

42 Techniques That *Shape* What We Read

A COMPANION RESOURCE TO FRED'S CHARTER

Understanding how news is framed is one of the most useful skills you can develop.

This is not a reason for cynicism — it is a reason for curiosity.

This resource expands the principles of [Fred's Charter](#) into a practical field guide. These 42 techniques describe how framing, selection, and structure shape information — sometimes deliberately, sometimes as a product of institutional habit. Recognising them is the first step to reading past them.

<p>42 TECHNIQUES</p>	<p>7 CATEGORIES</p>	<p>11 CHARTER PRINCIPLES</p>	<p>1 STANDARD</p>
---------------------------------	--------------------------------	---	------------------------------

I · LANGUAGE & FRAMING

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>01 LOADED LANGUAGE
"Regime" not "government." "Terrorist" not "militant."
The word chosen carries a verdict before any evidence is presented.</p> <p>03 WEASEL WORDS
"Some say," "sources claim" — with no sources named, no accountability taken, and no way to evaluate the claim.</p> <p>05 SCARE QUOTES
Placing a word in quotation marks to cast doubt without argument. A "ceasefire." The "victims." The "evidence."</p> | <p>02 EUPHEMISM
"Collateral damage" for civilian deaths. "Enhanced interrogation" for torture. Neutral language softens reality.</p> <p>04 PASSIVE VOICE TO ERASE AGENCY
"Mistakes were made." "People were killed." The passive construction removes the actor from the sentence entirely.</p> <p>06 COLLOQUIAL NITPICKING
Applying strict technical definitions to ordinary speech to manufacture inaccuracy. If the core assertion is directionally correct, imprecision is not a material error.</p> |
|---|---|

II · SELECTION & OMISSION

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>07 SELECTIVE OMISSION
Telling part of the truth while leaving out the part that changes its meaning entirely. The omission is invisible — it leaves no trace.</p> <p>09 CHERRY-PICKING DATA
Choosing only the statistics, time periods, or studies that support a predetermined conclusion while ignoring those that contradict it.</p> <p>11 COVERAGE GAPS
Systematically ignoring events affecting certain populations. Absence of coverage is an editorial choice, not evidence of absence.</p> | <p>08 BURYING THE LEAD
Placing the most significant fact at the end of an article, after most readers have stopped reading.</p> <p>10 MISSING CONTEXT
Reporting an event without the historical or political background that explains why it happened and what it means.</p> <p>12 SOURCE GATEKEEPING
Quoting only official voices while excluding affected communities, dissidents, and opposing experts from the record.</p> |
|--|---|

III · SOURCE CREDIBILITY

13 APPEAL TO AUTHORITY WITHOUT SCRUTINY

Treating government or institutional statements as facts requiring no corroboration. Institutional sources are sources like any other.

15 DELEGITIMISING BY ASSOCIATION

Dismissing a claim because of who made it, rather than evaluating the evidence itself.

17 ANONYMOUS SOURCING WITHOUT ACCOUNTABILITY

"Officials familiar with the matter." No name, no institution, no way to assess motive or reliability.

14 ASYMMETRIC SCEPTICISM

Demanding rigorous proof from one side while accepting the other's claims at face value. The standard of evidence shifts depending on who is speaking.

16 GEOGRAPHIC SOURCE HIERARCHY

Treating Western outlet coverage as confirmation and non-Western sources as needing Western validation. African, Asian, and Middle Eastern sources are primary sources.

18 EXPERT LAUNDERING

Presenting think tanks, lobby-funded researchers, or conflicted academics as independent experts without disclosing affiliations or funding.

IV · NARRATIVE & AGENDA-SETTING

19 FALSE BALANCE

Presenting fringe positions as equivalent to scientific consensus. Equal airtime does not mean equal evidence.

21 PROTAGONIST / ANTAGONIST FRAMING

Casting allied states as inherently defensive and designated adversaries as inherently aggressive, regardless of the specific evidence for any specific act.

23 MANUFACTURING CONSENSUS

"Everyone agrees," "no serious person doubts" — language that creates the impression of agreement when genuine disagreement exists.

