

The Seven Steps to Web Evaluation (A-G)

BIAS

STEP



Bias Detection In A Web Site



B. Investigate The Site For Bias

Unsubstantiated Claims.... Is there evidence to support?

Emotional Words... Do the words seem loaded with feeling?

Fact vs Opinion... Which way is the author leaning?

One sided.... Is the author presenting both sides of an issue?



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The Seven Steps To
Web Site Evaluation



Graphics from Microsoft Word 2007

The Seven Steps to Web Site Evaluation – Step B

B Is For Bias

One of the most important findings in determining the usefulness of a web page is discovering if a web site has any Bias. Wikipedia defines bias as “a term used to describe a tendency or preference towards a particular perspective, ideology or result, when the tendency interferes with the ability to be impartial, unprejudiced, or objective. In other words, bias is generally seen as a 'one-sided' perspective. ...” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bias>). Detect bias by keeping these four points in mind.

1. **Unsubstantiated Claims** – The word unsubstantiated can best be described as a statement unsupported by other evidence. When investigating a web page does the author or sponsor make statements that cannot be backed up using evidence from other resources or reference material? It is often easy to recognize because statements may be made that show no evidence. A statement such as *“Dwindling fish supplies are the main reason for loss of Polar Bear population”* must be followed with more evidence and information to support. There are several ways of investigating unsubstantiated claims. They include looking through the website for research and links to further evidence. One must also find other references that may make the same claim. This may involve an internet search, database submittals, reference book scanning, and perusing of magazines. Credibility of all sources must also be considered.
2. **Emotional Words** – Many times an author or sponsor will use emotional words instead of reliable research claims to garner support. This may be because there really is no validity to the author’s statements or, while statements could be reliable, the author is attempting to sway the reader in some way. Emotional words are words that convey feelings, emotions, personal beliefs, or judgments. The statement, *“The cold money hungry fishing industry is the only villain in a reckless scheme to bring the loveable and warm hearted Polar Bear to extinction”* uses emotional words to emphasize a claim that may not even be substantiated. Be aware that a site with emotional words may provide credible information while also having another purpose of gaining reader support for a cause.
3. **Fact vs. Opinion** – A researcher must be able to filter information in regards to what is real and what is not. Many times an author/sponsor will even blend opinion and truth together in order to sell an idea. The statement, *“Polar Bears are an endangered species due to lack of fish in Arctic waters and loss of ice habitat”*. There appear to be four ideas that need to be checked. They include references to Polar Bears being endangered, lack of fish in Arctic waters, loss of ice habitat, and the inter-relationships of the three. There may be facts with opinion mixed in. Some sites may even try to provide evidence for opinions. Remember to substantiate all claims.
4. **One Sided** - Many times an author or sponsor will give half of the story while eliminating other needed information. This allows claims to be substantiated, but may leave out important facts that still would dispute the author’s thesis. A statement *“Global warming elimination of ice fields allows for more open fish filled water for the hungry endangered Polar Bear”* may be a true statement. It however fails to point out that global warming may also be melting ice fields that the Polar Bear needs for habitat. Sites that appear to give both sides may still be hiding their claims in the one side. It is essential to detect a claim that may only give half of the story.