# TOOL: FROM DETECTING AN AUTHOR'S BIAS TO WRITING BIAS-FREE

**Office of Equity and Inclusive Communities and Teaching & Learning Commons**

### Overview

Bias may be an intentional or unintentional statement that reflects favouritism or prejudice for or against an object, idea, person, or group.

There is no perfect way to identify bias because it is oftentimes hidden in the content and/or context. The risk of not evaluating readings for bias is the dissemination of false and misleading information which may further perpetuate racist opinions and colonial and oppressive attitudes.

---

**Reflective Pause**

Reflect on your current experiences as it relates to this topic.

Consider what you are looking forward to learning more of, or hope to be able to do more of, as you work towards developing anti-racist practices.

---

### Goals

1. Understand strategies for instructors or learners to check for an author's bias.
2. Understand strategies for bias-free writing.

**How-to Guide**

**Detecting an Author's Bias**

The following strategies may be used to help instructors or learners check for an author's bias:

**Step 1: Finding Appropriate Sources**

- What specific databases should we use?

- How do we identify appropriate scholarly sources?

- How do we identify and use diverse practitioner sources?

*When evaluating what sources are most appropriate from an anti-racist lens, consider:*

- Are there specific sources that represent/publish works of diverse, racialized, equity-denied groups?

- Who is the author of the source and what kinds of work do they produce?

- Is there a political slant in the content?

- Are works of racialized authors in the field included or cited?

- If there are advertisements in the source, are they representative or display racial stereotypes?

- Is negative racial language or bias being used?

- Are arguments supported by factual evidence, including citations and links?

*Tips on evaluating sources:*

- Try to find the original sources used and read them yourself to confirm accuracy

- Find general information about a topic or author from more reputable sources like KPU Library and Google Scholar

- Check for consensus by looking at sources that contrast claims made by the author

- Use bias and fact checker websites to fact-check a claim made by the author

**Step 2: Understanding and Detecting Bias**

- Did the author use persuasive or inflammatory language or overestimate the probability of an event to examine a problem? E.g., "After the pandemic, travel by air became very expensive because people all over the world refused to fly"

- Did the author stretch the facts to emphasize an argument? E.g., "Everyone agreed the policy was poorly constructed"

- Did the author use flawed information in their argument? E.g., "Although there is no data to support this, buying this car is the best choice you can make"

- Has the author made certain statements that are were misquoted or not supported or linked to evidence? E.g., "Many research findings suggest that extreme sports are bad for your health"

*Techniques to Identify an Author's Bias:*

- Check for words connoting emotion that can reveal the author's opinion about a topic (charged/ loaded words)

- Check for words that label an entire group (stereotypes)

- Check if the author is using vague language or generalizations

- Check if the author only presents one side of an argument

- Check if the author presents facts or opinions

## Strategies for Writing Bias-Free

Strategies for writing bias-free are really about precision and word choice. The table below describes some general principles.

[Download an Accessible Version of this Table [PDF]](#)

| Table 1. General Principles for Reducing Bias in Communication | |
|---|---|
| **Appropriate Level of Specificity** | • Avoid the use of characteristics that are not relevant to the topic. It is not always necessary to include information on a person's racial and ethnic identity if the communication does not require it<br><br>• When you have determined which characteristic is required, choose terms that are appropriately specific. For example, consider using "Indigenous" only as an umbrella term for all First Nations, Metis and Inuit people but use specific names when needed<br><br>• **Examples:**<br>    ◦ Age: 15-18 years old; 65-80 years old<br>        ▪ Disability: Alzheimer's disease, autistic<br>        ▪ Racial or ethnic groups: Chinese Canadians, Black Canadians |
| **Sensitivity to Labels** | • Respect the language people use to describe themselves<br><br>• Try to determine what is appropriate by asking subjects what they call themselves<br><br>• Operational terms may be used, like BIPOC, if explained. However, it is oftentimes much better to avoid such labels and be specific as to what race you are communicating about<br><br>• Avoid false hierarchies by comparing groups with care. Avoid usage of "normal" and "abnormal" or "traditional" and "non-traditional." Also consider how groups or people are placed on a graph or table, especially if it implies that a certain dominant group is the universal standard<br><br>• **Examples:**<br>    ◦ Race: racialized persons<br>        ▪ Nationality: African, Latin American, European, Asian<br>        ▪ Racial comparisons: use alphabetical order or sample size order to describe racial and other groups |
| **Naming Biases & Privilege** | **Self-assessment questions (Twyman-Ghoshal & Lacorazza, 2021):**<br><br>• How does my social geographical location influence my identity, knowledge, and accumulated wisdom?<br>• What knowledge am I missing?<br>• What privileges and power do I hold?<br>• How do I exercise my power and privilege over others?<br>• How do my biases and privileges take up space and silence others?<br>• How do my power and privilege show up in my work?<br>• Am I non-racist or anti-racist? How do I hold myself accountable? |

> **Reflective Action Point**
>
> Reflect on your learning as you approach the end of this tool.
>
> • What changes to your practice do you hope to implement?
> • How can this tool support your anti-racist practice?

## Instructor Resources

**NorQuest LibGuide:** APA 7th Edition includes Inclusive and Bias Free Language Standards.
   This resources also links to how to reference Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers.
   **Website:** APA Style: General Principles for Reducing Bias – Includes general principles and guidelines for writing to reduce bias.
   **Website**: MLA Style, 9th. edition: Avoiding Bias – Provides guidance for reducing bias language.
   **Website:** Canadian Government: A Way with Words and Images – Includes appropriate language guidance when referring to people with disabilities

## References

- American Psychological Association. (2022). *General principles for reducing bias*. American Psychological Association. https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language/general-principles

- Axel-Lute, M. (2019, November 12). *The opposite of deficit-based language isn't asset-based language. It's truth-telling.* Shelterforce. https://shelterforce.org/2019/11/12/the-opposite-of-deficit-based-language-isnt-asset-based-language-its-truth-telling/

- Twyman-Ghoshal, A. and Lacorazza, D. C. (2021, March 31). *Strategies for antiracist and decolonized teaching.* Faculty Focus. https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/equality-inclusion-and-diversity/strategies-for-antiracist-and-decolonized-teaching/

- University of Wisconsin-Green Bay Libraries (2021). *Identifying Bias.* University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. https://libguides.uwgb.edu/bias

- USC Libraries. (2023). *Detecting author bias.* University of Southern California. https://libguides.usc.edu/c.php?g=235260&p=6384754

**Author Information**

**Written By:** Judith Gallimore (Associate Chair, Business Administration).

**Reviewed and Edited By**: Benjamin Denga (Anti-Racism Advisor, Reimagine Higher Education).

**Adapted for the KPU context by:** Daniel Benzimra (Education Strategist, Teaching & Learning Commons) and Dr. Nishan Perera (Director, Learning Technologies and Educational Development)

**OEIC Reviewed by**: Dr. Asma Sayed (Vice President, Equity and Inclusive Communities, Office of Equity & Inclusive Communities)

About the authors

Office of Equity and Inclusive Communities

Teaching & Learning Commons