

13 Types of Unconscious Bias

There are several different sorts of unconscious biases that can manifest in the hiring process.

Here are some **unconscious bias examples** to look out for and some handy tips for getting rid of them.

1. Affinity bias

Affinity bias happens when we favor a candidate because they share a **trait or characteristic** with us. It may feel easier to relate to such candidates if you both attended the same university or grew up in the same hometown.



Affinity bias is really common, and while having some common ground can help with cultural fit, just remember to also thoroughly evaluate their skills, too! | [Source](#)

Affinity bias is crucial for the [cultural fit](#) that so many companies yearn for. Founders want a tight-knit team of like-minded people, which is why affinity bias reigns supreme as a hiring aid in many early startups.

A solution: To avoid affinity bias, try spending equal time [evaluating candidates](#) that seem familiar or unfamiliar to you at first glance. You may learn that you have much more in common than you initially thought if only you took the time to get to know them better.

2. Attribution bias

Attribution bias happens when we make assumptions about people's **actions and intentions** based on previous interactions we've had with them.

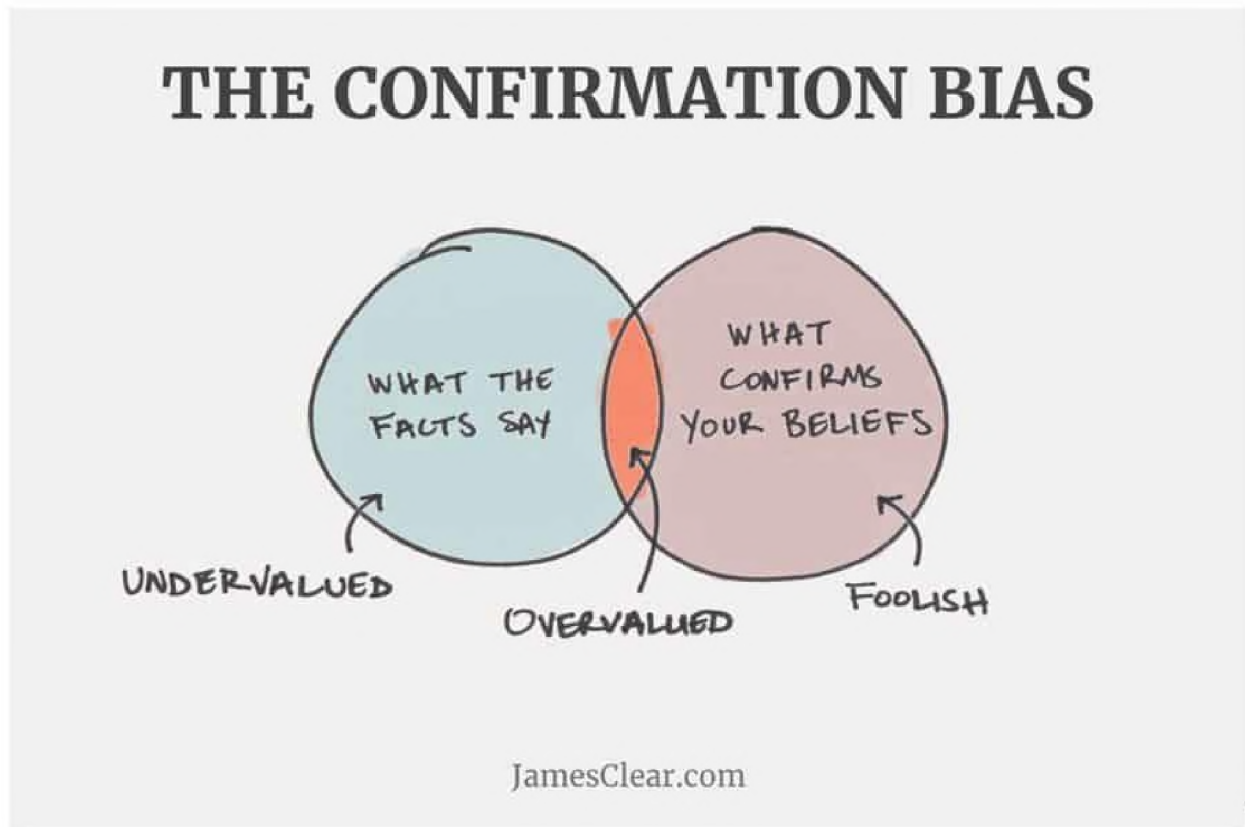
For example, if you notice a candidate tends to change jobs frequently, you might assume they're a job hopper and will move on from their next job in a few months. You immediately assume that they are the problem instead of considering the myriad of complex reasons that could've led to their recent work pattern.