20 FALSE DICHOTOMY

Reducing complex issues to two options and erasing every alternative. "You're either with us or against us" is the extreme form.

22 AGENDA-SETTING THROUGH REPETITION

Hammering certain stories relentlessly while ignoring others of equal importance. What gets covered most is perceived as most significant.

24 IMPORTING UNRELATED BACKGROUND

Weakening a specific factual claim by surrounding it with context designed to discredit the person making it rather than the claim itself.

V · SUPPRESSION & DISMISSAL

25 LABEL-BASED PRE-DISMISSAL

Calling something a "conspiracy theory" or "disinformation" as a substitute for examining its evidence. The label replaces the argument.

27 COVER-UP DISMISSAL

Treating suppression of inconvenient information as implausible by default. Elite suppression of inconvenient truths is historically well-documented.

29 CHILLING LANGUAGE

Describing truthful speech as "dangerous" or "destabilising" to discourage publication, sharing, or further investigation.

26 INSTITUTIONAL SILENCE AS CORROBORATION

Treating absence of official denial, or absence of media coverage, as evidence that an allegation is false. Silence proves nothing either way.

28 RIDICULE AS REBUTTAL

Mocking a claim or its proponents instead of addressing the substance. If something sounds absurd, the instinct is to laugh rather than examine.

VI · STATISTICAL & VISUAL DISTORTION

30 MISLEADING HEADLINES

A headline claiming something the article itself does not support. Most readers never reach the correction buried within.

32 ABSOLUTE VS RELATIVE RISK CONFUSION

31 MANIPULATED CHARTS

Truncated axes, selective time periods, or misleading scales that make small changes look dramatic or large changes look trivial.

33 CORRELATION PRESENTED AS CAUSATION

"Doubles your risk" sounds alarming. "Increases risk from 1-in-a-million to 2-in-a-million" does not. Both statements can describe the same finding.

- 34 SELECTIVE CASUALTY ACCOUNTING**
Applying rigorous scrutiny to one side's casualty figures while accepting the other side's uncritically. The standard of verification shifts by actor.

Two things happening together reported as one causing the other. A relationship between variables is not an explanation of them.

- 35 DECONTEXTUALISED IMAGES OR FOOTAGE**
Using real photographs or video from a different time, place, or conflict to illustrate a current event. The images are genuine; the context is not.

VII · STRUCTURAL & INSTITUTIONAL BIAS

- 36 EDITORIAL DEPENDENCE ON ADVERTISERS**
Avoiding stories that might displease major commercial partners or government funders. The editorial decision is never recorded; the story simply does not run.

- 38 ACCESS JOURNALISM**
Softening coverage of powerful figures to preserve privileged access. The trade is honesty for proximity, and it is rarely made explicit.

- 40 ALGORITHMIC AMPLIFICATION OF BIAS**
AI and algorithmic systems trained on skewed media corpora inherit and amplify existing biases at scale, creating feedback loops that are harder to see than individual editorial decisions.

- 42 DEFAULT CULTURAL ASSUMPTIONS**
Training data and editorial culture embed certain geographic and cultural perspectives as the neutral default — shaping which stories are told, how, and for whom.

- 37 REVOLVING-DOOR COMMENTARY**
Presenting former officials, military officers, or lobbyists as independent analysts without disclosing their prior roles or ongoing interests.


- 39 BOTH-SIDESING STRUCTURAL INEQUALITY**
Treating the powerful and the powerless as equivalent parties in a dispute in order to appear neutral. Balance and equivalence are not the same thing.

- 41 SELF-CENSORSHIP UNDER POLITICAL PRESSURE**
Newsrooms quietly dropping stories not because they are untrue but because they are inconvenient to the powerful. The decision leaves no public trace.

Fred Check — Independent Fact-Checking System
Media Literacy Field Guide · 2026
Consistent standards. Global sources. No exceptions.



FACT-CHECK ON WHATSAPP

 +44 7863 795638

FACT-CHECK ON WEB

fredcheck.com

CONTACT

hello@fredcheck.com

