

# BIAS-FREE HIRING

## Quick Reference Guide



While it is important to ensure we have a well structured hiring process, a bias-free hiring process also requires that we reflect on our biases and the impact they have on our hiring decisions.

We all have biases. Some we are conscious of and some operate on an unconscious level. Both types of bias can affect our ability to fairly and accurately assess job candidates.

Biases can also be embedded within the organization and are reflected in the organizational culture, policies and practices.

Individuals are better able to recognize and minimize the impact of biases in the hiring process when they increase their bias literacy. Bias literacy is the ability to recognize one's own biases and then take action to set new expectations for

ones self and the organization (Carnes et al, 2012).

We can increase our bias literacy by increasing our self-awareness, engaging in ongoing learning and increasing our comfort zone by interacting more with people who are different than ourselves.

This guide identifies the stages of bias literacy so that you can identify where you are at in becoming bias literate. It also identifies 13 types of biases in hiring that are identified in the literature and offers tips on how to structure the hiring process to minimize the impact of bias.

# The Stages of Bias Literacy



## 1 Unconscious Incompetence

At this stage, you are not aware of any biases in yourself or in the organizational culture. You may not be aware of the lack of diversity in the organization, or that certain groups are concentrated in certain jobs and excluded from others.

If you do identify a gap in representation, you may attribute it to deficiencies in the group itself, which you may see as unqualified for or uninterested in certain jobs.

You do not see the need to recognize and minimize bias in the hiring process.

This stage may sound like:

**“This is interesting information, but it doesn’t apply to me.”**

**“We want to hire the best person for the job. If we hire diverse candidates we will be lowering our standards.”**

**“The problem is that they just are not qualified for these jobs.”**

## 2 Conscious Incompetence

At this stage, you are aware that bias exists and are trying to recognize it in yourself and the organizational culture. You may make a commitment to change but may be challenged to identify biases and how it may affect people from particular groups.

You may also be more comfortable acknowledging the impact of bias on certain groups than other groups.

Some people may be aware of your biases, but resist the need for change as you don’t think there is a problem when you act on your biases.

This stage may sound like:

**“Wow, I didn’t even think about my biases. But I don’t think they affect my hiring decisions.”**

**“My gut has served me well. I’ve always hired good people.”**

## 3 Conscious Competence

At this stage, you have moved from understanding to action.

You are focused on the issue and are able to recognize bias in yourself and in the organizational culture. You also begin to raise the issue of bias when you see it.

Although you can recognize bias, you may not be able to explain it to others or teach them bias literacy.

This stage may sound like:

**“Can we discuss this candidate a bit more. I found her tattoos distracting and it may have gotten in the way of hearing what she said.”**

**“That comment is biased and makes assumptions about the candidate based on her gender. We need to use gender neutral criteria in this evaluation.”**

## 4 Unconscious Competence

At this stage, you have become more comfortable acting to minimize the impact of your own and others’ biases. You also begin to see bias in organizational policies and practices.

Your ability to recognize bias becomes second nature and you feel comfortable explaining it and teaching others about this issue. You are more comfortable making public statements when you recognize bias and sharing your knowledge with others.

## 5 Reflective Competence

At this stage you are now fully bias literate. You understand that most biases come from our culture and that biases are a “social virus” rather than an individual issue. You actively try to unearth your biases and seek out opportunities to learn through reading and increase your comfort level with people who are different than yourself.

You are also committed to challenging the biases of co-workers and to identify and remove biases that are embedded within the organizational culture, policies and practices.

(Adapted from: [http://uvasearchportal.virginia.edu/?q=bias\\_literacy](http://uvasearchportal.virginia.edu/?q=bias_literacy))





# Bias-Free Hiring

## Principles of Bias-Free Hiring

### Principle 1: Merit-based

Bias-free hiring helps ensure that all candidates are provided an opportunity to demonstrate and be judged on their job-related skills and qualifications.

### Principle 2: Objective and job-related

A bias-free hiring process helps ensure that candidates are objectively assessed on job-related criteria.