A solution: Work to recognize whether your thoughts about a candidate are based on information or assumption. If they are based on assumption, stop, and ask the candidate instead. Be mindful of phrasing questions in accusatory ways.

Asking, “What factors contributed to you deciding to leave your last position?” is much better than “Why haven’t you stayed in a job for more than 4 months?” We bet you’ll be surprised by the answers more often than not.

3. Confirmation bias

Confirmation bias is a type of unconscious bias that happens when we **draw conclusions** about people, situations, and even data, **that only serve to reinforce what we already believe** to be true. It is a sort of ‘selective sight’. We only ‘see’ what confirms our existing beliefs, disregarding or even forgetting information to the contrary.



Confirmation bias refers to our tendency to search for and favor information that confirms our existing beliefs. | [Source](#)

For example, a bit like finding the perfect partner, it can be hard to see or admit the flaws in a favored candidate. In recruitment, hiring managers might feel like they found the perfect candidate, and everything they focus on from that point on is aimed at proving themselves right.

In such cases, they will ignore the [red flags](#) raised by others in the hiring team and struggle to take a step back and analyze them more objectively.

A solution: [Look at your candidates' skills](#) before considering anything else. This will allow you to shortlist candidates based on ability alone. You will end up with a much more diverse interview pool if the only factor you're assessing is a test score. Toggl Hire to screen candidates based only on skill is an easy way to [boost diversity and inclusion](#) and combat bias in the hiring process.

4. The contrast effect

This kind of unconscious bias happens when we **compare two or more candidates** we've encountered. Receiving an exceptionally strong application subconsciously sets a standard in our mind, and all the applications from that point on seem inferior.

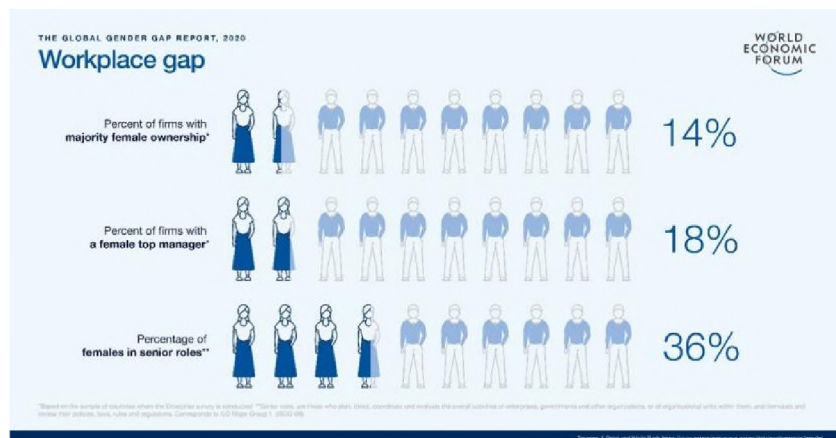
The problem with the contrast effect is that it lacks objectivity. It skews expectations away from reality and can make a promising candidate seem mediocre or poor candidates seem great. Both are lose-lose scenarios because you never end up with the best person for the job; you end up with the 'best' person from the bunch you've seen.

A solution: Having an objective benchmark against which to judge applications is a good place to start. [Compare candidates](#) to the objective mark instead of to each other.

5. Gender bias

This is one of the simplest and most easily understood types of implicit biases. It happens when we unconsciously think a candidate's suitability for a job, industry, or position is **influenced by their gender**.

Some examples of gender bias are the old-fashioned unconscious beliefs that men are better suited to high-logic professions like physics, whereas women are better suited to caring roles like nursing or education.



Gender disparity in the workplace | [Source](#)

A solution: Ensure you're using gender-neutral language wherever possible in order to not exclude a specific gender from applying to the role. This is especially relevant for job ads and descriptions for roles in male or female-dominated industries.

