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FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION  
**DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE**

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**Bias Awareness for Speaking Testers**

ILR Testing Committee, May 19, 2023  
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**Discussion objectives**

- Demonstrate a preliminary bias awareness training
- Discuss in groups:
  - Items that could be added
  - Items that should be deleted
  - Items that should be clarified/edited
  - Additional items
- Review contributions together

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## Training objectives

- Become more aware of what bias is and the types of bias
- Look at how bias impacts language testing
- Identify ways to mitigate bias in testing
- Review potential sources of bias in the ILR SLDs.
- Practice identifying bias and mitigating it.

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## Bias definitions

An inclination of temperament or outlook especially a personal and sometimes unreasoned judgment : **PREJUDICE**

- Merriam-Webster Dictionary

The action of **supporting** or **opposing** a particular person or thing in an **unfair** way, because of allowing personal opinions to **influence your judgment**

- Cambridge Dictionary


**Prejudice** in favor of or **against** one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be **unfair**.

- Oxford English Dictionary

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## ILTA Code of Ethics (2000)

<https://www.iltaonline.com/general/custom.asp?page=CodeofEthics>

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### Principle 1

- Language testers shall have **respect for the humanity and dignity** of each of their test takers. They shall provide them with the best possible professional consideration and shall **respect all persons' needs, values and cultures** in the provision of their language testing service.
- Language testers **shall not discriminate against nor exploit their test takers on grounds of age, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, language background, creed, political affiliations or religion, nor knowingly impose their own values** (for example social, spiritual, political and ideological), to the extent that they are aware of them.

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## ILTA Guidelines for Practice (2007)

<https://www.iltaonline.com/page/ILTAGuidelinesforPractice>

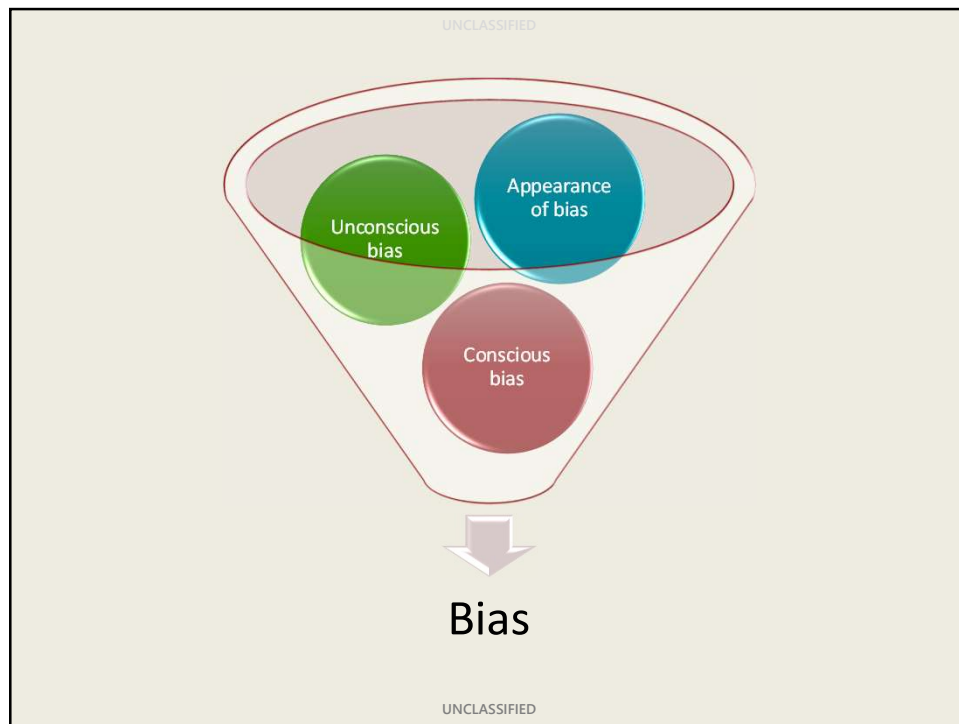
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### Part 2 - Rights and Responsibilities of test takers

- A. As a test taker you have the right to:
  - 2. Be treated with courtesy, respect and **impartiality, regardless of your age, disability, ethnicity, gender, national origin, religion, sexual orientation or other personal characteristics.**
  - 6. Have your test administered and your test results interpreted by appropriately trained individuals who follow **professional codes of ethics.**

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## Unconscious bias



**What is unconscious bias?**

- An implicit association or attitude that:
  - Operates beyond our control or awareness
  - Informs our perception of a person or social group
  - Can influence our decision-making and behavior toward the target of bias.