### Principle 3: Structured

A bias-free hiring process is structured and ensures that all candidates are assessed in the same manner and against the same criteria. This structure provides candidates with an equal opportunity to demonstrate their skills, knowledge and qualifications for the job.

### Principle 4: Inclusive

A bias-free process is inclusive and free from barriers that adversely affect qualified candidates from diverse communities, backgrounds and identities.

In addition, this process includes people on the interview panel who are knowledgeable about equity, diversity and inclusion.

Where possible, it is desirable that interview panels also include people from diverse communities, backgrounds and identities. This not only demonstrates inclusion, but reduces bias in the hiring process.

## What is bias

Bias is an inclination or preference that influences judgement from being balanced or even-handed. Bias can be embedded in the organization's systems or culture, or held by individuals.

## The impact of biases

### Systemic Discrimination

The Ontario Human Rights Commission describes systemic discrimination as:

"...patterns of behaviour, policies or practices that are part of the structures of an organization, and which create or perpetuate disadvantage for [people based on the human rights protected grounds]."

Systemic discrimination can be created by the organization's formal and informal policies and practices, as well as its organizational culture.

### Cultural barriers

Barriers created by organizational culture are sometimes referred to as passive barriers. These barriers are created by a culture that can isolate, alienate and stereotype employees from diverse communities, backgrounds and identities.

### Attitudinal barriers

Attitudinal barriers are often called active barriers because they result from the attitudes and behaviours of individuals. Attitudinal barriers can be unintentional (based on unconscious biases or inaccurate assumptions) as well as someone's actual intent to be discriminatory.



# 13 Types of Bias in Hiring

## 1. First Impressions

The tendency of an interviewer to make snap judgments about a job candidate within seconds of their meeting.

## 2. Non-Verbal Behaviours

Misreading, misinterpreting or placing too much emphasis on non-verbal behaviours that have nothing to do with the candidate's ability to do the job, such as eye contact, whether and when they smile, or the firmness of their handshake.

## 3. Personal Discomfort

Allowing personal discomfort with a candidate to influence the interviewer's behaviour in the interview and their assessment of the candidate. The interviewer could be uncomfortable with the candidate for a number of reasons, including the candidate's race, physical appearance or disability.

## 4. Affinity Bias

The tendency to want to work with someone who is like us culturally, someone we like, and who we can socialize with. Our similarity and comfort level with the candidate can then override our assessment of the candidate's skills and abilities to do the job.

## 5. Stereotype Bias

The impact of stereotypes on our assessment of job candidates. This results in filtering in information that supports our stereotypes and filtering out contradictory information.

When the candidate is applying for a job that goes against the stereotype we have for the group to which they appear to belong, they need to be more qualified than others to be seen as minimally qualified for the job.

## 6. Gender Bias

This is the influence of gender stereotypes and assumptions on our assessment of candidates that results in the preference for men over equally qualified women.

## 7. Heightism

The tendency to judge a tall person as more competent, intelligent, and ambitious.

## 8. Confirmation Bias

The tendency to seek out and assign more weight to evidence that confirms our initial assessment of a job candidate and ignore or devalue evidence that contradicts this assessment. For example, if the candidate projects confidence and gives the appearance of being intelligent we may give more weight to the strong points in the candidate's responses and overlook weak responses to some questions and gaps in knowledge.

## 9. Performance Bias

The tendency of interviewers to become enamoured with how the candidate performs or presents themselves during the interview. The assessment of the candidate is then highly influenced by their performance, e.g., their charisma, confidence and how they express themselves, rather than their skills and abilities to do the job.

## 10. Attentional Bias

This occurs when a candidate's features or mannerisms distract the interviewer from fairly assessing them. The interview may be distracted by facial tattoos or piercings, perfume, or accent.

## 11. Anti-Black Bias

The tendency to treat Black candidates differently in interviews and assess them as less competent when the same qualifications are presented.

## 12. Anti-Immigrant Bias

This is the tendency to view immigrants, or those perceived to be immigrants, as unqualified or lacking the language and social skills to be a good fit for the workplace.

