Objectivity and Impartiality in Research

Explore these Fundamental Concepts
Objectivity & Impartiality

The Absence of Distortion:
The presentation of information should not be distorted by subjective feelings, a one-sided view, or any favoritism.

Critical Analysis:
Being objective and impartial when looking at a situation, event, or information requires identifying the facts and recognizing biases, exaggerations, or inaccuracies.

We are all influenced either by our own or other’s emotions and opinions to some degree, all of which can cloud our ability to be objective and impartial about anything.

Yet we can still be good stewards of information. To be good stewards of information, we must be critical thinkers, assessing and not distorting the facts, seeking to unveil and understand the influences expressed in any mode of communication or information.

When we examine a text or watch or listen to a presentation how can we respond?
Objectivity & Impartiality

Ways in which we can respond:

Verify the information in additional sources
- Don’t rely on just one or two sources for that information.
- Make sure your research casts a wide net and includes a thorough examination of many sources of information.

Examine the source(s) of that information
- Always take time to evaluate at minimum the information, the resource, and the context of that information.

Examine the individual(s) presenting the information. Look for:
- Their credentials
- Their affiliations
- Cited by other researchers in their field?
When you use a search tool, such as a search engine or database, or you access any particular collection (library collection, online collection, etc.), keep this in mind:

- Someone has chosen which books, journals, authors, data, and views to include and which to exclude.
- Even a journal has a group of editors who decide who is published, which articles, and what content.

Look for the following:

- Summary of what the collection provides and/or does not provide
- Selection criteria for the collection
- Statement of purpose or mission

Take a closer look...
In Search Tools & Databases

A Closer Look:

Look for selection criteria to help you identify potential bias in others' selection of sources; or look for a list of resources included.

- A database may provide a description (view example)
- Or list of journals (view examples) it covers.

Some specialized search engines will provide the content and scope of their coverage, often very helpful in determining level of relevance, objectivity, and bias.

Yet it takes much time to determine ultimately if all voices of research are included.

- Sometimes noting what is NOT included in the coverage of a search tool of collection is the easiest way, but this takes time and much experience with any one tool/collection.

- A simple solution to ensure you have a good variety of perspectives: Use multiple tools and collections always.
In Journals & Articles

Journals and their publishers can be measured by the level of objectivity and impartiality they represent in a number of ways, two of which are listed below:

- By content covered, content not covered
- By representation of themselves. For example, is the journal truly academic? Truly peer-reviewed? Truly independent?

Articles, including scholarly articles, and authors of articles are not immune to problems of subjectivity and partiality.

Scholarly articles even in leading journals must be read carefully, as well as the database records for those articles

Take a closer look at a prominent journal publisher...

So what do we do with journal articles?
Read the following brief announcement:


More details available in the following editorial:

In Journals & Articles

- Look closely at any disclosures given in an article.
- Double-check the Information you have about the article.
- Research to Verity, Confirm, Update, or Disregard the Information.

We can make sure we have done our best to determine and evaluate affiliations, check for corrections, and use multiple resources.

Consider these three reminders in closing:
- Look for disclosure of affiliations and finances in an article; if full disclosure is provided, be sure to evaluate the information within that context.
- Look for notes of corrections to the article in later issues of the journal.
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