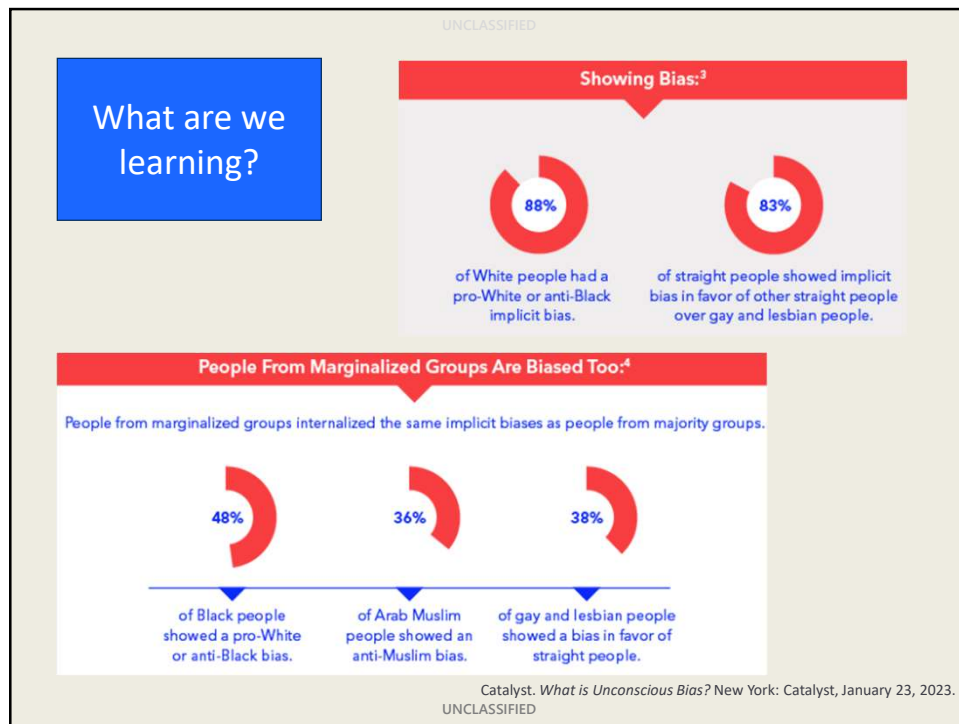
**Bias is pervasive.**

- Analysis on tens of thousands of tests on implicit bias have revealed:
  - People can be consciously committed to equality, and work deliberately to behave without prejudice, yet still possess negative prejudices or stereotypes.

Catalyst. *What is Unconscious Bias?* New York: Catalyst, January 23, 2023.

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### What is important about bias for testing?

- Everyone has biases. (Yes, you too!)
- Testers and raters may allow biases to influence the way they ask questions or rate.
- Tester/rater bias can inflate or deflate ratings.
- The appearance of bias reduces examinee's confidence in the testing process.

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## How can we eliminate mitigate bias?

01

Explore our own areas of potential bias.

02

Become aware of potential types of bias.

03

Examine where bias can influence our interpretation of the ILR SLDs.

04

Develop testing techniques that avoid bias or the appearance of bias in the test.

05

Justify ratings with the ILR SLDs.

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## Kinds of implicit bias

### Affinity bias

- Our tendency to prefer those who are like us (same age, gender, race, etc.).

### Ageism/authority bias

- Favoring or disfavoring someone based on age, social stature or authority.

### Beauty/weight bias

- Favoring someone because you find them attractive or judging them based on appearance.

### Confirmation bias

- Looking for evidence that confirms a decision you have already made.


Adopted for testing from Catalyst. 11 Harmful Types of Unconscious Bias and How to Interrupt Them (Blog Post), New York: Catalyst, January 2, 2020.

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## Kinds of implicit bias

Conformity bias	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allowing your views to be influenced by others.</li> </ul>
Consequence bias	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allowing knowledge of the consequence of the score to impact your evaluation.</li> </ul>
Contrast effect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comparing one person to another instead of to the criteria.</li> </ul>
Education/occupation bias	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making assumptions about ability based on education or occupation history.</li> </ul>


Adopted for testing from Catalyst. 11 Harmful Types of Unconscious Bias and How to Interrupt Them (Blog Post), New York: Catalyst, January 2, 2020.

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## Kinds of implicit bias

Gender bias	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Favoring a particular gender or gender identity.</li> </ul>
Halo/horns effect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Noting an impressive/unfortunate feature or characteristic and allowing it affect you.</li> </ul>
Heritage bias	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceiving someone differently because of their perceived background or language acquisition.</li> </ul>
Variant/accent bias	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thinking a person's language is better or worse because of the variant or dialect they use.</li> </ul>

Adopted for testing from Catalyst. 11 Harmful Types of Unconscious Bias and How to Interrupt Them (Blog Post), New York: Catalyst, January 2, 2020.

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## Mitigation techniques


- Avoid unnecessary personal details, such as how they learned the language.
- Keep an open mind throughout the test.
- Don't focus on one aspect of the performance.
- Don't have a preconceived idea of what the examinee should say.
- Be tolerant of variation.
- Discuss language-related bias sources with your team.
- Support rating with ILR SLDs.

