

7 FORMS OF BIAS IN INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

OFFICE OF
OPPORTUNITY GAPS

1. INVISIBILITY: What You Don't See Makes a Lasting Impression

The most fundamental and oldest form of bias in instructional materials is the **complete or relative exclusion of a group**. Textbooks published prior to the 1960s largely omitted African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans from both the narrative and illustrations. Many of today's textbooks are improved, but far from perfect. Women, those with disabilities, and the LGBTQIA community continue to be missing from many of today's texts.

2. STEREOTYPING: Shortcuts to Bigotry

Perhaps the most familiar form of bias is the **stereotype, which assigns a rigid set of characteristics to all members of a group**, at the cost of individual attributes and differences. While stereotypes can be positive, they are more often negative.

3. IMBALANCE AND SELECTIVITY: A Tale Half Told

Curriculum may perpetuate bias by presenting **only one interpretation of an issue, situation, or group of people**. Such accounts simplify and distort complex issues by omitting different perspectives.

4. UNREALITY: Rose Colored Glasses

Many researchers have noted the **tendency of instructional materials to gloss over unpleasant facts and events in our history**. By ignoring prejudice, racism, discrimination, exploitation, oppression, sexism, and inter-group conflict, we deny students the information they need to recognize, understand, and perhaps some day conquer societal problems.

5. FRAGMENTATION AND ISOLATION: The Parts Are Less than the Whole

Did you ever notice a **"special" chapter or insert appearing in a text?** For example, a chapter on "Bootleggers, Suffragettes, and Other Diversions" or a box describing "Ten Black Achievers in Science." Fragmentation emerges when a group is physically or visually isolated in the text. Often, racial and ethnic group members are depicted as interacting only with persons like themselves, isolated from other cultural communities. While this form of bias may be less damaging than omission or stereotypes, fragmentation and isolation present non-dominant groups as peripheral members of society.

6. LINGUISTIC BIAS: Words Count

Language can be a **powerful conveyor of bias, in both blatant and subtle forms**. Linguistic bias can impact race/ethnicity, gender, accents, age, (dis)ability and sexual orientation.

7. COSMETIC BIAS: "Shiny" covers

The relatively new cosmetic bias suggests that a **text is bias free, but beyond the attractive covers, photos, or posters, bias persists**. This "illusion of equity" is really a marketing strategy to give a favorable impression to potential purchasers who only flip the pages of books.

