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# What to do when active learning BACKFIRES

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**We love active learning!  
But... we have failed a LOT**

**We're here today to teach you effective  
recovery strategies for active learning  
pitfalls**



## Fail 1:

# Too many questions during self-guided activities

- It's possible to spend an enormous amount on time answering student questions about a guided activity
- Students might not complete the activity because of this excessive instruction
- This defeats the entire purpose of a self-guided activity! Gah!



—\*—  
**Solution**

- Let students use each other as a resource before they come to you
- Pair or group them so they can brainstorm and troubleshoot with each other first
- This leads to better overall comprehension of the activity



## Fail 2: Bias instruction gone wrong

- Opinion vs bias
- Frame the discussion around scholarly research
- Choose examples carefully



A group of people sitting around a table, looking at documents and talking. The image is overlaid with a dark purple semi-transparent filter.

## —\*— Solution

- Validate all opinions & stress that we are all human
- Use yourself as an example
- Don't forget to explain context
- Examples should quickly illustrate, build off each other & be backed by online tools



## Fail 3: Students love choosing sensitive topics for student-led activities

- The drawback to student-led activities is the lack of control on your end
- For the mind map activity I teach, students often choose sensitive or obscure topics
- This derails from the main point of the activity



## —\*— Solution

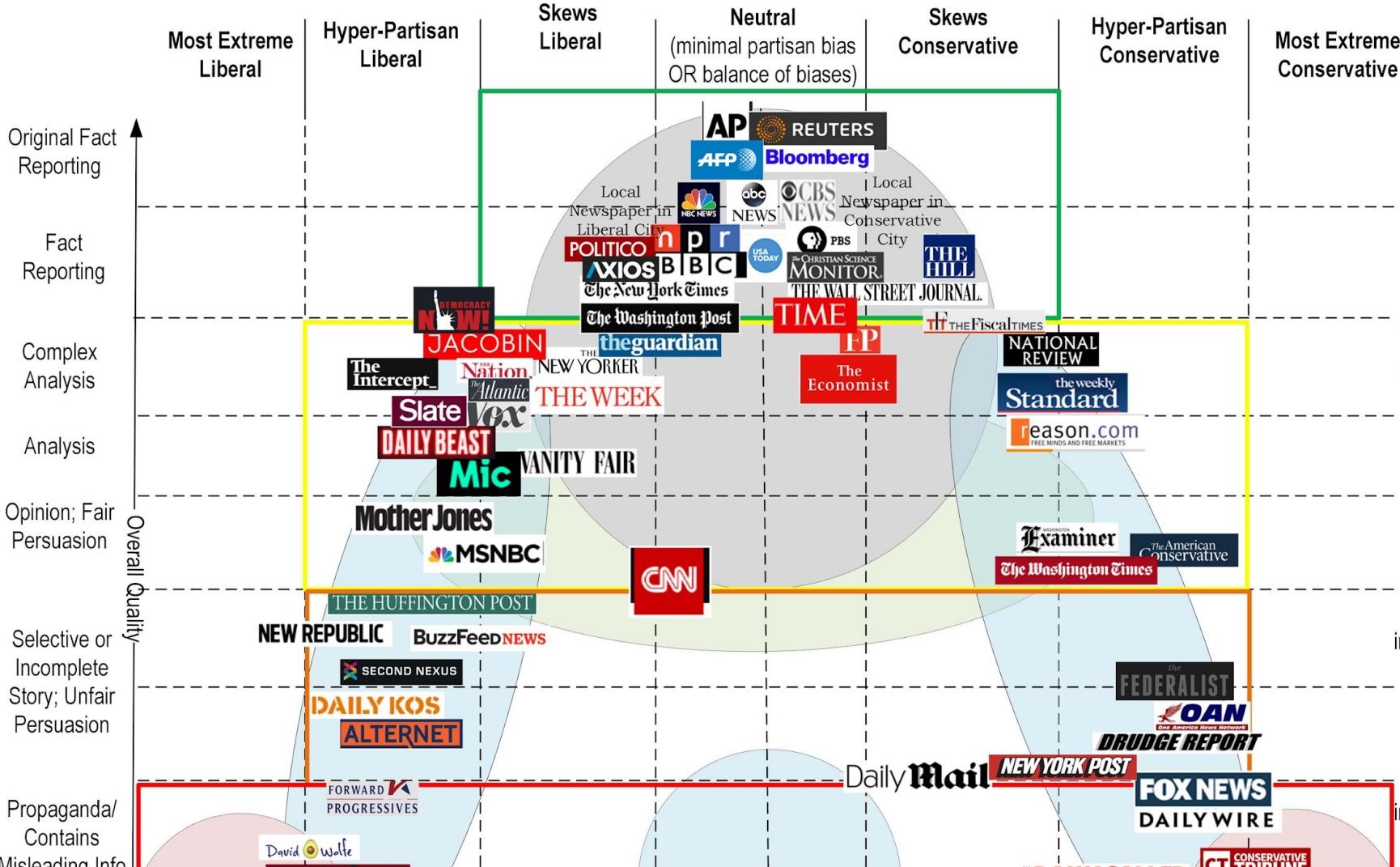
- Politely reject topics that could derail the activity
  - Use your judgment: many controversial topics are completely fine, but we should make sure that activities are inclusive
- Ask students to define their topic for the class before starting the activity
- Have a back-up plan just in case!





## Fail 4: Activities that require prior knowledge from students

- Be careful building an activity that depends on students having specific knowledge (even if that knowledge is basic)
- Media Map Activity



**Key:**

**Circles and Ellipses:**  
 Represent range that stories within a source often fall (not true for all sources though)

**Green Rectangle:**  
 News

**Yellow Rectangle:**  
 Fair interpretations of the news

**Orange Rectangle:**  
 Unfair interpretations of the news

Original Fact Reporting

Fact Reporting

Complex Analysis

Analysis

Opinion; Fair Persuasion

Selective or Incomplete Story; Unfair Persuasion

Propaganda/ Contains Misleading Info

Most Extreme Liberal

Hyper-Partisan Liberal

Skews Liberal

Neutral  
 (minimal partisan bias OR balance of biases)

Skews Conservative

Hyper-Partisan Conservative

Most Extreme Conservative

Overall Quality



A blue-tinted background image showing a group of students sitting at a table, looking at papers and talking. The text is overlaid on this image.

## —\*— Solution

- Carefully consider what prior knowledge is needed
- Budget extra time to go over concept
- When designing an activity consider type of class. Stand-alone, one-shot classes make it difficult to use activities that require prior knowledge



# Questions?

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