

The Recruiter's Guide to

INTERRUPTING BIAS



Knowing that bias exists in your hiring process isn't enough to interrupt it. If it were, unconscious bias training would be sufficient on its own. You and your team would learn about your biases, then know how to avoid them, every time. But research shows that training alone that isn't paired with process change can end up causing more harm than good. That's why combining mindset and process is the key to interrupting bias in a scalable way.

Organizational inertia can make company-wide changes challenging to pull off. It can feel more immediately possible to focus on smaller steps, putting off the more involved work for tomorrow. But, it won't move the needle. It's important to do both simultaneously. That means increasing individual awareness with process-level accountability. That's why Textio equips teams with the knowledge and tools they need to stay mindful of their language and its impact on their company's talent pool.

This guidebook will help you and your team develop concrete approaches to interrupting bias in your hiring efforts. We'll focus specifically on recruiting and cover five important processes to focus on in order to attract and hire talent inclusively. You'll notice a recurring theme of slowing down. Slowing down helps us notice when and where bias is occurring. It can feel impossible for growing teams to decrease their speed, but remember when we move fast, we default, and when we default, we default to the exact systems that perpetuate bias.

Let's interrupt bias!

01

Job descriptions



Where bias creeps in

Job description language impacts who applies to roles.

Research shows that the language we use in job descriptions impacts who ends up applying, as do the qualifications we list. Here's why:

Language has different impacts on different groups.

Inclusive recruiting starts with the language in the job description, but it's hard to predict how language choices will land. For example, "*get your hands dirty*" may not immediately bring an identity to mind, but Textio's data shows that it resonates more with men and certain age groups.

We're not always aware we're using harmful language.

Several common phrases are rooted in problematic histories and meanings that we may not immediately realize. For example "*crazy*" (ableist), "*blacklist*" (racist), "*salesman*" (sexist), and other similar sayings can alienate job seekers.

Lots of fixed-mindset language in recruiting content turns talent away.

Fixed-mindset phrases like "*overachiever*," "*rockstar*," or "*genius*" can turn talent away. Textio's language data shows that fixed-mindset phrases can have a statistically significant negative impact on who and how you hire.

Jargon and corporate clichés disengage job seekers.

Excessive jargon such as "*stakeholders*" and "*best practices*" or corporate clichés like "*hit the ground running*" don't universally resonate, dilute the job description's appeal, and disengage your audience.

Lots of qualifications can significantly narrow the candidate pool.

We know from research that some groups—especially underrepresented groups—are less likely to apply if they don't meet all qualifications. For each additional requirement, the pipeline narrows.

How to interrupt bias

Use inclusive language to attract a diverse applicant pool.

If you've struggled to source a diverse pipeline, now is the time to consider how your language is landing with candidates. Here's what to do:

Ensure job descriptions appeal to a broad range of candidates.

Evaluate the language in your job descriptions. You can do this by getting feedback on your post from members of your team before you post and with an augmented writing solution like Textio that analyzes your language and guides you to more inclusive phrasing.

Steer clear of harmful language.

Get rid of potentially harmful or exclusionary language choices. Question the meaning and history of common sayings, idioms, and lingo.

Use more growth-mindset language.

Growth-mindset language helps reach and engage diverse talent pools. Talk about growth opportunities as much as results and outcomes (e.g. simple edits like “committed” instead of “intelligent”).

Edit out corporate-speak in favor of clear language.

Read your job description for jargon and make sure you aren't accidentally disengaging candidates who aren't familiar with or just don't resonate as much with excessive jargon and corporate clichés.

Second guess “must-have” requirements.

Could equivalent work experience replace the default college degree requirement? Or could a competency (e.g., data analysis) replace specific experience (e.g., number of years using a tool like Excel or Tableau)?

Want more? Check out Textio's [5Cs framework for inclusive job descriptions](#) to make sure your post is engaging as possible.

02

Sourcing



Where bias creeps in

Access to networks impacts who gets opportunities.

Professional networks are often homogenous. They're also influential in who has access to opportunities in the first place. Sourcing a diverse talent pipeline requires intentionality and consistency. Here's why:

Most copy-paste sourcing templates don't work.

Copy-paste recruiter reach-outs make candidates feel as if they're being sold to more than recruited for a desirable position. The language we use in less formal communications is as important as in our job descriptions.

Generic recruiter lines tend to decrease candidate engagement.

Candidates pay attention not just to what you say, but how you say it. Generic openings like "*I came across your profile on LinkedIn*" and "*I love your background*" can lower engagement by as much as 80%.

All networks have representation gaps.

All social and professional networks have representation gaps. Even the most common professional network, LinkedIn, can make it challenging to get in front of talent from diverse identities and backgrounds.