## 13. Opportunity Hoarding

Bias toward giving job opportunities to family members and people within one's own social circle.



# Tips for Minimizing Bias in Hiring



## 1 Increase your self-awareness

The first step to minimizing the impact of your biases in hiring is to be aware of these biases.

Harvard's Implicit Association Test is an online tool to help you explore your biases. You can access it at: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/education.html>

## 2 Explore your thoughts and feelings

Explore your thoughts and any feelings of discomfort you may have when interacting with people who are different than you.

## 3 Expand your comfort zone

Break out of your comfort zone and interact more with people who are different than you. This will help increase your comfort level and decrease your biases and stereotypes.

## 4 Use a structured hiring process

Use a formal, structured process when hiring. This includes using pre-determined interview questions that are clearly linked to the duties of the job, identifying "look fors" for each question, and identifying scores for each question.

## 5 Provide the interview questions in writing

Provide job candidates with the interview questions in writing a few minutes before the interview. This helps them calm down and gives them time to formulate their responses.

Be sure to get the questions back from each candidate before they leave!

## 6 Use an interview panel

Two or three people on a panel helps provide different perspectives and can help to reduce the impact of biases on the process and the hiring decision.

Include people from diverse communities, backgrounds and identities and/or people with an understanding of equity and diversity on the interview panel.

## 7 Use consensus scoring

After each interview, the interview panel should discuss the candidate's responses and scores, and come to an agreement on the final score for the candidate.

## 8 Leave enough time between interviews for assessment

Your assessment of the candidate should happen immediately after the interview and should not be rushed. The research suggests that when we rush to score or discuss candidates, we are more likely to rely on our biases or "gut feeling" about a candidate.

## 9 Have a diverse applicant pool

Ensuring that you are interviewing people from diverse communities, backgrounds and identities helps reduce your reliance on bias or stereotypes when assessing candidates.

## 10 Anonymize the screening process

Anonymizing the screening process allows each candidate to be assessed based on their skills and abilities rather than assumptions made about them because of their name.

## 11 Use micro-affirmations

Use micro-affirmations to support all candidates equally to do their best in the interview.

## 12 Reject the myth of colour-blindness

Don't pretend that you don't see a candidate's race or other differences that are evident such as gender, gender expression, and at times disability. The goal is to respect these differences, not pretend they don't exist.

## 13 Monitor your hiring

Reflect on the diversity among those you've hired to identify whether biases or systemic barriers have influenced your hiring decisions. What do you have in common with applicants who get to the interview? What do you have in common with those you've hired?



# Interview Questions

A thorough interview process should include different types of questions. This provides various opportunities for candidates to demonstrate their skills and abilities. The various types of questions are described below with examples.

Type of Question	Purpose	Examples
Behavioural-based	<p>These questions help you discover how the candidate handled a specific situation in the past. This suggests how they are likely to handle similar situations in the future.</p> <p>In the response, you are often looking for the candidate to discuss Situation, Task, Action, Results. You might suggest that candidates frame their responses accordingly.</p>	<p><b>Q</b> Showing initiative and working independently are important characteristics that we are looking for in the successful candidate. Can you give us an example of how you have shown these qualities in the past school year?</p> <p><b>Q</b> Identify an incident at work during which you had a difference of opinion or a conflict with a colleague or supervisor.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe what happened</li> <li>• Explain how/if it was resolved</li> <li>• In hindsight, how would you handle it differently?</li> </ul>
Situational	<p>Present the candidate with a hypothetical situation and ask them what they would do in this situation.</p>	<p><b>Q</b> It is mid-morning on a typical Friday and the In-school Suspension Room is already quite busy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Five students are serving an in-school suspension</li> <li>• Two are doing a time-out for being confrontational with one another during a class but continue to bicker with one another</li> <li>• A Hall Monitor has just brought in a student who has refused to identify himself when she confronted him about wearing a hat in school</li> </ul> <p>Describe how you would maintain order in the In-school Suspension Room.</p>
Technical	<p>This question is used to assess a candidate's technical or professional knowledge needed to enter into the position. (Be careful not to ask for information that the candidate will learn once they are on the job.)</p>	<p><b>Q</b> Describe for us a unit that you would plan, teach and evaluate in a Grade 6 Math class—with an emphasis on some teaching strategies you might utilize and the types of assessment you would include.</p>
Open-ended	<p>These questions allow the candidate to provide a range of other information to the interview team.</p>	<p><b>Q</b> What personal qualities do you possess that you believe are important when working with high risk students?</p> <p><b>Q</b> Is there anything that you would like to share with us that you haven't had the opportunity to do as yet?</p>
Diversity-related	<p>These questions help the interview team assess the candidate's ability to work effectively with a diverse group of co-workers and in a diverse school community.</p>	<p><b>Q</b> This position requires that you work with students from diverse communities, backgrounds, identities and abilities. Tell us what you do to teach to this diversity by reflecting students in the curriculum, teaching to students with special needs and learning styles, etc.</p>





