

Persuasion- Awareness

1. **Bias and Differing Opinions:** A major portion of your work this week will be reading opinion editorials written by other people. This genre, by its nature, is *opinion* based. Yes, the authors may cite sources and research, but we all know that 95% of statistics are completely made up. Just kidding. But in all seriousness, if you ask anyone who works in a field that publishes reports and statistics they will tell you that how someone presents data can *very much influence* what people believe it means. People are very committed to convincing you that what they believe is true in the genre of the opinion editorial. This is not a bad thing. It is just something we should keep in mind while reading.

So. As you read these opinion editorials, try not to read them the way my toddlers watch movies (Is Mufasa dead forever, Mom? What is Simba going to do out there all alone?). They believe everything they see. Try to read these opinion editorials the way that emotionally mature adults watch movies; “Wow, the music and the way that scene panned out to show the larger scene..., I am totally tearing up! Well done, movie director!” Or, “Wow, I get that this scene is supposed to be super intense and impressive, but they just really aren’t pulling it off and it seems so cheesy!”

When you read these opinion editorials, be aware when emotionally charged stories or personal anecdotes tug on your emotions or get you fired up. Applaud the skill of the writer but keep in mind that it doesn’t necessarily mean that what they are saying is true. It might be true, it might not. When we have a strong emotional reaction to writing, the main thing that tells us is that the writing is skilled at getting us to feel something.

2. **Confirmation Bias:** Keep in mind that our brains always want to be right. When you read something that supports something you already believe, your brain automatically wants to believe it because it wants to be right about what it already believes. It will look for reasons to believe that story, or statistic or opinion editorial. When you read or view something that disagrees with something you already believe, your brain automatically wants to reject it (or even get mad that it exists), because it wants to be right about what it already believes.

This is completely normal. It is how our brains are set up. It isn’t very helpful to get mad at our brains for doing what they are set up to do. It is very *helpful* in a lot of cases to look for evidence for what we believe or don’t believe.

However, when we are trying to learn new things or understand different perspectives (understanding/learning and agreeing don’t have to be the same thing), then this *confirmation bias* thing that our brain does can get in the way of us being open to new ideas or perspectives. You don’t have to end up agreeing with a new idea or perspective but it will almost always help you be a better human if you can learn to *understand* new

ideas or perspectives. It doesn't mean you automatically throw away all conviction or core values that guide your life.

So. If you are reading an opinion editorial this week and you notice that you really really like it and agree with everything it says and think it is brilliantly written, your brain might be telling you all that because it supports what you already believe. And if you find yourself hating an opinion editorial, not agreeing with anything it says and thinking it is the biggest piece of garbage ever written,... well, your brain may be telling you that because this opinion editorial may disagree with something you believe.

So when this happens, just notice what a good job your brain is doing at one of the things it is wired to do. Then tell it: "You know what, it is ok. We don't have to agree with this writing. It doesn't threaten who we are in the world and what we believe to be true. Let's just read it to try and understand something new."

Or, "Hey brain, I know you think this writing is perfect, but no writing is perfect. So even though we think it is saying something exactly true about the world, let's see if we can find any parts of it that could be improved. So that we can learn something new."

Your brain is just one of your organs trying to do its job to keep you alive. You are the one making the choices. Be smarter than your brain. You can do it :)