

More Common Cognitive Biases

Part two: twelve more shortcuts, and more helpful alternatives

This second set continues where the first left off: twelve more predictable shortcuts that shape how we weigh evidence, read other people, and remember and decide. As before, the aim isn't to eliminate them, but to recognise them when it matters.

1 Notice a strong conclusion →

2 Name the bias →

3 Pause →

4 Try the alternative



Taking in information

Belief perseverance

Holding on to a belief even after the evidence for it has been undermined.

CAN SHOW UP AS

Still feeling "bad at maths" years after passing the exams you once failed.

TRY INSTEAD

Ask what you'd conclude if you were meeting the evidence for the first time today.



Judging people

Hostile attribution bias

Reading other people's unclear actions as deliberately hostile.

CAN SHOW UP AS

Someone bumps into you in a queue, and you assume they meant it.

TRY INSTEAD

Think of two innocent explanations before settling on one.



Decisions & memory

Endowment effect

Valuing things more highly simply because they're ours.

CAN SHOW UP AS

Asking far more for your old sofa than you'd pay for one like it.

TRY INSTEAD

Ask what you'd pay for it if it weren't already yours.

Base rate neglect

Ignoring how common something is overall, and focusing only on the details.

CAN SHOW UP AS

Deciding a headache must be serious because it matches an article you read.

TRY INSTEAD

Start with how common each explanation is, then weigh the details.

False consensus effect

Overestimating how much other people share our views and habits.

CAN SHOW UP AS

Assuming everyone at work finds a new policy as frustrating as you do.

TRY INSTEAD

Ask a few people what they think, rather than assuming.

Illusion of control

Overestimating our influence over events that are largely down to chance.

CAN SHOW UP AS

Feeling a lucky item will decide whether an interview goes well.

TRY INSTEAD

Separate what's in your control, like preparation, from what isn't.

Gambler's fallacy

Expecting chance events to "even out" in the short term.

CAN SHOW UP AS

Believing you're "due" some good luck after a run of bad days.

TRY INSTEAD

Treat each chance event as a fresh start, and focus on what you can influence.

Illusion of transparency

Overestimating how clearly others can see what we're feeling inside.

CAN SHOW UP AS

Feeling sure the audience can see how nervous you are during a talk.

TRY INSTEAD

Remember that inner feelings are usually far less visible than they feel.

Peak-end rule

Judging an experience mainly by its most intense moment and how it ended.

CAN SHOW UP AS

Remembering a whole holiday as ruined because of a stressful journey home.

TRY INSTEAD

Recall the experience from start to finish, not just the peak and the end.

Affect heuristic

Letting how we feel about something shape how risky or beneficial it seems.

CAN SHOW UP AS

Seeing an option as risky because it makes you uneasy, before checking the facts.

TRY INSTEAD

Name the feeling first, then look at the risks and benefits separately.

Authority bias

Giving extra weight to an opinion because of someone's status, not their evidence.

CAN SHOW UP AS

Accepting advice without question because it comes from someone senior.

TRY INSTEAD

Respect expertise, and still ask what the evidence is.

Bias blind spot

Spotting bias in other people more easily than in ourselves.

CAN SHOW UP AS

Seeing a friend is biased about their partner, while feeling your own views are objective.

TRY INSTEAD

Ask which of these biases might be shaping your view right now.

A GENTLE REMINDER

Biases aren't flaws in you; they're features of every human mind. Spotting one in yourself is a skill, not a failing. It's often easiest to practise on small, low-stakes decisions first.

MY OWN WORDS

A bias I notice in myself:

What I'll try instead:

SOURCES

- Dodge, K. A. (1980). Social cognition and children's aggressive behavior. *Child Development*, 51(1), 162-170.
- Gilovich, T., Savitsky, K., & Medvec, V. H. (1998). The illusion of transparency. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75(2), 332-346.
- Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Kahneman, D., Knetsch, J. L., & Thaler, R. H. (1990). Experimental tests of the endowment effect and the Coase theorem. *Journal of Political Economy*, 98(6), 1325-1348.
- Langer, E. J. (1975). The illusion of control. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 32(2), 311-328.
- Pronin, E., Lin, D. Y., & Ross, L. (2002). The bias blind spot. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28(3), 369-381.
- Ross, L., Greene, D., & House, P. (1977). The "false consensus effect". *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 13(3), 279-301.
- Ross, L., Lepper, M. R., & Hubbard, M. (1975). Perseverance in self-perception and social perception. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 32(5), 880-892.
- Tversky, A., & Kahneman, D. (1971). Belief in the law of small numbers. *Psychological Bulletin*, 78(2), 105-110.