, to help your students become better at identifying bias. Download and circulate the accompanying [Student's Book pages](#).

Level: Advanced C1 / *masterMind* level 2

Time: approx 60 minutes or longer depending on how the activities are used

How to use this lesson:

The lesson can be used for the whole class, who can work in pairs and small groups. Download and print out the Student's Book pages so each student has a copy.

* Can also be used with [masterMind 2nd edition](#) Level 1.

Step 1: Understand different types of bias. (Ex. A)

Step 2: Consider who a writer is and who or what they represent. (Ex. B, Ex. C)

Step 3: Look at the language a writer uses and what they emphasise or omit in order to decide whether their writing is biased or not. (Ex. D, Ex. E)

Lead-in

Read the target skill aloud, and invite the students to tell you what they think *identifying bias* means. Remind the students that they discussed bias in Unit 10 and elicit the meaning of *prejudice* (*in favour of or against one thing, person or group compared to another, usually in a subjective or an unfair way*). Ask them if they can think of a situation where they might be biased, or what might cause that bias (e.g. dealing with a friend/family member as opposed to a stranger in a job interview). Then **highlight** the three-step strategy to develop the skill of identifying bias. Explain that sometimes writers appear to describe a situation objectively, but careful reading can show that they are biased. By looking at who a writer is, who/what they represent, what their personal interest is in the situation they are writing about, and what they emphasise or omit, you can identify the bias and understand what you are reading in that context.

A

- Refer the students to the instructions, and explain them if necessary. Have them read the text carefully.
- Put the students in pairs, and have them discuss the different types of bias they have just read about.
- When they finish, elicit from the class any examples they know of biased writing (e.g. a local newspaper that applauds the efforts of the local sports team although impartial reports say they performed badly).

Extra: class discussion

Put the students into three groups. Assign each group one of the following types of bias: bias by selection of facts, bias by labelling, and bias by exaggeration, emphasis or repetition. Have the students brainstorm issues that are important to them. Write their ideas on the board. Have the class vote to select one issue they would like to discuss. Then ask each group to make an argument for or against the issue using the bias that was assigned to them. Give groups a few minutes to organise their ideas. Then invite one person from each group to stand up and talk about the issue, reflecting their group's bias.

B

- Ask the students to read the instructions, and explain that each of the people described has a probable bias regarding the issue of music distribution based on their own interests.
- Ask the students to first read through Jake's profile, and then elicit their ideas about the bias that he is most likely to have. Then ask them to read the example describing Jake's probable bias.
- In the same pairs as in Ex. A, have the students study the other profiles and then discuss how each of these people is probably biased. Remind them to make notes on the ways they expect them to be biased.
- When the pairs finish, encourage the students to explain and discuss their ideas with the class. Accept all reasonable possibilities.

POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Blue: He might be biased in favour of more free music on the internet because more people could hear his music and discover him that way. He might be biased against more free music because he doesn't make much money yet, and he might argue that he needs people to pay for his music so that he can continue his career.

Megan: She is probably biased towards wanting everyone to pay for music because her job and her industry depend on people paying to listen to music.

Luis: He may be biased towards wanting more free music on the internet, especially if he is young and doesn't have a lot of money to pay for music.

C

- Refer the students to the instructions. Ask them to read the extracts carefully. Point out that there is one text for each person in Ex. B, including Jake. Remind them that they can choose more than one person as the writer of an extract, as long as they can justify their answers. Have them work individually to complete the exercise.
- Choose volunteers to take turns giving their answers to the class, and make sure that they explain how they arrived at their decisions. Encourage them to rank their choices if they have nominated more than one writer for any extract, and have them justify their ranking. Accept any possibilities that are well supported and reasonably logical. Emphasise that there are no wrong answers.

POSSIBLE ANSWERS

- 1 This was probably written by Luis, since it argues against the interests of both the music industry and musicians.
- 2 This was probably written by Jake, since it focuses on how hard life is for musicians and how important it is for them to continue to make money. It could also have been written by Blue or Megan.
- 3 This was probably written by Blue, since it concentrates on how current technology affects artists, particularly young artists. It could also have been written by Jake or Megan.
- 4 This was probably written by Megan, since it presents an overview of how the music industry is changing and how that affects different people involved. It could also have been written by Blue, Luis or Jake.

D

- Put the students in pairs to analyse the extracts again in order to judge how biased they are. Explain that they will be deciding on the amount (or degree) of bias in these texts.
- Draw their attention to the expressions in the **How to say it** box, and encourage the students to use them in their discussion.
- Check answers with the class, and encourage discussion when the students disagree on any point.

POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Extract 1: very biased, because it only mentions consumers' point of view and doesn't take into account the needs of musicians

Extract 2: very biased, because it only mentions the needs of musicians and doesn't take into account the needs of consumers

Extract 3: slightly biased, because it sees the important issue as supporting young artists, but not as biased as Extracts 1 and 2

Extract 4: not particularly biased, because it attempts to give both sides of the issue

E

- Ask the students to refer back to the types of bias in Ex. A. Explain that after deciding on the degree of bias in Ex. D, they are now going to decide on the type of bias each of these extracts might contain.
- Have them look back at the texts in Ex. C. As a class, discuss whether the writers demonstrate biases that fall into any of the categories in Ex. A. Point out that the students should look for evidence to identify each form of bias. If they have difficulty doing this, remind them that one of the texts does not display any obvious bias and that the other three do.

POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Extract 1: This extract only quotes one statistic, which supports the writer's view (bias by selection of facts).

Extract 2: This extract uses exaggerated language (*destroy the music industry*) and labelling (*anarchy*). (bias by exaggeration, bias by labelling)

Extract 3: This extract uses labelling (*stealing music*). (bias by labelling)

Extract 4: This extract seems well balanced and doesn't show any obvious bias.

F

- Ask the students to read the questions first. Then put them in small groups to discuss the questions, and encourage them to provide as much detail as necessary.
- Ask the groups to share their responses with the whole class.
- Ask the students how the skill of *identifying bias* might be useful to them in the domain of **Self and Society**, either now or in the future.

REFLECT

- Ask the students to read the **Reflect** question.
- Give them time to think about different situations in the domains of **Work and Career** and **Study and Learning** where the skill of *identifying bias* would be useful.
- Elicit the following ideas: *identifying the purpose of a text, weighing the merits of a claim, identifying the flaws in an argument, using an objective tone when writing reports or reviews, making fair decisions and choices, etc.*

RESEARCH

- Explain the task and make sure the students know what they have to do. First, they must select a controversial topic about which people might have several points of view.
- Have the students brainstorm possible sources for articles on their topic. Give them time to discuss their topic with others in the class who might know of websites or publications where they could look.
- Ask the students to present their research to the class in the form of a PowerPoint slideshow if possible. Each presentation should include a brief description of the article and its topic, a clear identification of the examples of bias (the underlined sentences should be included in the slideshow or given to the audience as hand-outs), an explanation of the article's content, and the ways the presenter thinks that it is biased. Encourage questions and comments from the audience at the end of each presentation.

Teacher's notes taken from Unit 11 of **Open Mind** Advanced (C1) and **masterMind** 2nd edition level 2.

Click on the links below to find out more and download samples from other levels.

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