

# Cognitive Biases

Author: Maja Nenadović

## THEME

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Introduction to cognitive biases

## CONTEXT

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This lesson plan introduces students/participants to the concept of cognitive bias and presents them with different types of flaws in logical thinking that can lead to bad decisions. Cognitive biases are errors in thinking, interpreting and processing information, stemming from humans' subjectivity and desire to simplify the navigation of daily life, and to protect our minds from complexity and uncertainty.

## GOALS

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- Introducing students/participants with the concept of cognitive biases
- Raising awareness about several specific cognitive biases and the way they influence our thinking and decision-making
- Building critical thinking through discussion about debiasing techniques

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

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- Students/participants are able to define and explain what are cognitive biases
- Students/participants are able to identify and explain the ways cognitive biases affect our thinking
- Students/participants are able to identify several debiasing techniques

## METHODOLOGY

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- Group discussion

## MATERIAL & EQUIPMENT NEEDED

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Projector and computer, internet

# Overview of activities (process)

**Duration:** 45 minutes (standard school class)

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## **Group brainstorm: 5 minutes**

The teacher/educator starts the lesson with a few brief questions:

Has anyone heard of the concept, 'cognitive biases'?

What are they?

How would you define them?

The teacher/educator announces that the activity will revolve around the topic of cognitive biases – our mind's irrational and illogical tendencies. The teacher/educator announces a short video, that will be followed by group discussion and reflection on the topic.

## **Watching short film and discussions: 25 minutes**

In order to explain what cognitive biases are, the teacher/educator introduces a short film (note: select the one that suits your group the best, taking into account their age, maturity level):

- Practical Psychology YouTube channel, "12 Cognitive Biases Explained", at: [https://youtu.be/wEwGBlr\\_Rlw](https://youtu.be/wEwGBlr_Rlw) (2016, length: 10 minutes) – English language
- Wireless Philosophy YouTube channel, "Cognitive Biases", at: <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLtKNX4SfKpzVgBHC2buGxvQNaspGxdMQY> (2017, playlist with 7 short videos, each around 4 minutes)
- Kratak Sadržaj YouTube channel, "Kognitivne pristranosti i logičke zablude", at: <https://youtu.be/z3JQbubXRZk> (2021, length: 13 minutes) – Bosnian language

After watching the short film, the following discussion questions could be used to guide the group reflection:

- Did anything surprise you after watching this film?
- What particular cognitive biases do you recognize in general - and what about yourself? Can you think of a time when you experienced cognitive bias (either in yourself or witnessing it in someone else)? Give examples.
- Why do you think humans are susceptible to having cognitive biases? Do you think our emotions play a role in cognitive biases?
- What about on societal level – in what ways can cognitive biases affect public opinion, collective decisions and actions?

## **Introducing Debiasing Techniques: 15 minutes**

The teacher/educator announces that there are ways of teaching our mind not to fall for cognitive biases, or to build its resilience against them. The teacher/educator should invite students/participants to share their ideas on what some of these techniques for debiasing could be, collecting the brainstorming ideas on a flipchart or black/white/smartboard. Here are some of the techniques\* that should be mentioned (in case they are not, the teacher/educator should mention them and explain them):

- **Develop awareness and learn more about biases** – the simple act of knowing about biases increases one's ability to recognize them, and to be less susceptible to thinking this way
- **Clearly verbalize one's beliefs** – if you are aware of what underlying beliefs inform your opinions and attitudes, then you will be more able to recognize your mind's (at times irrational) attempts to protect these beliefs, at all times

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\*The sections draws from suggestions for debiasing techniques presented in this website: <https://effectiviology.com/cognitive-debiasing-how-to-debias/>

- **Introduce questioning into your thinking process whereby you scrutinize your own thoughts and thinking process** – for e.g. Is this true? What is the evidence that this is true? Am I jumping to conclusions? Why do I think this?, etc.
- **Reduce reliance on your own subjective memory** – to neutralize human tendency to assess the past fondly (look up: rosy retrospection bias, hindsight bias, telescoping effect, etc.), ask for opposing views and research perspectives that contradict your subjective memory
- **Create psychological self-distance** – for e.g., if you are facing a decision or a situation that requires your response, consider asking yourself, 'What advice would I give to a friend if they were in this same position?'
- **Identify the source of your discomfort that ignites the tendency towards cognitive biases** – what is bothering you about the situation? Why is it bothering you?
- **Practice intellectual humility** – assume that you do not have all the information and that you might be wrong. Is there anything you might be missing in the picture? What additional information would help you get a more comprehensive understanding of the situation?

## ASSESSMENT & EVALUATION OPTIONS

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You can evaluate the students'/participants engagement in the group discussion, or the quality of their homework assignments following the second class (for e.g. brief essays or presentations base on further research on a specific cognitive bias, or cognitive debiasing technique).

## ADAPTATION FOR ONLINE IMPLEMENTATION

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The class is fully adaptable for online implementation, as the short animation films as well as the group discussion can be done in plenary with all students participating.

## SOURCES

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- PRECOBIAS is an EU-funded project focusing on prevention of youth radicalisation through fostering self-awareness on cognitive biases, with teachers' toolkits and online learning course dedicated to the topic, at: [www.precobias.eu](http://www.precobias.eu)
- The School of Thought website on Cognitive Biases, at: <https://yourbias.is/>
- Visual Capitalist overview of cognitive biases, at: [www.visualcapitalist.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/50-cognitive-biases-2.png](http://www.visualcapitalist.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/50-cognitive-biases-2.png); also: [www.visualcapitalist.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/18-cognitive-bias-examples.html](http://www.visualcapitalist.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/18-cognitive-bias-examples.html)
- Effectiviology, "Debiasing: How to Reduce Cognitive Biases in Yourself and in Others", at: <https://effectiviology.com/cognitive-debiasing-how-to-debias/>, also: <https://effectiviology.com/confirmation-bias/>



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