**Identify bias** – STATE LIBRARY OF VICTORIA RESOURCES

It's important to understand [*bias*](http://ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/glossary/term/84) when you are researching because it helps you see the purpose of a text, whether it's a piece of writing, a painting, a photograph - anything.

You need to be able to [*identify*](http://ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/glossary/term/175) bias in every source you use. The following questions will help you work out how reliable and accurate information is.

**Who created the resource?**

Whether it's a book, journal article, website or photograph, sources are influenced by the ideas of the person who created them. Think about:

* the creator's age, religion, race and occupation

For example

If you and your teacher both had to write an essay about the importance of homework, you would probably give very different answers...

* whether the creator is presenting the whole story – you'll need to read widely to get all perspectives  
  whether the creator is an expert on the topic.

**When was the resource created?**

Any type of resource you look at will reflect the society and time in which it was created.

So it's useful to think about the events, people and ideas – or [*historical context*](http://ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/glossary/term/169) – that surround it. Keep in mind that:

* the less time between the event and the time of writing, the more likely certain details – such as dates, names and locations – will be accurate
* older documents show us what life was like in the past, and can also reveal attitudes that may be uncommon or unacceptable today
* particular formats – such as diaries, emails, video, sms, etc – reflect the era in which they were created, so think about what the format reveals about the resource
* even if the resource is only a few years old, it may not be the most up-to-date information, especially if it is part of an ongoing study or changing theories.

**Why was the resource created?**

Writers, artists, historians, photographers and other creators will sometimes use their work to persuade people about a particular viewpoint or interpretation of an idea or event. So, it's important to work out why the resource was created. Remember:

* the creator's purpose is, more often than not, the message you remember long after you've finished reading or looking at it
* in printed material, look for a range of [*opinions*](http://ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/glossary/term/210) that are supported by different sources – this helps you make up your own mind about the information being presented
* in secondary sources a bibliography is often a good sign of a reputable resource, but you'll need to check whether the references listed are reliable and credible.

**Who was the resource created for?**

Many different kinds of resources – from maps, government documents and diaries to photographs, websites and advertising materials – are created for many different audiences.

So it's important to think about how the intended audience has affected the format and overall message in the resource. Ask yourself:

* Who is the target audience?

For example

A teen magazine, travel website or tabloid newspaper has a very different audience to an academic journal, government annual report or a reputable broadsheet newspaper. You would expect the approach to text in each of these publications to be very different.

* Did the creator intend for their work to be looked at by someone else?[[1]](#footnote-1)

1. <http://ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/learn-skills/research-skills/select-resources/identify-bias> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)