[Textio](#) is a great tool that analyzes your job ads and suggests language tweaks you can make to make them more inclusive and immune to gender bias.

6. The halo effect and the horns effect

The halo effect is somewhat similar to confirmation bias. With these implicit biases, we notice something particularly impressive about a candidate – a “halo”- we are promptly blinded to less preferable features about that candidate.

For example, if you notice that a candidate used to work for Google, you may give them an unconscious advantage over other applicants. Surely, someone who worked at Google must be a good fit for your team, right? This is an example of thinking based on assumptions rather than information.

The opposite of the halo effect is called **the horns effect**. It happens when you focus on one particular negative trait of a candidate and ignore everything else—for example, judging a candidate entirely based on the fact that they dropped out of university, despite a strong work history since then.

A solution: Don't focus on what the candidate achieved in the past in their workplace. Instead, focus on what they can do for you in the future. Evaluate their skills and the ability to get the job done, rather than trusting a reference from 10 years ago and using it as your main hiring criterion.

7. The overconfidence bias

The name of this bias is pretty self-explanatory. When a recruiter or someone on your hiring team is feeling too confident about their ability to make good decisions, they will **use their gut feeling** as guidance for hiring rather than facts.



Overconfidence bias comic | [Source](#)

For example, let's say a candidate shined in the interview process because of impeccable communication skills. And so the HR lead decides to put them through to the next round without testing their skills because they "have a feeling" that the candidate is a star. This is not only unfair treatment to the rest of the applicants, but could also lead to problems after this candidate is hired.

A solution: No matter how reliable is your gut instinct, always make sure to assess your candidates fairly, for example, with [a skills test](#), to help avoid overconfidence bias. If they are truly exceptional, the [hiring test will](#) only confirm your assumptions before you welcome them into the workplace.

8. Beauty bias

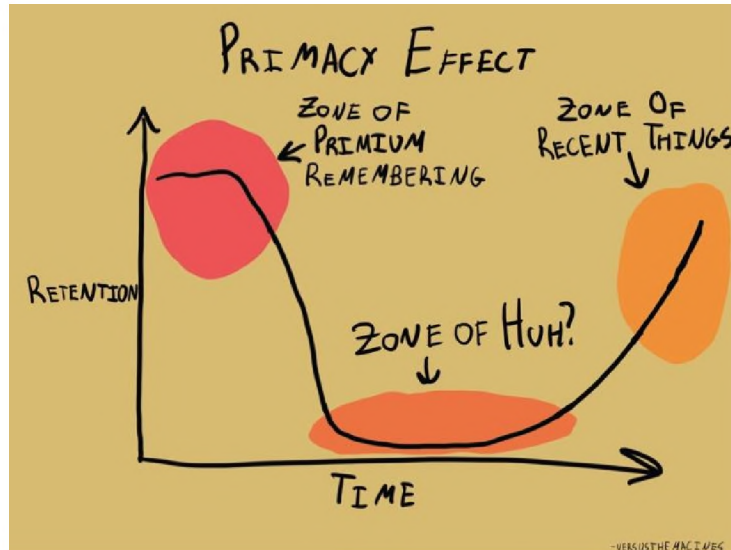
It's a strange but perhaps unsurprising fact that people who "look good" get paid an average of [10-15% more](#) than their counterparts in the United States. Good looks pay off in personal and professional lives, as it turns out.

Beauty bias occurs when someone decides to go forward with or **hire those candidates they perceive as beautiful**. They might even think that their looks will help them do the job better, like a receptionist or hostess working in front-of-house, even though it's not necessarily true.

A solution: [Blind hiring](#), skills testing in the pre-screening stage, or doing first-round interviews over Zoom or Meets with the camera off are just some ideas to help avoid beauty bias. And with Toggl Hire, you can test all your prospective candidates well before putting a face to their names.

9. The primacy and recency effect

As the name suggests, this implicit bias happens when we **favor candidates that we saw first**. For example, if someone was the first to interview for a role, we might remember them the most vividly – or fondly!



