

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

Understanding and Mitigating Bias in Judging

As judges, it's essential to recognize and minimize bias in all aspects of the competition. Bias can manifest in many forms and, if unchecked, can affect the fairness and integrity of the judging process. Below is an overview of how bias may influence the evaluation of a competitor and how we can actively work to ensure fair, objective assessments.

1. Types of Bias in Judging

- **Personal Bias:** A judge's preferences, experiences, or relationships with a competitor may unintentionally affect their score. This can include familiarity with the competitor, personal opinions, or previous interactions—positive or negative.
- **Confirmation Bias:** Preconceived notions about a competitor based on past performances or reputation may cause a judge to interpret current actions in a way that supports their existing beliefs.
- **Recency Bias:** Placing too much emphasis on the most recent part of the performance while overlooking earlier segments.
- **Halo Effect:** Allowing one exceptional aspect (e.g., latte art or stage presence) to overly influence judgment across all categories.
- **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 scoring that favours or disadvantages certain individuals, undermining the credibility of the competition and affecting competitors' confidence.
- **Consistency:** Bias disrupts consistency across judges and rounds, making the process unpredictable and unfair.

3. Mitigating Bias

- **Use Standardized Criteria:** Always follow the objective criteria in the rules and scoresheets. These are designed to remove subjectivity and personal interpretation.
- **Judge Collaboration and Calibration:** Regularly align with fellow judges before and during the event. Shared expectations reduce the influence of individual biases.
- **Self-Awareness and Reflection:** Actively check your own perceptions and potential biases. Ask yourself: *Am I scoring based on the performance, or am I being influenced by something unrelated?*
- **Education and Exposure:** Embrace ongoing learning about cultural awareness, unconscious bias, and inclusive judging practices.

4. The Importance of Fair Evaluation

Competitors train extensively and rely on judges to provide impartial, respectful, and equitable evaluation. It is our responsibility to ensure all participants—regardless of gender, background, or style—have equal opportunities to succeed based purely on their performance.

By staying aware and intentional, judges can uphold the values of fairness, consistency, and professionalism that are central to the spirit of barista competitions.

Bias in Judging Familiar Latte Art Patterns

Judges must be mindful of potential bias when evaluating latte art patterns that are more traditional or commonly seen. While these designs may appear less innovative, they can still demonstrate exceptional technical skill, precision, and control. Familiarity with a pattern should not influence its score negatively—each design must be assessed on its execution, symmetry, contrast, harmony, and overall appeal, regardless of how often it has been seen before.

Higher points will always be awarded to designs that are new, innovative, and push the boundaries of what we know as latte art. However, existing or classic patterns can still score well when executed with excellence.

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.