

Basics

When we read, it is important to understand what the writer believes. Sometimes, this is straightforward, and the writer will say things like *I believe ... I think ...* Other times, however, we need to do a little detective work to find out just what the writer believes.

The academic context

If we understand the writer's point of view, we can quickly dismiss texts that are too flimsy or opinion-based. Such texts are not usually suitable for academic study, so the ability to eliminate them saves us time. However, there are other times when we want to know the opinion of a writer, and identifying the writer's point of view is essential to understanding a text. If we don't know what the writer thinks, we don't fully understand the text. When we read for academic study, we also need to know the opinions of certain writers so that we can refer to them in our own writing.

Key features

- Look out for key words and phrases, such as *I believe ... It seems to me that ... I doubt that ...*
- Try to identify the tone of the text – is the writer being formal and respectful, or dismissive and sarcastic, for example?
- Remember that a text might contain many different opinions, and if they are relevant to your studies, you need to identify all of them.

Challenges / difficulties

Sometimes, the writer does not directly state her point of view. Instead, you have to 'read between the lines' to understand how the writer feels. This means that you need to have a very good vocabulary in order to understand what a writer might be implying with the choice of a particular word.

How can I develop this skill?

As with many of these study skills, a little critical thinking is needed. Ask questions about what you read, such as *What is the writer really saying? Why is this particular word being used?*

Learning outcome

Understanding the writer's point of view will leave you with a deeper understanding of the text. It will also be useful in your own academic writing, because you will be able to refer to the works of others with confidence.

Theory to practice

Read the extract and answer the questions about it.

¹No longer can a bank manager offer loans to applicants simply because she likes them as people. ²Instead, each candidate's application is assessed according to information about their circumstances and credit history. ³While this may seem like a fairer system, it also illustrates a problem with using algorithms for such important decisions. ⁴By treating each application exactly the same, to be assessed based only on numbers, the system fails to take into account important information such as the reasons for a person's previous credit problems. ⁵In other words, these algorithms are inflexible and do not allow for common sense. ⁶This is even more concerning now that they are being used by the state to make decisions on a community-wide level.

- a From sentence 1 alone, can we detect anything about the writer's opinion of the new system of offering loans?
- b Look at sentence 3. What do we understand about the writer's opinion when she says, 'While this may seem like a fairer system ...'?
- c What is it that the writer thinks the system ignores?

- d Which phrase in sentence 5 refers to the way we should approach bank loans, according to the writer?
- e Which word in sentence 6 tells us the writer does not agree with the use of algorithms?

Ways to get more practice

During your reading, remember to think about what the writer is implying as well as what the writer is saying directly.