Informed Choices

A Guide for Teachers of College Writing

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Finally, you have made an initial attempt to articulate your own philosophy of teaching—a crucial step in pinpointing your goals as a teacher. You will put this philosophy of teaching to work in upcoming chapters as you explore how you will enact your philosophy via your teaching persona (Chapter 3 and Chapter 4) and how your philosophy translates into specific course goals (Chapter 5), writing assignments (Chapter 6), and reading assignments (Chapter 7). Although it is fine to not yet have answers to the many complicated negotiations that happen in teaching, beginning to puzzle through these tensions is an important first step in laying the groundwork for your entire course design. Remember to return to these first two chapters as you continue to progress through the book, making note of your evolving thinking and even which tensions you can begin to clarify for yourself.

Further Reading

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CHAPTER 3

Choices about Your Teaching Persona

In Chapter 2, you began to explore your philosophy of teaching; you considered what makes for effective teaching and, given your beliefs about writing, what your writing classroom might look like. In this chapter and the next, you will get more specific about your individual teaching persona. As the teacher, you play a key role in shaping the culture of the class and the expectations to which students will hold themselves accountable; moreover, the expertise and energy you bring to the class contributes much to the overall dynamic. And at the same time, you are modeling what it means to be an engaged thinker, an experienced reader, and a strategic, effective writer. In this chapter, you will explore how you see yourself as a teacher, including the various roles you might play, and how you would like to present your professional self to a class of students.

What kind of teacher do you hope to be?

Your own learning experiences have a great influence on your teaching persona. As important as it is to give some thought to these experiences so that you can draw from them, it is equally important to consider how you can diversify beyond those practices to meet the varied needs of your students. Thus this chapter begins with a brainstorming activity.

Activity 3.1 Reflecting on your experience as a student

Brainstorm answers to the questions that follow.

1. Think about the most influential teacher you have had. What qualities did this person have that you found valuable?
2. Describe a specific moment when you witnessed excellent teaching. What role did that teacher take on (e.g., facilitator, tough coach, good listener) to make learning possible?
3. What motivated, energized, or excited you as a student? What teaching methods or styles did you respond to? What qualities—particularly affective (i.e., emotional) qualities—did you respond to? Why?

YOUR TEACHING JOURNAL: Engaging with tensions

Review your brainstorming, and respond to the following questions in your teaching journal:

- For what students would these methods or styles not work?
- What other methods might you consider employing to reach these students?
- How would you talk about your own experience as a student when discussing teaching role with colleagues or with a hiring committee?

> **What I remember working for me as a student was feeling that my teacher believed in my abilities as a student. As I've grown more comfortable teaching, I've been able to become less worried about myself in the classroom and more focused on my students, trying to convey to each student that I believe they can succeed.**
>
> *—Mark*

Reading back over your responses to Activity 3.1, you can begin to see some of the qualities you particularly valued in your past teachers. Circle the characteristics or descriptors that reflect who you would like to be as a teacher. Be guided by your own personality; consider the characteristics that others, perhaps even students (if you are currently teaching), note about you or compliment you on. You will most likely not circle every descriptor, and that is perfectly fine. One thing that makes teachers successful is an awareness of the unique strengths and expertise they bring to a teaching situation. Similarly, all of the words you circle might not be purely positive—you have probably had an experience where someone who was "tough" or "challenging" made a positive impact on you by believing in your abilities and encouraging you to achieve more than you thought you could. Many successful teachers balance positive affective characteristics (helpful, understanding, encouraging) with the high expectations that other descriptors (tough, rigorous) suggest.

As you look back at Activity 3.1, you might also notice that tensions exist between what worked for you as a student and what might work for other students who find different methods and styles supportive and motivating. As you progress through this chapter and as you enter the classroom, it is important to remain aware of the teaching methods and styles that support a range of students. Different models or strategies might likewise be more appropriate for different contexts or for students at different levels. And you might even find that certain teaching methods feel more appropriate at different points in your career. You might feel empowered to be more provocative as a teacher later in your career, for example, than you might at the beginning of your career.

Another important tension to note is the one that often emerges between our cherished teaching models (perhaps a genius literature teacher who inspired us through the depth of knowledge displayed in his lectures) and our own beliefs about what a successful writing classroom looks like (perhaps the opposite of a teacher lecturing and students passively listening). This is a crucial tension to keep in mind. As you work through the rest of this chapter, you will identify specific roles and teaching styles that are connected to your view of a productive writing classroom. You may find that your beliefs about writing call on you to be quite different from those inspiring teachers who stand out in your memory.

> **Although they felt difficult at the time, I really appreciated larger projects and longer writing assignments that asked me to go above and beyond what I had done before. They were challenging, but they helped me build confidence in myself when I could look back and say, "Wow, I accomplished that!" So now this is a key question I ask myself in my course design: What kinds of projects could help my students stretch themselves and build a similar confidence?**
>
> *—Tara*

What roles will you take on as a teacher?

