

# UNCONSCIOUS BIASES & THE SELECTION PROCESS

Our goal is not to eliminate unconscious bias but to account for it and prevent it from determining our behaviours and actions.

## AFFECT HEURISTIC

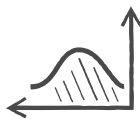
Definition: "First impression" – positive or negative – feelings in relation to a stimulus (ex: gender, age, ethnicity, weight, facial hair, speech, etc.). Decisions are heavily influenced by emotion.



Example: Feeling a candidate won't make a good doctor due to their piercings or coloured hair. Favouring one candidate over another because they are thinner.

## NORM REFERENCING

Definition: Comparing and contrasting candidates with those before them.



Example: You rate a candidate more favourably if they follow someone who interviewed very poorly compared to if you had interviewed them after a very good candidate.

## AVAILABILITY HEURISTIC

Definition: Overemphasis on what comes quickly to mind.



Example: You think a candidate is very strong because they come from the same school as a recent wonderful resident you worked with.

## ANCHORING AND PREMATURE CLOSURE

Definition: Being overly influenced by an early piece of information. Making a decision early and not being open to new information.



Example: You decide quickly that a candidate will not be a good fit despite much evidence to the contrary that you receive after your initial impression.

## HALO AND HORNS EFFECT

Definition: Your feelings about someone in one area influence your opinions of them in other areas.



Example: You really think highly of a candidate so you dismiss their frequent tardiness as an aberration.

## SIMILAR-TO-ME BIAS

Definition: Favouring those who are similar to ourselves (ex: gender, ethnicity, common interests, training, place of origin, etc.).



Example: You favour a candidate because they grew up in a large urban center & also have an interest in theatre.

## CONFIRMATION BIAS

Definition: Placing more value on information that supports your existing belief (which may be a result of other biases). We notice, remember, and interpret behaviour that reinforces our beliefs.



Example: You believe a candidate is highly motivated and ambitious so you note their participation in charitable work but ignore their lack of involvement in research activities.

## WHAT CAN I DO?

Acknowledge and accept that we all have unconscious bias – it is normal and helps us navigate a complex world.

Becoming aware of unconscious bias helps us reduce its impact on our decisions.

- Note when you have a strong reaction to someone or something.
- Note when you are tired, rushed, or stressed (unconscious bias may predominate).
- Take time and think deliberately – especially when making important or complex decisions.
- Take the perspective of others.
- Take an Implicit Association Test (<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>).
- Practice counter-stereotyping and challenge the status quo.

# GROUP BIASES

The strategies below need to be implemented & encouraged by those who lead or chair committees/groups.

---

## AUTHORITY BIAS

Definition: Attributing greater importance or accuracy to someone in a position of authority. Group decision can be swayed by one, or a few, individuals. Others may be reluctant to disagree with them.



Strategy: Separate the idea from the person who provided it. Discuss the rationale for the point and evaluate it on supporting evidence and likely implications.

---

## BANDWAGON EFFECT AND GROUPTHINK

Definition: Believing things simply because others do. Going along with the majority opinion. Striving for consensus, conformity, harmony. Avoiding being a dissenting view.



Strategy: Invite and consider all positions and viewpoints. Treat differences of opinion as positive and valuable.

---

## STATUS QUO BIAS

Definition: A preference for the current state of affairs (resistance to change). The current baseline (or status quo) is taken as a reference point.



Strategy: Illustrate how many egalitarian measures in society have resulted from challenging the status quo.

# SHARED INFORMATION BIAS



Definition: Also known as the collective information sampling bias - is a tendency for group members to spend more time and energy discussing information that multiple members are already familiar with and less on information available to only one or a few members (or to none of the members of the group).

Strategy: Create diverse teams/committees. Ensure everyone feels included and valued. Practice counter-stereotyping.

---



UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

College of Medicine

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT  
[MEDICINE.USASK.CA/FACULTYDEV](https://medicine.usask.ca/facultydev)

Created by Sean Polreis,  
University of Saskatchewan