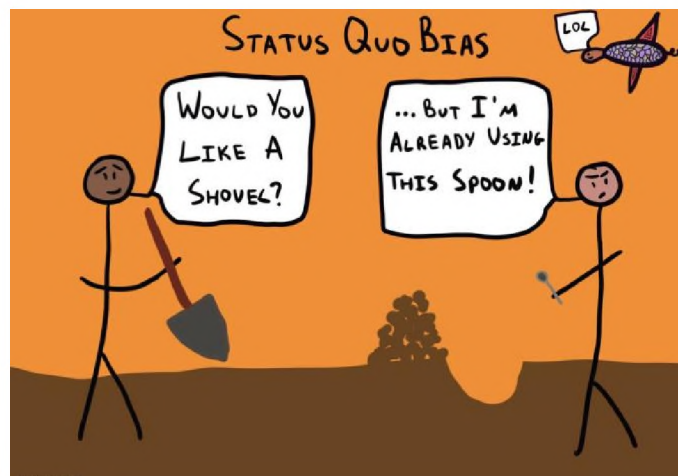
The primacy and recency effect | [Source](#)

Similarly, recency bias occurs when the hiring team **favors the most recent candidates** they interviewed or screened. Since they are still fresh in your hiring team's memory, they might leave the biggest impression and affect their hiring decisions.

A solution: One way to help overcome such biases is to take detailed notes to help when comparing candidates or try using a [candidate scorecard for interviews](#). Interview scorecards are a practical tool for hiring managers to support their decisions with real, quantifiable data.

10. Status quo bias

As the name suggests, this type of bias is when hiring managers **shy away from making any changes** to the status quo. Especially for homogenous teams like an all-male developer squad or a sales team that all used to work together at another company, hiring managers may feel reluctant to introduce any changes.



A status quo bias in hiring prevents you from recruiting people who think differently | [Source](#)

Let's say you have a team of marketers who are keen on doing things the old way – racking their brains over copy, Mad Men style. While interviewing a copywriter, he or she suggests using AI tools, but the existing team isn't on board. A status quo bias would prevent you from making this hire because the new copywriter would have to go against your existing team.

A solution: A breath of fresh air and some diversity can be an amazing thing for your workplace. But of course, even the best of us can be resistant to change. In this case, you'll need to persuade them of the benefits of the coming changes and outline a plan of action for dealing with any resulting conflict.

11. Anchoring bias

Also known as anchor bias or expectation bias, it happens when we're "anchored" to a specific idea and **have expectations** based on it. For example, you had a fantastic developer named Fred who was incredible in team meetings. He led the conversation, made sure it stayed on track and inspired the rest of the team. Then, Fred leaves.

When looking to replace him, you employ a similarity bias and ignore candidates with exceptional [hard skills](#) just because they **don't have the one trait you're anchored for**.

A solution: Lead the hiring process with objective, measurable skills to avoid anchor bias. Compare candidates against one another on their ability to get the job done and not a trait that you would love them to have above everything else.

12. The affect heuristic

It might sound complex, but the affect heuristic happens when we **let emotions get the best of us** while hiring. In other words, when we make decisions based on how we feel at the moment rather than an objective perception of a candidate.

Let's say that a hiring manager is going through a difficult personal issue, something with their children. And during the course of the interview, they discover that the candidate is going through the exact same thing. This could cause them to favor the candidate over others because of an emotional connection.

A solution: Have more than one person attend important interviews to get multiple opinions. And, of course, base your decisions on tangible criteria like how well they answered the interview questions or performed on a skills test.

FURTHER READING:

[Peer Interviewing: Tips for Hiring Managers to Get it Right](#)

13. Conformity bias

Peer pressure is incredibly powerful and happens in our everyday lives – not just in the workplace. Conformity bias is when a group of people agrees on a matter, forcing even those who are against it to conform.

In practice, imagine a candidate that scored high on their skills test but did just okay in their interview compared to other candidates. Three out of five people on your team think they should go forward, but the results tell you otherwise. Since you're in the minority, you go along and progress the candidate.

A solution: Data and facts are your friends when seeking to avoid conformity bias. Make your [hiring decisions](#) independently and stick to your guns when it comes to who goes further in the hiring process. Your aim is not to agree with your coworkers – it's to hire the best person for the job.