As you work to integrate your personality and your classroom persona, it will be helpful to consider the many roles that teachers can play. Good teachers often take on a range of these roles at different times for different purposes, attending closely to what approach might help a particular student or class at particular junctures. As you read through the many teacher roles described in Activity 3.2, pay attention to your response to each role. You will want to return to these descriptions as you develop your teaching philosophy. We will ask you to work with your responses throughout the rest of this chapter.

Activity 3.2 Examining roles that teachers choose

Circle any ideas that resonate with you, and mark with an asterisk any ideas that cause tension. Unpack at least one of the tensions in your teaching journal.

Coach	Model
We can all think of a "coach" in our lives: someone who summoned the best from us and encouraged us to tackle increasingly hard challenges. A coach sets us tasks that will help us improve, encourages us to practice, and boosts our confidence while simultaneously challenging us. Coaching can be particularly successful in introducing new writing concepts or practices, as well as in working one-on-one with students. A coaching role is also amenable to working with diverse students and their different learning styles and needs.	As teachers, we constantly act as models for our students—demonstrating how more experienced writers achieve tasks or how people in academia ask questions, marshal evidence, and so on. We can model how a productive discussion might occur, provide models of successful papers, or even model how we would get started writing or thinking through a problem. Modeling is often most successful when we are explicit about the fact that we are modeling. When we say to students, "Here's one way you might go about doing X; watch and consider if this could help you," we are both giving students useful strategies and honoring their autonomy in deciding which strategies might work for them.
Facilitator	**Mentor**
For many writing teachers, their central goal in the class-room and in working with student writers is to facilitate the kind of environment that will advance students' writing and thinking. Many teachers want to foster a strong sense of community and student-centered classrooms where student expertise and interests are an integral part of the class. When we act as facilitators, we set up meaningful learning experiences and jump in to help when needed, but mostly we step back and let students take the reins. We keep things moving in a positive direction, but we are flexible in terms of where a discussion moves or where an activity ends up. Successful facilitation means striking the right balance between shaping the flow of events, responding to what is happening in the moment, and getting out of the way.	Whether we recognize it or not, we often act as mentors for our students. This is most clear when we work one-on-one with students or when we build special relationships with particular students to help them succeed or pursue their interests. However, we also mentor all our students in small ways, encouraging them to succeed and acknowledging their individual challenges and successes. In these ways, we bring students along, taking an interest in them and helping them find productive places for themselves in our classes or the academy at large. We mentor students when we differentiate our teaching in response to different student needs, when we take an interest in their progress and ongoing success, and when we offer our help and advice to assist them in continued learning.
Confidant	**Advocate**
Whether we desire this role or not, students may call on us to act as a confidant, a trusted adult figure, a counselor or adviser, or a problem solver. This is particularly likely in a composition class. The class is small, students have a lot of contact with the teacher, and the topics or writing can elicit strong personal reactions from students. When students perceive you as a caring, trustworthy, capable person, they might divulge information that can be challenging to hear	The longer you teach, the more you might find yourself in a position where you can effect change for your students beyond the walls of the classroom. You might recommend students for jobs or scholarships, serve on a committee that shapes curricula, or read student essays submitted for a departmental award. You might even talk to your friends and neighbors about who your students are and how larger policy affects their learning. In situations such as these, you can act

and process, such as health issues, psychological problems, abuse or rape, or family problems. Although it is important to remember that you are not a certified counselor and must point students to the appropriate resources, professionals, and health facilities, you should also acknowledge that the student has come to you with this information for a reason: He or she trusts you. The role of confidant involves acknowledging students' troubles and helping however you can, while still maintaining a professional relationship.	as an advocate for individual students, for your institution, and even for higher learning in general.

YOUR TEACHING JOURNAL: Engaging with tensions
Choose one of the roles that you feel somewhat uncomfortable with, and brainstorm about it in your teaching journal. Consider the following questions:

- Why does this role feel uncomfortable?
- To what extent is this discomfort related to your personality and sense of who you are as a person or as a teacher?
- To what extent is this discomfort related to your teaching philosophy?
- How might you become more comfortable with this role?
- How would you discuss these tensions with colleagues or with a hiring committee?

In addition to the roles described in Activity 3.2, you might find yourself forced to adopt particular roles. Sometimes these other roles come along with the institutional authority we carry (such as grader); other times they emerge from the views that students and others have of us as professional educators. Negotiating these roles is no less important and can sometimes be more difficult than occupying the roles that feel more connected to our personalities. In the next activity, you will examine these additional roles and explore how comfortable you would feel in them.

Activity 3.3 Examining roles that are imposed on teachers

Circle any ideas that resonate with you, and mark with an asterisk any ideas that cause tension. Unpack at least one of the tensions in your teaching journal.

