

BEST PRACTICES: REDUCE UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

Unconscious biases are social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their own conscious awareness. Everyone holds unconscious beliefs about various social and identity groups, and these biases stem from one's tendency to organize social worlds by categorizing.

While we cannot control all our biases, we can take affirmative steps to acknowledge these tendencies and mitigate our responses. Below you will find several tips to consider during your recruitment processes.

Job Posting

Balance masculine or feminine-associated language (*See Appendix*)

Avoid extreme modifiers, such as “world-class,” “unparalleled,” or “rock star.”

Ensure descriptions of the workplace don't subtly indicate a male-dominated environment. If so, expand or modify these descriptions to include a range of preferences that may speak to a wider audience.

Remove physical requirements unless they are necessary for the job. When using physical requirements, consider the following wording to ensure they are inclusive and do not limit your ability to attract candidates.

- Change “talk” to “communicate”
- Change “carry” to “move/transport”
- Change “walk” to “walk/move/traverse”
- Change “typing” to “operate computer”

Screening Applicants

You should continually examine whether your judgments on a dissertation, a person's character, experience, or publications are being affected by subjective factors, stereotypes, or other assumptions. To help avoid these judgements, never use the following information to screen out applicants:

- **Addresses** – Units should consider applicants from all locations. However, all applicants must be eligible to work in the US. Units are not required to sponsor applicants.
- **Alma mater** – Units shouldn't disqualify an applicant because they attended a state school versus a private school, for example. It is okay to require degrees from accredited institutions.
- **Social media** – This content isn't a valid and reliable indicator of an applicant's qualifications for a position. These criteria should only be evaluated if it's job related.
- **Prior title** – An applicant's prior title isn't as important as their experience and related skills. Many applicants have second careers and may leave a leadership role to learn a new skillset.
- **Gaps in employment** – Don't assume that an employment gap reflects an applicant's ability to hold a job or that they have been fired. Request more information before removing an applicant from consideration. Many legitimate family or personal situations would explain employment gaps.

Interviewing Applicants

Never ask for prior salary history. Instead, ask for salary expectations. Prior salary history is not objective criteria upon which to make employment or compensation decisions.

Employ a diverse search committee to allow for a range of perspectives.

Allow search committee members to score independently prior to any group discussion.

Focus on how a candidate adds ‘value’ rather than how they ‘fit.’ This will help you avoid confirmation bias, which is the tendency to embrace information that confirms your assumptions or prejudices.

Resist the impulse to label one or more candidates the "most promising" because this may interfere with giving other candidates full consideration.

APPENDIX: MASCULINE AND FEMININE TERMS

Here is a sample of terms that reflect strong gender norms about what traits are valued in women versus men in North America. You should choose a balance of vocabulary or strategically incorporate feminine terms to attract a broader pool of applicants.

MASCULINE		FEMININE	
active	independent, independence	agree	nurture, nurturing
adventurous	individual	affectionate	pleasant
aggressive; aggression	intellect	child	polite
ambition, ambitious	lead	cheer	quiet
analysis, analytic	logic	collaborate, collaborative	respond, responsive
assert, assertive	objective	committed, commitment	sensitive, sensitivity
athletic	opinion	communal	share, sharing
autonomy, autonomous	outspoken	compassion	submissive
battle	persist, persistence	connect	support
boast	principle	considerate	sympathy, sympathetic
challenge, challenging	reckless	cooperation, cooperative	tender
champion	self-confident, self-confidence	depend	together



compete, competitive	self-reliant, self- reliance	emotion, emotional	trust
courage, courageous	self-sufficient	empathy, empathic	understand
decisive, decision	stubborn	enthusiasm, enthusiastic, enthusiasm	warm
defend	superior	feel	whine
determine	unreasonable	flatter	yield
dominate, dominant		gentle	
driven		honest	
fearless		inclusive	
fight		interdependent	
force		interpersonal	
greedy		kind	
headstrong		kinship	
hierarchy, hierarchical		loyal	
hostile		modesty	
impulsive		nag	