Different types of networks are needed to succeed.

Did you know that women are less likely than men to have strong networks? And, research shows that women and other genders may need different types of networks to succeed in their careers. That means one network doesn't fit all talent profiles.

How to interrupt bias

Post jobs in several channels and engage thoughtfully.

Posting jobs in several networks helps your team recruit a more diverse pipeline. Staying thoughtful in your language choices, particularly in one-on-one outreach can improve candidate responsiveness. Here's what to do:

Write thoughtful reach outs that you would find engaging.

Stay up-to-date with which language lands well with candidates and don't copy and paste overly-circulated generic recruiter outreach. Slow down and think through the meaning behind your words. Use perspective-taking as a guide to help you: how would you like to be contacted?

Post in many channels beyond LinkedIn.

By investing in several networks, you increase your chances of getting in front of as diverse and representative of a talent network as possible. You become less reliant on single channels, and you can even take it a step further and try job fairs, conferences, or diversity-focused networks.

Take the #PlusOnePledge. Even LinkedIn is vocal about the need to improve access on its platform. The company created the #PlusOnePledge. The idea is simple: for every networking or mentorship request within your network, find one outside of your network. It encourages everyone, particularly those with influence, to diversify their networks.

Want more? Check out Textio's Secret Language of Sourcing guidebook to learn why the 5 most common sourcing techniques don't work, and what to do instead.

03

Screening



Where bias creeps in

Resume reviews often screen out qualified talent.

Decades of research have proven many times just how unreliable and problematic resumes are, but we can't seem to shake them. Resumes are a huge culprit of bias. Here's why:

Resumes are candidate-curated fluff.

Resumes, cover letters, and online career profiles are candidate curations of only their best work, which isn't helpful in assessing competence.

Resumes advantage resourced candidates.

Resume writing services benefit those who can afford to pay a professional or who have adequate after-work hours to do it themselves. And subtle clues in resumes in some cases can result in bias and inequity.

Savvy candidates hack the system.

Digital tools that screen resumes rely on keywords and other loopholes that savvy candidates use to their benefit.

Demographic groups write resumes differently.

In 2015, Textio's CEO Kieran Snyder highlighted clear demographic trends in resume writing. Her findings showed that on average women's resumes were twice as long and more likely to rely on prose vs. bulleted content. These differences across gender can play a role in which candidates get recruiter engagement and reinforce industry diversity issues.

And, we don't even read them!

On average, recruiters spend 6 seconds per resume, hardly enough time to draw objective conclusions and screen talent. Why are we asking for them if we barely look at them?

How to interrupt bias

Reduce reliance on resumes for screening.

When we move beyond resumes, candidates have the opportunity to better differentiate themselves. Companies use Requests for Proposal (RFPs) to find the best vendors—a similar process could be used to find talent. Here's what to do:

Use 1-2 screening questions to supplement resumes.

Some companies have stopped using resumes altogether to the delight of candidates in favor of custom questions in the application. Application questions are a more reliable signal of who aligns with the role best as experience isn't always the strongest predictor of role success.

If resumes are a must, score them.

If ditching resumes isn't in the cards, be clear about which criteria you are screening for. You can even obscure personal information like name, college, and location to avoid the most common screening biases.

Deprioritize pedigree and prestige labels.

Preference for "labels" favors well-connected and privileged candidates. Fondness for exclusivity like alma mater (e.g., graduate from a top 10 school) or specific internship logos can ease the path precisely for those who already have the most access to opportunity to begin with.

Avoid favoring certain stylistic preferences.

Try not to weigh how the resume is written as heavily since we know there are demographic differences in resume writing. Focus instead on the nature of the experiences, rather than the presentation of the experiences.

If you ask for them, read them evenly!

If you are collecting resumes, read them evenly. That means making sure that you spend equivalent time scoring each resume so everyone has a fair shot. If you barely read them, barely read them for everyone.

04

Employer brand



Where bias creeps in

Your culture content determines who thinks they'll belong.

Traditional notions of employer brand are antiquated, and it's no longer about what's on your careers page. It's about your entire company presence across all formal and informal channels. Here's why:

All interactions are an opportunity to reinforce or diminish inclusion.

Today, your company's employer brand is actively shaped by anyone coming in the door, not just your official talent marketing channels. That even extends to candidates you reject. All interactions play a role in how inclusive your company culture comes across.

How your company communicates shapes views about your culture.

The language your company uses makes a difference in who can see themselves thriving in your culture. But, it can be hard to stay consistent and aware of the impact of our language, so many companies aren't even aware of the areas where they may be accidentally turning away talent.

Employee value propositions can end up as aspirational paragraphs.