Gatekeeper	Expert
Although perhaps one of the toughest roles to occupy in a responsible way, the role of gatekeeper (a type of institutional authority) is one that we all must negotiate. This role becomes particularly challenging when we balance issues of access against issues of "readiness" or meeting expectations. These decisions often emerge at the end of the semester or in response to grades. Sometimes the decision will be clear-cut: A student, without a compelling reason, missed the number of classes that the department determines warrants a failing grade. Sometimes decisions will be more murky: A student needs a C to pass and has a high C–. Are there any circumstances or reasons that would warrant this student's passing the class and moving on? This role often involves trying to objectively weigh the costs and benefits of decisions.	Whether we think about our expertise in terms of our advanced reading skills, the rhetorical awareness we bring to writing tasks, or the other factual or practical knowledge we possess, we are experts in the eyes of our students. This does not mean that we need to stand at the front of the class expounding on our expertise for our students to absorb; but we can offer our expertise — including a range of ways to effectively tackle a reading or writing task — when it will help students or when they ask for such advice. When we think about it, this makes sense: We most need and appreciate expertise when it helps us accomplish something and when we are not sure how to proceed. Connecting expertise to specific tasks — making it relevant, that is — ensures that our students can forge a meaningful connection between our words and their goals.

YOUR TEACHING JOURNAL: Engaging with tensions
Choose some aspect of the "Gatekeeper" or "Expert" role that you feel uncomfortable with, and brainstorm about it in your teaching journal. Consider the following questions:

- Why does this role make you feel uncomfortable?
- Given that this role might be imposed on you, how might you deal with it and still stay true to your teaching philosophy?
- What kinds of boundaries might you need to set (for students, colleagues, or yourself)?
- How would you discuss this process of negotiation with colleagues or with a hiring committee?

In Activity 3.2 and Activity 3.3, you surely noticed that your own personal philosophy about writing and teaching is deeply intertwined with your choices about teacher roles. For example, if you believe in writing as an ongoing process in which writers are discovering their own voices and material, you will probably find yourself drawing on the roles of coach and facilitator more than that of expert. It will probably be helpful for you to practice switching between these roles and to explore their dimensions, paying attention to how these roles serve different purposes based on your beliefs about writing, the writing process, and effective teaching. You will want to note which roles seem to fit hand in glove with your teaching persona and which roles you might have to work a bit harder to negotiate. Finally, if you can remember to maintain an awareness of the range of roles you can occupy in the classroom and which roles tend to fit certain situations best, you will be well on your way to establishing a teaching presence that works for you and your students. You will find it helpful to return to the notes you have taken as you practice moving between roles and negotiating the tensions that arise.

> **"I liked when I felt as though my teachers were learning with us students — when it felt as though they didn't have all the answers but still had some questions, too. It made learning feel less robotic to me. That's something I try to be able to do with my own students.**
> —*Tara*

As you work to craft an effective teaching persona, you will no doubt experience setbacks and doubts that may challenge your view of yourself as a teacher. Do not despair! Not only does this happen to every teacher, but these moments often present the most salient lessons for us, causing us to reflect deeply and, when warranted, to make necessary changes. There is great value in talking through these moments with others who might be experiencing similar challenges—perhaps others new to teaching or more experienced teachers whom you trust. Setbacks may be emotionally challenging, making us ask, "Why did this happen? What did I do wrong? Am I failing my students?" However, do not miss the opportunity to learn from any missteps. Working through problematic situations, dealings with difficult students, or lessons that went awry may well lead to more growth for you as a teacher than all your successes. That being said, you can do some work up front to anticipate how you might respond to difficulties that arise or how you might prevent some difficulties from occurring in the first place.

Activity 3.4 Examining difficult teaching situations

The following questions will help you prepare for challenging moments. Answer the questions in the first column, and identify helpful teacher roles in the second column.

Teaching challenging and reflective questions:	What teacher roles would be helpful in this situation?
Describe a specific moment when you felt silenced or marginalized as a student or when you witnessed a situation that likely made other students feel this way. What happened? How can you use this experience to inform your own teaching?	
Describe a specific moment when a lesson or the classroom dynamic fell flat. What were the teacher and students doing that was not working? Did anything happen to pull things back to a productive direction? If not, what could the teacher have done? (If you cannot think of a specific moment, imagine such a scenario and describe what could be done to rectify the situation.)	
A student speaks with you before class about getting an extension for the day's paper. What reasons might convince you to allow an extension, and what reasons might be insufficient to convince you? Is "I didn't do my best and I know I can do better with a few more days" a sufficient reason for you? Explain.	

