



# **English IV - ELL**

## **Week 3**

## English IV, Week 3

### Constructing Public Opinion

#### Task 1:

- What does it mean to be partisan?
  - To be partisan means to be \_\_\_\_\_.
- How can someone be partisan to something? Write three examples.
  - Teacher Example: A person can be partisan when they support Real Madrid and not Barcelona.
  - A person can be partisan when they...

#### Task 2: Preview Vocabulary

- These words and phrases from the text are useful for learning and talking about the topic of partisanship and public opinions. Use context clues, help from a dictionary, or a teacher to understand the words. Write the definition for each of these words:
  - Liberals
  - Conservatives
  - Bias
  - Progressive
  - Mainstream
  - Pervasive
  - Perceptions
  - Normative
  - Hew
  - Consistent
  - Congruent
  - Polarized
  - Context
  - Validate

#### Task 3:

- Read about author Matthew C. Nisbet.

#### About the Author

Matthew C. Nisbet is a professor of communication studies at Northeastern University and serves as editor-in-chief of the journal *Environmental Communication* and senior editor of *ORE Climate Science*. Nisbet studies and writes about the role of communication, journalism, and advocacy in shaping discourse and debates over meaningful policy issues including climate change and income inequity.

- Read the article "Why Partisans View Mainstream Media as Biased and Ideological Media as Objective."
- Copy any new words that you do not know and write the definitions.

# “Why Partisans View Mainstream Media as Biased and Ideological Media as Objective”

by Matthew C. Nisbet

July 21, 2011

1. We've reached a strange time in American political culture today: Both **liberals** and **conservatives** view the TV news, radio, and newspapers as unfair, yet tend to believe that their own news outlets and commentators provide unemotional coverage. Claims of media **bias** have long been the familiar language of the conservative movement with the creation of rival outlets first in the form of magazines such as the National Review, then political talk radio, and ending with Fox News and right-wing blogs.
2. Yet over the past ten years, strong criticism of the newspapers, TV, and radio has more and more come from the left with claims of unfair-thinking coverage a basic core belief of **progressive** people working on issues ranging from climate change to social policy. In turn these same progressives tend to prefer the "unemotional" coverage at magazines like the Nation, blogging websites like the Huffington Post, and most boldly and clearly MSNBC which has positioned itself as the liberal counter-weight to Fox News.
3. Research in the field of communication has tracked the mental under-pinning of this trend, explaining why supporters view **mainstream** coverage as unfair-thinking but perceive their preferred idea-based outlets as fair and balanced. In a recently published book chapter on the social psychology of political communication, my colleague Lauren Feldman and I review and explain this research, drawing in part on Feldman's own work in the area.
4. Here is an excerpt on media bias, from that chapter:
5. Across national settings, there is an ever **pervasive** belief in different forms of media bias. In the U.S., over the past twenty years, the most common belief about media bias is that the mainstream news media favor liberal causes and political candidates. Yet, when people conduct content analyses to search for planned patterns of covering bias in coverage of elections, across studies they are unable to find definite evidence (D'Alessio D. & Allen, 2000). If social scientists using the best tools available to them find it hard to notice hard evidence of liberal bias, why are beliefs among the public so widespread? More than that, across country settings and issues, what explains the difference between unknown **perceptions** of media bias and unemotional signs relative to coverage?
6. In research on perceptions of the news media, believability is understood as a not definite test, influenced by the partisan or idea-based background of the audience and the claims about bias that might come from trusted sources such as political reporters or

like-minded friends. In the U.S., these claims are usually focused on a liberal bias charged by wealthy conservatives and reinforce a widespread belief among conservative-leaning audiences (Watts, Domke, Shah, & Fan, 1999). Audiences, then, do not usually check story content on its own qualities but rather on the basis of prejudiced ideas about the news media—often coming from writers' desire in many stories to cover and reflect on their own potential liberal bias. Other studies have also suggested that people's expectations for bias in a news source or in the media, more generally, are likely to influence their perceptions of bias in news coverage (Arpan & Raney, 2003; Baum & Gussin, 2007).

7. Maybe the most important part of perceptions of bias in the news, however, is the extent to which news coverage is seen as disagreeing with one's own views. People who feel most strongly about an issue tend to see their own side's views as being more a product of unemotional analysis and **normative** concerns, and less influenced by belief systems, than the other side's views (Robinson, Keltner, Ward, & Ross, 1995). This human desire translates directly to judgments about the media. In a range of studies, when news audiences who **hew** to opposing sides on an issue are given the same news coverage of the topic to check, both view this identical coverage as unfair-thinking in favor of the other side (Gunther & Schmitt, 2004; Vallone et al., 1985). This is commonly referred to as the "hateful media effect." Researchers believe that the explanation for this hateful media effect is selective naming: opposing partisans pay attention to, process, and recall identical content from a news presentation but mentally group and label the same parts of a story differently—as hateful to their own position (Schmitt, Gunther, & Liebhart, 2004).
8. The original hateful media effect assumes that news coverage is balanced most of the time. The relative hateful media perception (Gunther, Christen, Liebhart, & Chia, 2001) relaxes this idea, making it relevant to news that is slanted in favor of or against a particular issue. In the presence of the relative hateful media effect, supporters and opponents of a given issue perceive bias in a **consistent** direction (i.e., leaning toward one side), but each group perceives coverage as much more unhelpful to their own position relative to those in the other group. In other words, supporters perceive less bias in news coverage slanted to support their view than their opponents on the other side of the issue.
9. Interestingly, then, whereas the result of the original hateful media effect is a partisan public perceiving media bias where none was present and possibly rejecting useful information, the results of the relative hateful media effect are somewhat different. The result here is that partisans will fail to recognize bias in news that is in fact biased, in events when that bias is **congruent** with their pre-existing views. This bias against news bias is troubling. Americans' trust in news sources has become deeply **polarized** in the past few years—with Republicans, for example, attributing more believability to the conservative Fox News and less to most other news organizations than Democrats (Pew

Research Center, 2008). In other countries, similar perceptions of a left or right bias to news or a bias relative to national or cultural identity exist.

10. In each **context**, as news—especially on cable TV and online—is full of increasing amounts of opinion and beliefs, this may make it even easier for partisans to **validate** their personal political beliefs—by accepting information that agrees with their views while rejecting information that advocates for the other side. So, the relative hateful media effect may not only reflect partisan divides in news perceptions but may also add to the further polarization of political attitudes and knowledge across political systems.

**Task 4:** Use the article above to help you answer the questions.

- How are media outlets made for a specific audience or a specific idea?
  - Media outlets are made for a specific audience or a specific idea by...
- What is the difference between being persuasive and being correct?
  - The difference between being persuasive and being correct is...

**Task 5:** Write a compare and contrast essay of the two articles: “How Headlines Change the Way We Think,” and “Why Partisans View Mainstream Media as Biased and Ideological Media as Subjective.”

- Read through the texts and write down the similarities and differences between the two in the graphic organizer below.
- Use the graphic organizer and this essay outline to write your comparison essay.
  - Title, Date, Your name
  - Paragraph 1: Description of the two documents and your thesis statement
  - Paragraph 2: Differences in item #1
  - Paragraph 3: Differences in item #2
  - Paragraph 4: Similarities between the two items
  - Paragraph 5: Summary of the similarities and differences and your thesis statement reworded

# Compare & Contrast Graphic Organizer

(This will become your introduction paragraph.. PLUS A THESIS STATEMENT)

Item #1:

Item #2:

(These will become your three body paragraphs)

Different Features:

Similar Features:

Different Features:

(This will become your conclusion paragraph)

Conclusion: