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# Learn more about reducing bias in interviews

Being fully unbiased when conducting and observing interviews is impossible. Everyone has their own set of biases that they bring to every interaction. Acknowledging your own personal biases so that you can move beyond them is key when conducting research, like interviews. Why? Well, you need to gain accurate feedback about how users really think and feel. Remember, your goal as a UX designer is to put the user front-and-center always, which means you need to learn about their honest and authentic perspectives in order to best create designs that meet their needs.

Check out five common types of bias that might come up when conducting UX research and some tips for how to overcome those biases.

## Confirmation bias



**Confirmation bias** is the tendency to focus on information that matches a pre-existing belief. Have you ever tried to find evidence to prove a hypothesis that you already have? If so, that's confirmation bias in action! Your personal preferences can sneak their way into your research, too, so here are a couple of pro-tips to help you combat this bias when conducting research.

- Recruit an appropriate sample size.** In the real world, many UX researchers want to have five to eight participants when conducting a usability study. Research shows that five participants is a large enough sample size to gain valuable feedback, and there is often diminishing return on investment if more than eight participants are added to the study. This means that you typically learn what you need to know about the usability of designs by interviewing five to eight participants. Interviewing the right number of participants and gathering a variety of perspectives will help reduce confirmation bias.
- It's not about your beliefs.** Pay attention to and embrace findings that challenge your hypotheses. If participants share ideas that contradict your assumptions, it could highlight the need to dig into an issue more deeply and can pave the way for new learnings to emerge.

## Leading questions



**Leading questions** are research questions that are intentionally framed to guide participants to respond in a certain way. Consider this example: How might participants answer differently when asked the question, "How did you locate the product you wanted to buy?" compared to "Is having the product you wanted to buy under the blue tab easy to find?" The first question is open-ended and encourages interview participants to share their own process and thoughts. The second question is a leading question that steers the participant toward supporting the design choice of a blue tab.

To avoid leading questions in your own research, try these pro-tips:

- Encourage participants to think aloud.** Ask interviewees to share all of their thoughts as they review a product. This will help ensure that the information collected comes from the participant's actual experience with the product, not the experience that researchers want them to have. After each interview question or task, pause to provide participants extra time to share additional thoughts.
- Limit your responses.** When you are conducting research, try not to offer your own opinions, like, "Yes! That's true. I totally agree." This type of feedback can shape participants' responses because participants are likely to want to receive more validating feedback. If participants are trying to please the researcher, it can lead to an inaccurate representation of their real wants and needs.

## Friendliness bias



**Friendliness bias** describes the tendency of people to agree with those they like in order to maintain a non-confrontational conversation. In other words, participants might share what they think you want to hear! In addition, being agreeable makes the interview go faster and easier. That's why the friendliness bias is sometimes called "the principle of least effort" because people have a tendency to avoid resistance when completing tasks.

How can you overcome the friendliness bias when conducting interviews? Check out these pro-tips:

- Honesty is the best policy.** Before the research study begins, make it very clear to participants that they need to be honest and that their responses won't hurt your feelings.
- Stay consistently engaged.** As a researcher, you should show curiosity and practice active listening in the same way throughout the entire interview, no matter how positive or negative the feedback that participants share.

## Social desirability bias



**Social desirability bias** describes the tendency for people to answer questions in a way that will be viewed favorably by others. This type of bias can occur when research participants provide answers that are rooted in what they think is popular, instead of what they actually believe. In other words, social desirability can cause participants to focus on the positive aspects of their experience with the product and minimize the negative aspects.

To fight social desirability bias, keep these pro-tips in mind:

- Conduct 1:1 interviews.** Social desirability bias is more likely to occur in group settings, where a participant might respond in a way that they think will be viewed favorably by other research participants. Conducting interviews individually allows for more points of view to emerge because participants are more likely to share their authentic opinions.
- Ensure confidentiality.** Before beginning a research study, remind participants that their perspectives about the product will be kept confidential. For example, it can put people's minds at ease to know that their name will not be published or their negative feedback will not become public.

## Hawthorne effect



The **Hawthorne effect** describes how people tend to act differently when they know they're being watched. People often work harder or perform better when they know they are participants in a research study or experiment. If you watch documentaries or reality TV, you know that everything changes when the camera is on! In the case of research, telling participants that the interview will be recorded or that stakeholders are watching from behind a mirror will influence the participants' behavior in an undesired way.

Try these pro-tips to avoid the Hawthorne effect in your research:

- Create a non-threatening environment.** Let participants know that there are no right or wrong answers, and allow them time to feel comfortable in the research environment before diving into interview questions.
- Establish rapport.** It's easier for participants to share their honest opinions when they feel at ease with the interviewer. Use the participant's name throughout the conversation to make the experience feel more personal, and make small talk before the research study begins.

As you set out into the world as an up-and-coming UX designer, remember that taking deliberate steps to overcome biases will make your research findings more accurate and actionable. After all, if you want to design a product that really helps users, you need to know their honest perspectives.