Turning to the field: Affective dimensions of teaching

Recently, scholars have begun to focus more on the affective dimensions of teaching. As in other relationships in our lives, students respond to how we listen, how we engage them, how we move, and how we emote. As scholars have noted, emotions prompt more than feelings; emotions also trigger physical responses and cognitive reflections, both of which range in intensity and vary in terms of their perceived positivity and negativity. The affective dimensions of teaching and learning also extend beyond: Motivation, beliefs, attitudes, insight and intuition, and much about how we perceive the world all have an affective component. Writing scholar Susan McLeod summarizes the effects of emotion and explores how they may play out in the classroom in her book *Notes on the Heart*. How do students perceive the affective components of our actions, and how do we respond affectively to students and our own perceptions of them? How do these dynamics shape the classroom? McLeod suggests we need to attend not only to emotions and feelings, but also to attitudes and beliefs (including

beliefs about learning and overall worldviews), motivation, self-efficacy (our faith in whether we can succeed), and even intuition.

To begin to explore this territory, ponder the teaching practices listed in Activity 3.5, and think about whether they might create a positive affective response in students.

Activity 3.5 Creating a positive learning environment

Circle any ideas that resonate with you, and mark with an asterisk any ideas that cause tension. Unpack at least one of the tensions in your teaching journal.

Practices for creating a positive learning environment . . .

- engage student ideas
- connect class to student and teacher interests
- share stories
- ask genuine questions
- connect with students
- read new materials along with students
- explore new topics together
- connect academia to the larger world
- ask students what matters to them
- be curious about students
- pinpoint what energizes a discussion
- capitalize on diversity
- teach new material
- show that I care for students
- listen intently
- joke with students
- ask about students' lives
- discuss shared interests
- ask for feedback
- use technology creatively

Additional practices that come to mind . . .

YOUR TEACHING JOURNAL: Engaging with tensions

Choose the practice that you feel most uncomfortable with, and brainstorm about it in your teaching journal. Consider the following questions:

- How does the practice clash with your own experience or philosophy about "positive learning environments"?
- Do you think that your students would necessarily feel the same way? Why?
- How might you make space in your classroom for students whose notions about a positive learning environment differ from your own?
- How would you discuss this practice with colleagues or with a hiring committee?

Taking it further: Your affective responses to students

As McLeod explores in depth, and as you began to explore in Activity 3.5, emotion is a complex creature. Our emotions, beliefs, motivations, and even confidence and self-efficacy all play a significant role in shaping who we are as

teachers and the teaching personas we display to our students. We can begin to acknowledge the affective component of our classes by practicing how we attend to our own affective responses, as well as how these responses may encourage different roles. If a student hands in a paper late, do we tend to assume the student had a valid reason, or do we chalk it up to procrastination or laziness? Why do we react this way? Asking questions like these can help us become more in tune with and aware of our reactions and the reasons behind them. It can also help us respond to students more appropriately and recognize when our emotional reactions are not warranted, especially when students present us with new information about their behavior.

In Activity 3.6, you will work with a few scenarios to explore how affective forces play out in the classroom for both teachers and students.

Activity 3.6 Getting learning back on track

For each scenario, try to pinpoint your initial emotional or affective reaction. Then try to think affectively from the student's point of view: What might be prompting or influencing the student's behavior? Finally, use your responses in the first two columns to hypothesize how you might respond to the situation to get learning back on track in the last column, making sure to take your philosophy and possible roles into account. Fill in the chart. We have done the first couple of examples to get you started.

Scenario	How might you feel?	Why might the student act this way?	How might you respond or redirect?
A student challenges something you have said in class.	• Thrown off guard • Insecure about the idea I expressed • Worried that this student does not respect me	• The student may be trying to be intellectually engaged. • The student may be trying to pin down expectations. • The student may feel insecure or threatened by the idea being discussed.	• Acknowledge the student's engagement. • Encourage other students to join the dialogue. • Follow up with the student after class to obtain more information.
A student whom you have asked to stay after class bolts out the door without speaking to you.	• Angry or frustrated • Confused • Worried • Exasperated	• The student knows he or she "messed up" and is scared and embarrassed. • The student genuinely forgot to remain behind. • The student hopes he or she can dodge the issue and you will let it drop. • The student believes you do not care.	• Reiterate that you want to speak to the student in order to help. • Reframe the conversation as making a plan with the student. • Reassure the student that you are not mad.
Without explanation, a student exceeds the number of absences allowed.			
A student consistently derails class by expressing frustration or by asking, "Why are we doing this?"			

We might think of the affective component of teaching in more positive ways as well. You might notice how you feel (and how your students respond) when you walk into the classroom smiling or when you nod encouragingly at each student as they speak in class. We can consider the affective component of teaching habits of mind—traits like curiosity or persistence—and how best to model this relationship for students (see Activity 5.7). And we might use our reflections on our own affective responses to find ways to heighten our interest in our students, strengthen our relationships with them, and remain active and interested in our job and field.

Reflections from experienced teachers

Teaching is a dynamic experience, which is part of what makes it so exciting. The challenges that you will face and the changes you will undergo can feel exhausting and destabilizing at times, however. Just as you might tell your students, remember that every challenge you face is your opportunity to reflect, to learn, and to grow. If you stay open to this idea, you will eventually forge a teaching persona that works for you as a teacher and as a person.

