



Unconscious Bias  
February 2025

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## Introduction

Human beings are hard-wired to make intuitive decisions about other people. We go about our daily lives making unconscious judgements that affect our attitudes and behaviours towards other people.

From a basic human survival standpoint, developed through human evolution, our unconscious judgements or biases are necessary and essential. The process of placing people into categories and pre-judging helps us to make rapid decisions that could literally be lifesaving.

Social categorisation also helps us to deal with everyday encounters. The categorisation process helps to inform intuitive and appropriate behaviours and expectations from both parties. These rules of behaviours are stored within our unconscious and saves us from having to decode common social interactions. We behave in socially acceptable ways and make everyday judgements without being aware of doing so.

When most people think of bias, they think of a negative action taken deliberately. However, there are unconscious or implicit biases that can affect your behaviour or decisions without you realizing it. Unconscious biases are often based on mistaken, inaccurate, or incomplete information. These biases can have a significant impact on workplaces, shaping who gets recruited, hired, and promoted. Having an unconscious bias doesn't make you a bad person—it just means you're human.

It's possible, however, to interrupt bias. The first step is awareness. Below are the most common types of unconscious bias, along with tactics you can use to ensure workplace decisions aren't being guided by them.

### 1. Affinity Bias

Also called like-likes-like, this bias refers to our tendency to gravitate toward people similar to ourselves. That might mean hiring or promoting someone who shares the same race, gender, age, or educational background.

#### Interruption Opportunity:

Ensure that candidates selected for all open positions include people from under-represented groups.



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## 2. Ageism

Discriminating against someone on the basis of their age. Ageism tends to affect women more than men and starts at younger ages.

### Interruption Opportunity:

Remove graduation and work experience dates from resumes. Realize that older workers may bring skills and experiences to the table that younger workers cannot.

## 3. Attribution Bias

Because some people see women as less competent than men, they may undervalue their accomplishments and overvalue their mistakes.

### Interruption Opportunity:

Give honest, detailed feedback to all of your direct reports, and tie it to concrete business goals and outcomes. Research shows that feedback given to women tends to be vague and focused on communication style, while men are given specific feedback that tends to be tied to business goals and technical skills that accelerate advancement.

## 4. Beauty Bias

Judging people, especially women, based on how attractive you think they are. People perceived as attractive can be viewed more positively and treated more favourably.

### Interruption Opportunity:

Try to be aware of those judging thoughts in your head during the hiring process and promotion opportunities. Focus on their work, not their look.

## 5. Confirmation Bias

Confirmation bias refers to the tendency to look for or favour information that confirms beliefs we already hold.

### Interruption Opportunity:

Identify your blind spots. Build your own awareness about unconscious bias.

## 6. Conformity Bias

Very common in group settings, this type of bias occurs when your views are swayed or influenced by the views of others. This is similar to groupthink.

### Interruption Opportunity:

Consider using structured interviews and wait to share your thoughts with coworkers until the process is over.



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## 7. The Contrast Effect

This bias refers to evaluating the performance of one person in contrast to another because you experienced the individuals either simultaneously or in close succession.

### Interruption Opportunity:

If you find yourself comparing two people, especially in the hiring process, write down why you are leaning toward one over the other. Be sure your assessment is of each of them individually, not in comparison to one another.

## 8. Gender Bias

Preferring one gender over another or assuming that one gender is better for the job.

### Interruption Opportunity:

Try to use neutral language in job descriptions that don't resonate more with one gender over another. When thinking about development opportunities or promotions, try to switch the gender of the person you're thinking about and see if it changes your perception of their readiness.

## 9. The Halo/Horns Effect

The tendency to put someone on a pedestal or think more highly of them after learning something impressive about them, or conversely, perceiving someone negatively after learning something unfavourable about them.

### Interruption Opportunity:

Consider why you have a negative (or positive) perception. Ask yourself if your perception stems from unconscious stereotyping based on race, gender, or ethnicity, for instance.

## 10. Name Bias

When you judge a person based on their name and perceived background. This is especially important when reviewing resumes.

### Interruption Opportunity:

Remove candidates' names from resumes to ensure you choose people based on their skills and experience, not their perceived background.



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## 11. Weight Bias

Judging a person negatively because they are larger or heavier than average.

### **Interruption Opportunity:**

When making judgments about a person, consider how you would feel if the person was thinner.

Now that you are aware of the different kinds of unconscious bias, you can start to put systems in place to prevent bias from interfering in your social, workplace and hiring decisions.

### **Useful Links**

<https://freecoursesinengland.co.uk/equality-and-diversity/>

<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/money-business/diversity-and-inclusion-the-workplace/>

<https://obs.acas.org.uk/ViewEvent.aspx>

<https://www.diverse matters.co.uk/training>

Break the Gender Bias Cycle | Catalyst