

THINGS TO LOOK FOR WHEN REVIEWING ARTICLES

Courtesy of Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME)

Shoddy and/or imbalanced reporting manifests itself in a number of different ways. The following are some of the most common manifestations, listed in typical order of frequency, in descending order. Be sure to review the title of the article, any associated photos, and the photo captions, in addition to the article itself, as these other elements can also include misleading or biased content. Please consider the following when doing your media analysis:

- **Word Choice:** Word choice which affects the interpretation of the same set of entities or events. Consider the emotional and semantic difference between the choices of words. E.g. “disputed territories” vs. “occupied territories”; “security fence” vs. apartheid wall”; “Islamist” vs. “Muslim.” See suggested lexicon below for common examples.
- **Placement of viewpoint:** The placement of one viewpoint in preferential locations of an article (e.g. in the title, headline or in first paragraph) increases read exposure to one side of the story.
- **Single viewpoint reporting:** Reporting which favours one viewpoint over another. Some articles will provide (or favour) viewpoints or quotes from only one side of an issue. E.g. an article which includes a perspective or quote from an Israeli official, while failing to provide the same from a Palestinian official.
- **Selective reporting:** Devoting more resources, such as news articles or air time, to the coverage of one side of the story at the expense of the other.
- **Omission:** Failure to include information, or selective inclusion of information which distorts the presentation of events in favour of one side or another. In the case of Israel-Palestine, this is often evident when the piece seeks to explain the “beginning” of tit-for-tat violence, and inevitably leaves the reader with the impression that the Palestinians “started it.”
- **Failure to properly qualify assertions:** Stories reporting on conflict must be sceptical when providing the perspective of one of the belligerent parties. E.g. Rather than saying, “Israel launched airstrikes against Palestinian rocket-making workshops,” the piece may need to say, “Israel launched airstrikes against *alleged* Palestinian rocket-making workshops.”
- **De-contextualization:** Omissions in which the omitted information is essential to understanding a decision, action or event, its motivations, or key events leading up to it.
- **Factual errors:** Errors in content or context that mislead the unsuspecting reader
- **Self-Censorship:** The decision not to cover certain developments, or to play down the significance of such developments.
- **Lack of verification:** Failure to perform factual verification, and the publication of potentially unreliable information prior to or without independent confirmation of the facts.
- **Exaggeration or sensationalism:** Media chooses to report on shocking events or to exaggerate, at the expense of accuracy, context and objectivity.
- **Prejudice:** Journalists may partially distort reports due to political ideology, national affiliation, or other personal convictions.
- **Forgery of falsification:** The intentional misrepresentation, alteration, or invention of reported information.