As you continue exploring these issues, consider the following insights from experienced teachers:

- Successful teachers explore the different roles they can occupy in the classroom. Balancing nurturing and supportive roles with challenging roles encourages students to stretch themselves, and allows teachers to notice which roles seem to aid different students in different situations.
- As they explore different roles, veteran teachers often find it helpful to consistently circle back to their philosophies of writing and teaching. Ask yourself, "When I occupy this role, are my actions congruent with my beliefs and theories about writing, process, and teaching?"

- Feelings, emotions, beliefs, and self-efficacy all play a role in effective teaching and learning. Experienced teachers have learned to pay attention to the complexities of the affective domain—their own affective responses, their students' responses and behaviors, and the interconnection between the two.
- Experienced teachers remember that a good source of information is students themselves. Ask students about the teaching styles that work for them, offer options in how you present information, and recognize that certain styles may not work for all students.
- Seasoned teachers often find themselves actively working to maintain their own positive self-efficacy. As you enter the classroom, remember that we are only human. Talking about difficulties and the affective dimension of teaching with other teachers—and even with students—can help us continue to grow and stay engaged.

As we have noted in prior chapters, you must test these pieces of wisdom for yourself, seeing how they align with your teaching persona and teaching philosophy. You may decide to integrate some of these ideas into your professional development plan (see Chapter 17), or you may set them aside for further reflection in the future.

Putting it together: Integrating your persona, philosophy, and approach

Now that you have explored many of the possible teaching roles and have considered how these roles mesh with your philosophies about teaching and writing, it is time to bring the components of this chapter together. After reviewing your notes from this chapter and perhaps looking back at your notes from the first two chapters, think about how you might describe your teaching persona to a hiring committee.

Activity 3.7 Articulating your evolving philosophy

Use the first column of this chart to list eight to ten terms or concepts that describe your persona. Next to each term, note how it connects to your teaching philosophy.

Key term or concept describing your persona:	How it relates to your teaching philosophy:

Now you will write a paragraph or two in your teaching journal to help you flesh out a description of your developing teaching persona. As you write, try to be as specific as possible about how you will accomplish your goals in the classroom. For example, what might you do to ensure your questions are engaging, or how might you practice caring? As always, be sure to connect your ideas about your teaching persona to your developing teaching philosophy.

Activity 3.8 Synthesizing ideas about your persona, activities, and philosophy

In your teaching journal, discuss the following questions. Be sure to note any questions or issues that you are still wrestling with.

- Who do you hope to be as a teacher?
- How do you want to present yourself and your teaching persona in the classroom?
- How do your ideas about your teaching persona connect to your teaching philosophy?

This chapter has given you a chance to explore in more depth the roles you might occupy as a teacher and to consider how these roles might be enacted in the classroom. Since teaching personas evolve and change, sometimes in response to the needs of different student populations, this might be a useful chapter to return to throughout your career. Keeping this range of roles in mind will also help you further explore one of the most challenging negotiations teachers face: negotiating authority, which is the subject of Chapter 4.

Further Reading

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CHAPTER 4

Choices about Your Authority as a Teacher

In Chapter 3, you explored the roles you may adopt as a teacher and were introduced to the roles you may be given by dint of your institutional authority. When we enter the classroom, we are more than just ourselves; we also carry with us the authority and expectations that define us professionally. At best, these institutional valences help us clearly articulate our expectations and rationale to students and allow us to connect the work we do in our individual classrooms to a larger curriculum or to students' progress in their course of study. At worst, the stamp of institutional authority can mask a clear sense of *why* we are teaching in certain ways or asking students to complete particular tasks, resulting in an unproductive "because I said so" mentality. It often takes us many years as teachers to find productive ways to balance and negotiate the authority we possess in the classroom. In this chapter, we will further explore the dimensions of authority that mark teaching, as well as the tensions you might feel between the roles you choose to occupy and the institutional roles imposed on you by others.

> **"I vividly remember my first two years teaching: I would stand at the front of the class, give directions, and feel like an imposter. Did I know enough to be leading this class? Would they find out I was a fraud? In retrospect, these insecurities led me to be more authoritative than I wanted or needed to be; I wanted to keep everything under control so that students would respect me, my authority, and the work of the class. I wish I had known then that other new teachers were undoubtedly feeling the same insecurities.**
>
> —*Tara*

How will you negotiate your authority in the classroom?

Many issues can complicate our relationship with authority. When first entering the teaching profession, some teachers are close in age to their students or appear young. Some fear that students will test their authority because of their age, gender, race, or ethnicity. If you are new to teaching, you may feel that students perceive you as a novice. Indeed, there are moments when you might perceive yourself that way (or even think of yourself as an imposter who will soon be found out). These factors, or others, may lead to a heightened awareness of your authority in the classroom, sometimes resulting in an overextension of authoritative behavior to "save face" or to "lay down the law" to minimize the risk of being challenged.

