Confirmation bias, the tendency to interpret new information in a way that aligns with your current views, can pose a cognitive challenge when you’re working on research projects in college and beyond. It’s important to think critically and avoid getting caught up in your own biases.

Now, at this point, you may be wondering – “Okay, so how can I avoid confirmation bias?”

First, you have to be able to recognize confirmation bias. This is often difficult, since confirmation bias isn’t a conscious process. You can begin by asking yourself a few questions like:

- Do all my sources say the same thing?
- Are all my sources from the same outlet? (for example, a particular academic journal or The New York Times)
- Do I agree with what all my sources are saying?
- What might someone who disagree with me say?
- How did I find these sources? (Searching in a database may yield more diverse viewpoints than going straight to a newspaper’s website.)

It’s important to consider all possible perspectives on an issue when you’re conducting research. For example, if you were making a poster on technology in a school setting, you would need to address the viewpoints of those who believe technology can enhance learning as well as those who think technology is distracting, regardless of what you believe.

However, not all viewpoints are valid. Information from the Flat Earth Society is scientifically invalid, and need not be addressed in every paper about earth science. If you’re wondering whether or not to include a certain perspective, you can always ask your professor or a librarian for a second opinion!

Finally, whenever you’re doing research, make sure you use a variety of search terms to find credible, diverse sources. If you were writing a paper on the life of Ben Franklin, you would find different opinions on his life by searching “Benjamin Franklin AND inventions” vs. “Benjamin Franklin AND relationships.” The former would likely lead you to books and articles touting his accomplishments, the latter might reveal him as an unfaithful partner.

One way to make sure you’re finding well-rounded information is to avoid using words like “good”, “bad”, “pros”, and “cons” in your search terms. Using these terms may seem like an easy way to get diverse results, but think about it... these words indicate bias! One author’s “good” may be another author’s “bad.” The best way to find a range of results is to think critically and form your own opinion based on diverse sources.

At the end of the day, remember that scholarship is a conversation. Learning to recognize biases in your own work and in the work of others can help keep that conversation going.