Many companies either don't have a clear EVP or don't revisit it enough to reap the full benefit of having one. Without explicit effort to weave it into all talent content, it can easily become a stale paragraph on the careers page. And, if it doesn't accurately reflect the reality of working at the company, it leads to a sense of cognitive dissonance that hurts your employer brand.

Candidates screen your company to determine if the talk is walked.

Consistency matters in your employer brand message. It also matters who communicates the message. Employees are considered to be the most trustworthy source of truth, so a strong culture that's genuinely invested in the employee experience is foundational. Job seekers want to see that real employees are experiencing equity, inclusion, and belonging.

How to interrupt bias

Communicate inclusively, authentically, and consistently.

When companies communicate inclusively, they have the potential to positively impact the composition of their hiring funnel. Authenticity and consistency in company communications show your team is serious about its culture. Here's what to do:

Equip your team with inclusive language guidance.

Your team is already communicating in several channels that impact your employer brand. To ensure consistency, invest in an augmented writing tool like Textio. Giving your team the language guidance they need in their emails, social posts, and evergreen content helps them show up the way they intend.

Continually recenter on your employee value proposition.

The EVP should be present in all employer brand content even if not spelled out explicitly. Continue to come back to your EVP and clarify what employee experience your company strives to accomplish. It will help you differentiate your culture in content and show candidates the true priority your company places on its employees.

On socials, especially Glassdoor, respond thoughtfully.

Candidates care about how your company responds to tough feedback. It can be tricky to strike the right balance in responses, especially on platforms like Glassdoor. But, how you respond in these types of contexts sends a signal to prospective candidates about how validating, open, and authentic your culture is.

Want more? Put your employer brand to the test and use [Textio's free employer brand report](#) to see how your company's language patterns compare to your competitors.

05

ATS



Where bias creeps in

Without consistency, bias can steer outcomes.

The power of a great system that nudges accountability cannot be understated. You can offer all the training in the world, but if you don't have the systems to bring theory into practice, it won't get you far. Here's why:

Open-ended interview feedback prompts become biased fast.

Open-ended prompts like "pros and cons" or "overall impressions" lead us to disregard competencies and jump into broad sweeping statements. It's here that most common hiring biases show up. Most out-of-the-box ATS configurations default to general prompts that don't ensure specificity, relevance, and structure in interview evaluations.

Recruiting language can be very inconsistent across systems.

As with any system, adoption determines whether or not a tool provides value. Part of the benefit of an ATS is creating standardization across the entire business. Without that standardization, inconsistency can show up in our job posts, interview feedback, and other language.

Without measuring your pipeline, it's impossible to track progress.

For some companies, understanding the diversity of their hiring funnel is challenging because they aren't collecting or measuring any demographic data in a meaningful way. URGs could be disproportionately dropping off at certain stages of your hiring process and without measuring it, you won't be able to identify where that's happening and counteract it.

How to interrupt bias

Set up your ATS to identify and interrupt bias at scale.

For many organizations, the ATS is the heart of their hiring system. But, when the system isn't set up well or designed with objectivity in mind, it can sabotage our efforts to hire inclusively. Here's what to do:

Use augmented writing where your team already is.

To scale inclusive language, use an augmented tool like [Textio](#) that helps your team stay mindful of their communication everywhere from the ATS to employer brand content.

Get rid of open-ended prompts in favor of customized ones.

Don't evaluate off of open-ended criteria or prompts. Use the job description as an evaluation guide. Intentionally structure interview feedback forms around the role competencies. These incentives more accountability and interviewers will better justify their reasoning.

Collect demographic data and analyze it across hiring stages.

Track the diversity and representation throughout the hiring funnel. For example, does a certain group consistently drop off towards the final round? Are certain rules bent for some and not others? Why or why not?

This guidebook gives your team a place to start or some ideas on how to continue to prioritize inclusion in your hiring process. There is a lot we all can do to better identify and interrupt bias in hiring. The companies that make progress are the ones that pick something and stick with it end-to-end until they make a measurable impact. And, that's why it's important to measure what's working and what isn't. There aren't any silver-bullet solutions, so if things don't snap into place right away, keep at it. Identifying and interrupting bias takes time and investment, especially in recruiting.

If there is one thing to remember, it's to take the time to be mindful, adopt more deliberate practices, and pause before defaulting. Lastly, and most importantly, if you are prioritizing a few key process upgrades, don't bend the rules! Remember: short-term outcomes can get us stuck in cycles of stagnation. And now, you have a few concrete alternatives.

To learn how Textio can help your team bring more inclusion and equity into hiring and talent initiatives, say hello at sales@textio.com.

Loved this guidebook?

You'll enjoy our Textio U course—Interrupting Bias in Hiring. It's free for everyone. See you there!