Certainly, we want our students to respect us and the class, especially as mutual respect contributes to a positive learning environment. It thus can be helpful to remember the range of roles we can occupy, such as the roles we explored in Chapter 3. Clear, consistent expectations (with exceptions when necessary) can go far in establishing an equitable environment where everyone works together. However, you will need to explore your relationship with authority in the classroom as you begin teaching, as you develop as a teacher,

and even as you encounter different groups of students. As you work to draw on your strengths as an individual and as a teacher, experiment a bit with how authoritative you'd like to be in the classroom and, most importantly, why. Articulate your rationale to your students so they know the intellectual reasons for the rules you enforce or the standards you determine. If you want to be firm about attendance because you have a discussion-based classroom, for example, be sure to make that reasoning clear. In Activity 4.1, you will examine pairs of tensions that teachers often negotiate, positioning yourself between these tensions.

Activity 4.1 Mapping your beliefs about authority

Circle any ideas that resonate with you, and mark with an asterisk any ideas that cause tension. Unpack at least one of the tensions in your teaching journal.

Beliefs about teacher authority . . .		
Deadlines should have some flexibility.	⟷	Deadlines should be firm.
Boundaries and expectations should be developed with students as needed.	⟷	Clear boundaries are necessary and promote success.
Students often have a good reason for not adhering to certain course policies (e.g., attendance, no cell phones).	⟷	There is rarely a good reason for not adhering to course policies.
It is my job to adapt to students.	⟷	It is the student's job to adapt to my class.
If students do not fulfill a component of the class, it means they probably need more targeted support.	⟷	If students do not fulfill a component of the class, it means they have not made the class a priority.
"Extenuating circumstances" are a reality and affect everyone.	⟷	"Extenuating circumstances" are often just excuses.

YOUR TEACHING JOURNAL: Engaging with tensions

You will notice that the beliefs on the left might be described as "accommodating" and the beliefs on the right might be described as "firm." In your teaching journal, consider the following questions:

- Which side resonated more with your teaching philosophy? Why do you think this is so?
- Now think about the other side: In what teaching contexts or in what situations might it be beneficial for you to adopt those less comfortable notions of authority?
- In what ways might those notions enrich or add another dimension to your teaching?
- How would you discuss authority in the classroom with colleagues or a hiring committee?

As you may have noticed, issues about authority can often emerge when you are asked to make an exception for a particular student. New teachers sometimes believe that exceptions are not fair to other students. However, we all know that extenuating circumstances and individual challenges make a "one size fits all" approach unrealistic. This is particularly the case when you are working with a socioeconomically diverse student population; you will have some students who are juggling an almost overwhelming load of responsibilities in the realms of work, home, and school.

For such students, we recommend that you try to strike a balance between being consistent and making exceptions when they are warranted. Ask yourself, "Will saying yes to this particular request help the student in the long run?" Whether you decide to say yes or no to a particular request or make a particular exception, be sure to track the outcome and reflect on whether it was the right choice. Who benefited from your decision? Were there any negative consequences? You can use this information to negotiate and tweak the ways you use your authority in the classroom, eventually finding a productive authority role that you feel comfortable occupying.

You can use a chart such as the one that follows to help you track your decisions and their results. Consider using your teaching journal to note impressions, ideas, successes, and failures and to gather information to guide your future decisions.

Exception or decision	Who benefited, and how?	Any negative consequences?	Takeaway notes for the future
I extended a deadline for Amy, whose dad was in the hospital.	Amy appreciated my flexibility, which allowed her to focus on her family. She was able to complete the assignment without worrying.	Amy did not have her draft for peer workshop, but she worked in a brainstorming group with others.	This felt like the right decision, especially for a usually responsible student who was obviously going through a tough time emotionally.
I made very flexible deadlines for Tim, who was dealing with recurring health issues.	This decision seemed to relieve Tim's stress and insecurity.	Too much leniency may have hindered Tim from feeling like he was making progress. At the end of the semester, Tim had to take a grade of "incomplete."	Perhaps giving all students two "late essay passes" would have encouraged Tim to meet other deadlines and use his "passes" only when necessary, encouraging him to capitalize on those days when he felt good.

Relationships and boundaries with students

In any difficult situation in which you must balance competing roles or negotiate issues of authority, you will need to make a decision that you can stand behind. If you find yourself in a difficult situation, or you are just not sure how to proceed, remember that you can consult with any resources available to you, like the department chair or the director of your writing program. A good rule of thumb before making any hard decision is to try to objectively weigh the costs and benefits of your decision and then sleep on it.

