BIAS vs. PERSPECTIVE / POINT OF VIEW

A wise history teacher (whom I don’t know, but I like what she said) once wrote in an e-mail:

“I’d like to make a big plea for teaching students to look for Point of View, and not bias. They misuse ‘bias’ so much that it hurts to read. In most minds, ‘bias’ is BAD; and they get in the habit of writing the phrase ‘it is biased because’ – which, of course, makes the reader start grinding her teeth.”

So, the moral of the story is: DON’T BE THAT STUDENT. Become familiar with the following terms and their definitions, and then get in the habit of using “point of view” OR “perspective” when discussing documents.

These terms have a NEGATIVE value attached to them:

- bias (n.): a mental leaning or inclination; partiality; prejudice
- biased (vb.): to cause to have a bias; influence; prejudice

These terms have a NEUTRAL value attached to them:

- perspective (n.): the relationship or proportion of the parts of a whole, regarded from a particular stand or point in time; the interrelation in which a subject and its parts are mentally viewed
- point of view (n.): the place from which, or way in which, something is viewed or considered; standpoint; a mental attitude or opinion