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## Attempts to reduce bias in the ILR SLDs

a highly articulate well-educated native speaker	How much education is well-educated? Education is related to privilege. Removed all references to native speakers and learners.
the individual would not necessarily be perceived as culturally native	Who is the arbiter of this? It feels like an in-group self selecting those who appear like the other members of the in-group.
Pronunciation is typically consistent with that of well-educated native speakers of a non-stigmatized dialect.	Removed pronunciation at 4+ and 5 as well as native or stigmatized terms.

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## Terms susceptible to bias in the ILRs



- 2
  - Pronunciation occasionally **interferes** with communication.
  - Generally, language is culturally **awkward**.
  - Transitions between turns may sometimes be abrupt or **unnatural**.
- 3
  - Able to speak in **formal contexts**...
  - Pronunciation **interferes** with communication.
  - Supports ideas **effectively**.
- 4
  - Employs discourse **effectively**.
  - Errors are **sporadic**.
  - Is generally **articulate**, such as **emphasis**, **certainty**.
- 5
  - Able to speak with clarity of expression and precision, using diverse linguistic resources to produce articulate, nuanced, and **engaging** language in almost any context.
  - Can tailor speech skillfully to an audience, shifting between registers for **effect and impact**.

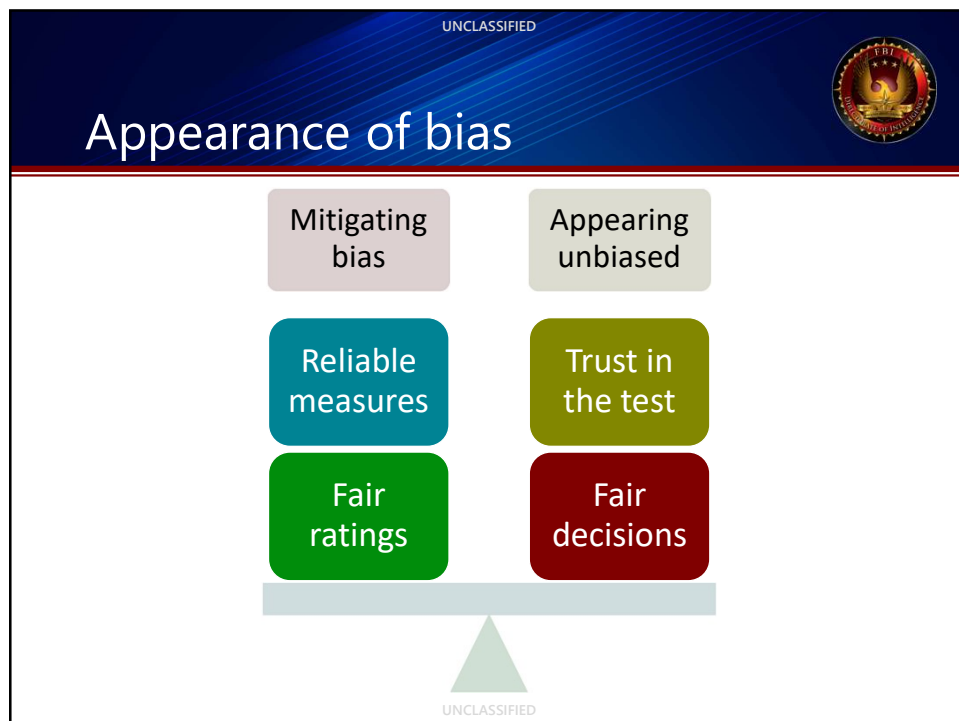
How do we approach these terms?

Discuss how to talk about these terms in their contexts.

Norm, norm, and norm some more.


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## Testing techniques to avoid bias


- Avoid taboo topics, which may vary by language and organization.
- Don't reveal information about yourself.
- Attribute ideas and opinions to others.
- Avoid leading/negative questions.
- Be careful following up on political opinions or other personal views.
- Avoid "grouping" terms (we, those people).

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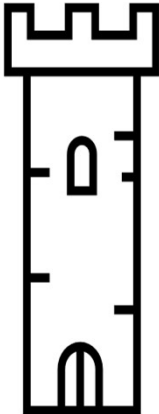
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## Bias safeguard #1




Compare the speech sample to the ILR Skill Level Descriptions for Speaking to determine the highest level at which all requirements are met.

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## Scenario practice


- Scripted role plays or videos with discussion
- Question revision exercise
- Case studies with discussion
- Appeals letters

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## Other ideas

- Adding in an external unconscious bias training
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OoBvzl-YZf4>
- Surveying examinees or testers about bias they have observed in testing
- Bias resource list

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## Discussion

- Designate a spokesperson to share your group's discussion points.
- Discuss:
  - Items that could be added
  - Items that should be deleted
  - Items that should be clarified/edited
  - Additional items

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