Part of finding a productive and appropriate authoritative role is being mindful of the relationships you build with students while also being attentive to constructing appropriate boundaries. Sometimes students will be the ones to reach out to you as a resource, perhaps asking you to be a confidant as they share personal, sometimes troubling, information (as explored in Chapter 3). This can be a challenging and at times unsettling position to be placed in; you are not a therapist, but you are a trusted adult and a caring human being. When students reach out to you in this way, they do so in part because of your authority: They

think you may be able to help. Do your best to acknowledge what the student shares, to listen, and to be empathetic. Help if you can. Depending on the situation, you may find that you need to establish some boundaries or point students to others who are more qualified to help. For example, you might say, "I hear what you are experiencing; that must be incredibly difficult. Let me help you find someone who can better help you than I can."

Although this is an uncommon occurrence, some students might take advantage of their relationship with you, perhaps unknowingly, in ways that make you uncomfortable. If this is the case, calmly and clearly reestablish appropriate boundaries. Remember that you can always reach out to your colleagues, the person in the office next to yours, your chair, or the director of your writing program if you need extra assistance in working with a troubled or difficult student.

A related issue concerns the way you represent your students and your work to others, whether that be your family and friends, your colleagues, segments of the public, or organizations involved in supporting education. In each of these exchanges, try to honor your students, their struggles, and their efforts in your words. Carry this attitude of advocacy back into the classroom. Particularly since you are in a position of authority, it is important that you use that authority to respect and champion students instead of maligning them. This not only improves your self-efficacy as a teacher but when students feel you are on their side, it also improves their motivation, benefiting both sides of the teacher-student relationship. And using your authority as a vehicle for respecting students through your words and actions has the potential to strengthen support for education even more broadly.

Turning to the field: Negotiating authority as a developmental process

Figuring out how to negotiate authority is often a lengthy process that may change over time. Longtime teacher and preeminent scholar of student writing Mina Shaughnessy puts some of these issues into perspective in her seminal article "Diving In: An Introduction to Basic Writing." Although written in 1976, her article chronicles the struggles and changes many new teachers experience as they seek to uphold the expectations of the academy and develop themselves and their pedagogies.

Shaughnessy describes the process that she went through as a developing teacher by identifying four stages: Guarding the Tower, Converting the Natives, Sounding the Depths, and Diving In. From the obvious metaphors involved, we can see how new teachers often initially feel more allegiance to the rules and practices of the academy than they do to their students. Initially, some teachers feel that they need to uphold the university's standards in such a way that students are kept out, or they feel the need to "convert" students fully into the sacred realm of academia. In both cases, the teacher is not really learning from his or her students or responding to their needs, but rather is choosing to believe in the immutability of the content or practices that students should "just learn."

When teachers move toward the next stage, Sounding the Depths, they begin to reflect on how well the specific choices they are making in the classroom are

"A key learning moment happened for me the first time a student asked a question and I responded, "I don't know. How could we find out?" Nothing happened: The class didn't implode; students didn't walk out or snicker. In fact, they seemed to respect my acknowledgment that I didn't know it all. Thinking back, I now realize that admitting what I didn't know actually opened up the classroom dynamic, enabling students to bring their knowledge more to the fore.

—Mark

working; they begin to acknowledge both the "sophistication" that students bring with them in terms of prior knowledge and the "complexity" demanded by writing and specific writing tasks. With this level of reflection in place, teachers can "dive in" and study their students, student learning and writing processes, and themselves as teachers who are also learning.

Taking it further: Your beliefs about developmental writers

As we have just explored, Shaughnessy provides a framework for thinking about your responsibilities as a teacher. Particularly when your subject is composition—a subject that has historically been connected to issues of access and social justice—careful consideration of your attitude toward students and their written work is a large part of discovering how to be an effective teacher. Although you will have to explore much of this terrain on your own when you begin teaching, continual reflection and an understanding of how teachers develop and change over time can give you a head start on developing a cohesive, successful teaching persona that effectively balances issues of authority. Engaging with Shaughnessy's ideas requires critical self-reflection, but her developmental model of teaching saves new teachers much trial and tribulation. In Activity 4.2, you will explore how your beliefs fit with the framework Shaughnessy provides.

Activity 4.2 Examining your views of students

In the left column, we have matched statements teachers might make to Shaughnessy's four stages of teacher development. Circle any ideas that resonate with you, and mark with an asterisk any ideas that cause tension. Then use the right column to unpack how you would examine or modify your beliefs.