# Interview Questions

## Questions to Avoid

### Questions unrelated to the duties of the job

These questions can appear to be job-related but in reality don't help to assess whether someone can effectively carry out the duties of the job.

- Tell me about your dream job.
- What motivates you?
- Why do you want this job?

### Culturally-biased questions

These questions are biased against candidates from various cultures who may find it difficult to sell themselves because this is seen as "bragging" and is frowned upon in their culture.

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why should I hire you?
- Why do you feel you are the best candidate for this position?

### Questions that the seasoned candidate can easily answer

There are a number of questions that the seasoned interviewee has rehearsed responses to. They know what you're looking for and will give that to you. But their responses may not help you assess their skills and abilities against the duties of the job.

- What is your long-term career objective?
- Why do you want to work for this organization?
- What are your weaknesses?
- How would you describe yourself?
- Where do you see yourself in 3 to 5 years? What are your goals?

### Questions on personal fit

It may be important to ensure that the candidate is a good fit for your organizational culture and is committed to, for example, continuous learning, family-centred service delivery or is able to work well on teams. But you need to make sure your questions aren't about personality or personal fit which may exclude people from diverse communities, backgrounds and identities.

- In what kind of work environment do you do your best work?
- What type of people do you like to work with?
- How would you describe your working style?
- When reporting to a manager, what management style supports you in doing your best work?

### Things you should be telling them

Questions in this category include information you should either provide to the candidate or work with the successful candidate to determine once they have been hired.

- What do you feel this position should pay?
- Please give me your definition of the position.
- If you were hired, what would your priorities be for the first 6 months?

### Puzzles, riddles and other tricks

These questions are not relevant for most positions, are impossible to score, and don't clearly tell you how the person will perform in the job.

- Is there intelligent life in outer space?
- Why do people climb mountains?
- If you were an animal, which animal would you be?
- If you had enough money to retire right now,

