

Overview of Bias as Related to a Competitor: A Judge's Perspective

As judges, it's essential to recognize and minimize bias in all aspects of the competition. Bias can manifest in different ways and can affect the fairness and integrity of the judging process. Here's an overview of how bias may influence the evaluation of a competitor:

1. Types of Bias in Judging

- **Personal Bias:** A judge's personal preferences, experiences, or relationships with a competitor may unintentionally influence their score. For instance, familiarity with a competitor or a positive or negative prior experience could skew judgment.
- **Confirmation Bias:** If a judge has formed an opinion about a competitor based on previous performances or reputation, they may be more likely to notice and emphasize certain actions or results that support this belief, potentially ignoring areas where the competitor excels or struggles.
- **Recency Bias:** This occurs when a judge places more weight on the most recent part of the competitor's performance, forgetting or overlooking earlier parts of the routine.
- **Halo Effect:** A judge may allow a single standout aspect of the competitor's performance (like an exceptional latte art or perfect shot timing) to overly influence the rest of their evaluation, even if other areas weren't as strong.
- **Cultural Bias:** Making assumptions or judgments based on a competitor's cultural background, accent, attire, communication style, or approach to the routine. Competitors may express excellence in diverse ways informed by their culture, which must be respected and assessed objectively.
- **Sexual or Gender Bias:** Allowing a competitor's gender identity, appearance, or perceived sexuality to influence their score—consciously or unconsciously. All competitors, regardless of gender, must be evaluated on their skills and performance alone.

2. Impact of Bias

- **Fairness and Objectivity:** Bias can lead to an unfair scoring process, where some competitors may be unintentionally favoured or penalized. This undermines the credibility of the competition and can affect the morale of participants.
- **Consistency:** Bias can cause inconsistent judging across different competitors or rounds. Maintaining a neutral stance and scoring based on established criteria helps to ensure that every competitor is evaluated equally.

3. Mitigating Bias

- **Standardized Criteria:** Judges should stick to objective, established criteria outlined in the rules and scoring sheets. This helps to minimize personal interpretations and biases in scoring.
- **Collaboration:** Judges should calibrate before and during the competition to ensure alignment in scoring. Discussing scoring expectations and sharing observations can help reduce individual biases.
- **Awareness:** Being aware of personal biases is the first step in minimizing their influence. Judges should consistently remind themselves to focus on the competitor's performance rather than personal feelings or preconceptions.

4. Importance of Fair Evaluation

- Competitors rely on the integrity of the judging process to ensure they are being assessed fairly based on their skills and performance. Judges are responsible for creating an environment where everyone has the same opportunity to succeed.

By being aware of bias and actively working to mitigate its impact, judges can ensure a fair, consistent, and transparent competition, where all competitors are evaluated based on their skills and abilities, not preconceived notions or personal feelings.

Bias Awareness Thought Exercise: “Switch the Identity”

Objective:

To encourage judges to identify potential bias by reflecting on how their perception may shift based on a competitor's identity, appearance, or background.

Instructions:

1. **Visualize a Routine:** Think about a competitor you've seen recently, or imagine one in detail. Visualize how they spoke, moved, dressed, interacted with the judges, and presented their coffee.
2. **Switch the Identity:** Now, change one aspect of the competitor in your mind. This could be their gender, cultural background, accent, age, or physical appearance.
Ask yourself:
 - Would I still interpret their confidence the same way?
 - Would I view their communication as professional or too casual?
 - Would I see their technique as innovative or unconventional?
 - Would I describe their behaviour differently?
3. **Reflect Honestly:** If changing one trait changes how you feel about the performance, pause and ask:

“Is this based on their coffee skills and routine — or on my own assumptions?”

Why This Matters:

Our brains naturally take mental shortcuts, but awareness helps us slow down and assess more fairly. This exercise isn't about guilt — it's about growing as judges and ensuring that we serve every competitor with equal respect and professionalism.