Shaughnessy's stages of teacher development:	How might you examine or modify this belief?
Guarding the Tower • "So many students — or even all! — seem unprepared." • "These students can't do college-level work. They just aren't ready." • "I feel I need to emphasize standards. I might even have to lower those standards so students can get by."	
Converting the Natives • "Some students might be able to learn, but I'm going to have to do a lot of work to bring them around." • "Students need so much, and they want the knowledge I have so they can succeed and gain access to more opportunities. My job is to give students my knowledge." • "There's a lot to cover, especially about correctness, mechanics, and correct forms." • "I sometimes feel frustrated that students can't learn the simple things I'm teaching them."	
Sounding the Depths • "Are the things I'm teaching really as simple as I thought?" • "In my students' work, the nature of error seems to be contextual and changing." • "Sometimes it seems as if there is a logic to the errors students are making." • "I feel myself trying to puzzle through these difficulties, reading more for students' intentions. I find myself reflecting more on teaching writing and my students."	
Diving In • "Instead of trying to 'remediate' students, I think I also need to 'remediate' myself to learn more about writing and teaching writing." • "There are some things that students don't know how to do, but there is a lot they do know how to do." • "I feel I have a different attitude about error and my students, and I'm guided by my desire to nurture their incipient excellence." • "I strive for new knowledge that will help me and my students learn."	

Reflections from experienced teachers

As we have explored in this chapter, it is not uncommon for new teachers to feel like imposters or frauds when they first begin teaching. Although they have much to offer students, the authority they have been granted sometimes feels like a mismatch for their experience and expertise. Students, however, do not know whether a teacher is teaching for the first time (unless, of course, they are told). As a new teacher, you will feel more confident and act with more assurance if you thoroughly and thoughtfully plan your lessons and if you clearly articulate your goals and rationales to students. (Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 might be helpful in this regard.) Although there may be some bumps along the way, you will start to feel comfortable in your teaching role soon enough. Keep learning from and listening to your students, and you will eventually craft an effective teaching persona that feels comfortable yet remains flexible in response to new situations and students.

As you negotiate the different positions you must occupy as a teacher, keep in mind the following ideas from seasoned teachers. They will help you make your own informed choices.

- Experienced teachers try to remember that they are always learning along with their students. Notice where students challenge their assumptions, and think about what students can teach the teacher.
- Intellectual rationales can go further toward promoting learning goals and helping students understand those goals than "just do it" decrees. If you have good learning-based reasons for your policies and explain those reasons to students, they will understand your expectations and why those expectations are important to their success.

- Many teachers find that keeping track of decisions that were difficult and charting their outcomes (perhaps in a teaching journal) gives them more solid data to use to make increasingly better decisions in the future.
- When grading, teachers' authority sometimes seems to collide with other elements of their teaching personas. (We discuss this topic further in the chapter on assessment, Chapter 14.) For now, you might remember that after you grade papers or establish end-of-term grades, it is often helpful to map the spread of grades. Does this tell you anything? Is everything in order? Do the grades feel right? Wait a day before submitting them just to make sure.
- Nothing can substitute for talking through challenging situations with others who understand and can offer you their insight. The best teachers reach out to other teachers, colleagues, and administrators as needed to find support, strategies, and solutions.

Putting it together: Balancing chosen roles and institutionally imposed roles

Negotiating authority in the classroom is tricky because it is so situational. There is rarely a single right way to uphold institutional authority and promote learning. On a moment-by-moment basis teachers must weigh their responsibilities and standards alongside the learning needs, desires, and goals of individual students and make decisions accordingly.

Activity 4.3 Articulating your key notions of teacher authority

Imagine that you are preparing for a job interview and will be asked for your views about negotiating teacher authority. In the first column of the chart, brainstorm several key words or terms that you would want to include in your discussion. In the second column, provide a real or hypothetical example that illustrates your views. Then, in the third column, explain the connections between your views of authority and your general teaching philosophy.

Key words about authority:	Specific examples illustrating each key word:	How does each example connect to your teaching philosophy?

Now you are ready to describe your views on teacher authority, drawing on all the activities in this chapter.

Activity 4.4 Negotiating your roles as a teacher

In your teaching journal, discuss the following questions. Be sure to note any questions or issues that you are still wrestling with.

- How will you negotiate authority as a teacher, both in your chosen teacher roles and in institutionally imposed teacher roles?
- How does your negotiation strategy connect to your teaching philosophy?

In this chapter, you have explored how you can balance your authority as a teacher with your teaching persona to best achieve learning goals and support your students. Crafting a teaching persona that students respond well to and that they can trust is an ongoing process; however, remaining aware and reflecting on the authority you bring to the classroom can help inform your decision-making process and guide you in developing a teaching persona that works for both you and your students. As you move forward to Part 2 and start designing actual materials, it will help to keep the persona you have begun to construct in mind as a way to animate your decisions. Likewise, as you begin mapping your course goals (Chapter 5) and writing and reading assignments (Chapter 6 and Chapter 7), new issues may arise that complicate your understanding of your teacher roles. If so, you may find it helpful to return to this chapter and the notes you have made in your teaching journal.

Further Reading

- Bloom, Lynn. "Why I Used to Hate Giving Grades." *College Composition and Communication* 48.3 (1997): 360–71. Print.
- Ching, Kory Lawson. "Peer Response in the Composition Classroom: An Alternative Genealogy." *Rhetoric Review* 26.3 (2007): 303–19. Print.
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