# Considerations for the Interview



Before	During	After
<p><b>Develop the interview questions and the Interview Marking Guide</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify the selection criteria and the corresponding interview questions</li> <li>Identify the "look fors" or the ideal responses you're looking for to each question</li> <li>Specify the maximum score for each question</li> <li>Develop the Interview Marking Guide</li> <li>Review the Interview Marking Guide with those on the interview panel</li> </ul> <p><b>Ask about accommodation when contacting candidates to schedule the interview</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When scheduling the interview describe the process to the candidate, e.g., an interview with two people, a written test, prepare a presentation</li> <li>Ask the candidate if they require any accommodation to participate in the interview process or complete the test, based on a human rights protected ground such as disability, religion or family status (accommodation could mean changing the date or time of the interview, providing a technical aid, allowing more time for the interview)</li> </ul> <p><b>Set the stage for a good interview</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have each person on the interview panel review the 13 Types of Biases</li> <li>Each member of the interview panel should be aware of the potential for their personal biases – both conscious and unconscious – to affect the hiring decision because they are better able to make adjustments for their biases if they are aware of them</li> </ul>	<p><b>Use micro-affirmations</b> - Use your non-verbal behaviours to show the candidate that you are interested in hearing what they have to say - lean forward, smile, nod.</p> <p><b>Probe as needed</b> - After asking a question, you may want to probe for more information to support the candidate in providing a more complete answer. Probing questions can also be used to help candidates focus on specifics when their response is too general.</p> <p><b>Paraphrase when needed</b> - If you are unsure whether you have fully understood a candidate's response, restate what you think you heard in your own words and ask the candidate for feedback.</p> <p><b>Allow for silence</b> - Some people need time to collect their thoughts. People from some cultures pause before speaking. Give them that time.</p> <p><b>Listen past the accent</b> - Focus on what is being said rather than the person's accent. If you have trouble understanding, ask them to slow down, e.g. "We will be taking notes during the interview, can you slow down a bit so that we can capture all the points you make."</p> <p><b>Make notes</b> - Make notes about what the candidate says, not your interpretation of their responses.</p> <p><b>Remember that your assessment of a candidate will be affected by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fatigue</li> <li>Hunger</li> <li>Previous knowledge of the candidate</li> <li>Comparing one candidate to another</li> </ul> <p><i>Take care of yourself so you can focus on the candidates. Take breaks. Have a snack.</i></p>	<p><b>Scoring</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Each member of the interview panel should independently score each candidate</li> <li>Score based on the candidate's responses to the interview questions</li> <li>Assess each candidate against the duties of the job and what they have to offer—not each other</li> <li>After each interviewer has independently scored the candidate, discuss the candidate's responses to each question</li> <li>As a team, come to an agreement on the final score for each question</li> <li>Add scores and have a total score for each candidate</li> <li>Rank each candidate according to their total score</li> </ul> <p><b>Consider diversity</b></p> <p>In some cases you are able to select the successful candidate from among qualified candidates. When making the hiring decision, consider all that the person brings to the position and all they have to offer to the organization.</p> <p>Applying a diversity lens to your hiring decision helps the organization create a more diverse workforce – by design rather than by accident.</p> <p>Be sure you are only considering fully qualified candidates.</p> <p><b>Keep the documentation</b></p> <p>Collect all notes from each panel member.</p> <p>Retain competition files for at least 18 months.</p> <p>The documentation will provide the evidence on which the hiring decision was made. It will also allow you to provide feedback to candidates who request it.</p>



# Resources



## Videos

CBC – Metro Morning. Unconscious Bias: Matt Galloway spoke with Mahzarin Banaji. She is a professor at Harvard University and the co-author of a new book, "Blind Spot: Hidden Biases of Good People." <http://www.cbc.ca/metromorning/episodes/2013/05/09/unconscious-bias-1/>

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. *The danger of a single story*.  
[http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story](http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story)

Project Implicit: Implicit Association Test  
<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>

TEDx Talks. *Color blind or color brave?*  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/mellody\\_hobson\\_color\\_blind\\_or\\_color\\_brave](https://www.ted.com/talks/mellody_hobson_color_blind_or_color_brave)

Tim Wise. *Beyond diversity: Being race conscious in a diverse organization*.  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gUGi2f-wONg>

Tim Wise. *Beyond diversity: Being race conscious in a diverse society*.  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4TGMHvj\\_2JQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4TGMHvj_2JQ)

## Documents / Books

CDO Insights  
*Proven Strategies for Addressing Unconscious Bias in the Workplace*  
<http://www.cookcross.com/docs/UnconsciousBias.pdf>

Ernst and Young & Royal Bank of Canada  
*Outsmarting our brains: Overcoming hidden biases to harness diversity's true potential*  
[http://www.rbc.com/diversity/docs/Outsmarting\\_our\\_brains\\_Overcoming\\_hidden\\_biases.pdf](http://www.rbc.com/diversity/docs/Outsmarting_our_brains_Overcoming_hidden_biases.pdf)

Mahzarin Banaji and Anthony Greenwald  
*Blindspot: The Hidden Biases of Good People*