



## **Preventing Accent Bias in Hiring:** Summary of Interventions Strategies Tested (Annexe)

Our website ([accentbiasbritain.org](http://accentbiasbritain.org)) discusses the best intervention strategy and offers HR training advice. This annexe provides descriptions of the five interventions that we tested.

Below we describe the five strategies for accent bias training that we tested. The one that was most effective in reducing accent-based differences in evaluation of candidates was Strategy 1. We therefore recommend this strategy over the others. Please consult our [website](#) for training advice and a tutorial.

## Strategy 1: Raising Awareness

*Background.* One of the most common methods for promoting greater control over biased outcomes is to raise awareness of the potential existence of bias in the first place. This is because being aware that you may hold biased views is the necessary first step in being able to control any unwanted effects those views may have. For instance, in a study that examined social bias in an academic admissions task, Axt and colleagues (2018) found evidence to suggest that raising awareness of the potential of bias beforehand is an effective way of reducing discriminatory judgments.



*Implementation.* A common way of raising awareness is through unconscious bias training. During this type of training, you can direct participants' attention to the existence of bias through a variety of different exercises (e.g., "Take a mental note of your 1<sup>st</sup> impression of someone. Is it based on a stereotype or an unconscious bias?"). See our [Training Pages](#) for information on raising awareness about accent bias.

*How did we test it?* In our study, listeners were provided with a short-written statement about the existence of accent bias and the problems it can cause before being asked to rate job candidates. In this statement, listeners were told that recruiters tend to be more favourable to candidates with 'Standard English' accents and less favourable to those who speak with regional or non-standard accents, and that this is a form of accent bias. Listeners were asked to keep this in mind when evaluating candidates.

## Strategy 2: Identifying irrelevant information



*Background.* Research has shown that the effects of bias can be mitigated by explicitly identifying task-irrelevant information and committing to ignoring it. This is done by adopting what are called “implementation intentions”, or “if-then” rules that set out how you intend to conduct a particular task. A study by Mendoza and colleagues (2010) found that stereotypical reactions could be reduced if people are reminded that a certain piece of information (e.g., ethnicity) is irrelevant to the task at hand (e.g., judging a candidate’s qualifications for employment), and then commit to ignoring that information.

*Implementation.* Rather than simply framing things in terms of goals or intentions (e.g., *I will ignore a candidate’s ethnicity*), implementation intentions should be designed to facilitate the desired behaviour by linking that behaviour to a specific situational trigger: *If I notice X, I will ignore it*. Formulating intentions as if/then statement of this kind is a more effective strategy than simply committing to an action without specifying when that action will take place.

*How did we test it?* In our study, we presented listeners with a warning about letting a candidate’s accent of English influence their ratings. The participants were then asked to read and commit to the statement *If I hear an accent, I will ignore it and focus on what the candidate is saying*. They were told to repeat this sentence to themselves and to type it on a computer, as a way of adopting and reinforcing the message.

## Strategy 3: Committing to fairness and objectivity

*Background.* Similar to identifying irrelevant information, research has also shown that explicitly committing to criteria for fairness and objectivity beforehand can reduce the effects of bias. Having people agree a set of objective rules for evaluation before making any judgments makes it less likely that they will “redefine” those rules by relying on negative stereotypes. Uhlmann and Cohen (2005), for instance, asked candidates to evaluate the suitability of male and female candidates for stereotypically gendered jobs, and found a reduction in gender bias (e.g., whether women can be police officers) when participants agreed what characteristics are important for a job beforehand.



*Implementation.* There are different ways of establishing and agreeing objective criteria beforehand. One way is to have everybody involved come up with a list of what characteristics and experience they are looking for, and agree to only focus on these in

the recruitment process. Another is to have people answer a series of questions before doing an evaluation task, where they think about how the task should be completed and how they specifically want to complete the task themselves (*In your opinion, should evaluations of a candidate be based on X? Do you want your rating to be influenced by X?*).

*How did we test it?* In our study, we informed listeners of the importance of being fair in their evaluations. We then asked them to respond to a series of written questions about how they think people should be judged in job interviews, whether accents should matter, and whether they personally want to be influenced by a candidate's accent.

### Strategy 4: Increasing accountability



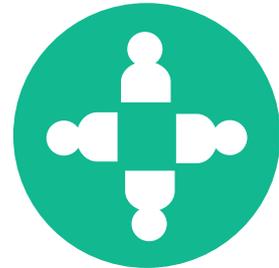
*Background.* Telling people that they will have to justify the decisions that they make – to their line managers, the candidates, etc. – encourages them not to be overly reliant on snap decisions, and instead engage in more thoughtful and close deliberation. Lerner and Tetlock (1999) found that making people feel more accountable for their actions can decrease biased judgment. Certain studies, however, have found an opposite effect (Biernat and Fuegen 2001): that increasing accountability can encourage people to go with the more stereotypical choice, since they feel like it would be safer and easier to defend.

*Implementation.* There are multiple ways to increase a recruiter's sense of accountability. One way of doing this is by asking individuals to justify and explain their decisions at the end of any evaluation task. Another could be to simply remind people of the organisational structure and that their decisions will be reviewed by their superiors. The goal is to instil a greater sense of responsibility, with the hope that this reduces biased behaviour.

*How did we test it?* In our study, we informed listeners that their evaluations would be used to help develop training materials for students, and so it was important that they did the task carefully. We also told them that researchers would examine the responses to see whether there was any effect of bias in their responses.

## Strategy 5: Appealing to multiculturalism

*Background.* Increasing awareness of the positive effects of multiculturalism and diversity can also be an effective strategy for reducing bias. Research has shown that calling attention to diversity and its positive benefits is more effective at reducing prejudice than trying to minimise differences. For instance, in a study on judgments of different ethnic groups, Wolsko and colleagues (2000) found that people who were exposed to written statements celebrating the benefits of diversity had less prejudicial reactions than people who were instructed to ignore things like cultural or ethnic differences. These findings indicate that more than simply trying to overcome automatic biased responses, it could also be worthwhile to have people focus on the positive aspects of living and working in diverse settings.



*Implementation.* It is important to tailor the understanding of what constitutes a positive benefit to a specific audience. In some cases, the benefit of having a diverse workforce. In other cases, it may be better to focus on being able to expand a firm's client base, for example, by having more staff diversity. Whatever strategy is adopted, the goal is to highlight the beneficial impact of social and/or cultural difference.

*How did we test it?* In our study, listeners were presented with a short written statement about the benefits of multiculturalism in society, including the benefits for society of having a diverse professional workforce.

## References

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