Research shows that we are more than twice as likely to seek out information that confirms and conforms to our opinion than information that contradicts or disproves our opinion. This is called confirmation bias. But only seeking out information that confirms our current opinion is a hindrance to expanding our knowledge base and making a truly informed decision. How can we overcome our confirmation bias? Instead of reading articles or reports that confirm your opinion, you need to seek out credible information from reliable sources that claim the opposite. Can you rationally counter-argue to other argument, and can you back it up with unbiased data? If you can’t it doesn’t mean you’re wrong, but you have a new set of questions to answer and research to pursue. The important point is to argue against yourself! It will force you to think hard about why you could be wrong. Not only does it force you to expose yourself to confirming ideas and data, but it can strengthen your original opinion and enhance your overall knowledge level.

AHA! I like to be right, so I look for information that confirms my opinions.

Materials: Projector to show the activity Grade Level: 9-12

Key Question #3/Consumer: How might different people understand this message differently?

Core Concept #3: Different people understand the same media message differently.

Activity:

Suppose we lay out the following 4 cards like this.*
Then we give you the following statement.

If a card has a vowel on one side then it has an even number on the other side.

Our question to you is which two cards do you need to flip over to prove this statement true?

- A & 4
- A & 7
- D & 4
- D & 7

Did you choose A & 4?

Then you’re like the majority of people, wrong. People flip over these two cards to confirm the statement.

If they flip over the A card and a vowel appears the statement is correct. If they flip over the 4 card and a vowel is on the other side then the statement is also proved correct.

Instead of asking you to prove the statement true, what if we asked you to prove the statement false.

Which two cards would you flip over now?

- A & 4
- A & 7
- D & 4
- D & 7

The answer is A & 7.

Flipping over the A card can confirm the statement but also disprove the statement if an odd number is on the other side. You would flip over the 7 card because you can disprove the statement if a vowel was on the other side.

*This test is the Wason Selection Test and it shows our confirmation bias in action. This activity is adapted with permission from an investment newsletter published by American Money Management LLC, P.O. Box 675203, Rancho Santa Fe, CA 92067.