

## NARRATIVE 6.

# TEACHING RHETORIC WITHOUT A LICENSE

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I felt like I was teaching rhetoric without a license as I prepared to teach my first class. My own first-year composition class in undergrad was more of a literature-analysis class reminiscent of something you would find in a high school, not something focused on the components and techniques of writing. On top of that, I had never heard of rhetoric in an academic context before walking into day one of my “Teaching Composition” class as a graduate student. What qualifications did I have to teach?

There are seventeen students looking to me as the ultimate authority of this classroom; and it is both terrifying and heady. This position is something I have longed and worked hard for, but there were still plenty of lingering doubts. But I was not left to drown in the deep end of the pool. As part of my role as a TA, I was in a graduate course with my cohort of fellow TAs where we not only continued our training through readings and other work but also acted as a support network for one another as we developed our professorial identities. The transition from solely acting as students to acting as both student and professor was not an easy one. It was uncomfortable at times; but being able to have my fellow TAs act as sounding boards was indispensable for if instructions for a project were clear or if I should be lenient with a student who skipped multiple classes or just chatting about funny things students had said or done that week.

Mistakes were made during my first semester. Sometimes I was not as clear as I could have been when explaining my expectations for an assignment to my students, and I’m sure I could have assigned a better reading or two than what I did. I bet that there are mistakes that I don’t even know about. However, what I learned about being a TA was that this is inevitable and expected. Despite what I may have believed going in, I wasn’t going to be able to be a perfect teacher right away, or ever really. That was the real kicker I learned from both training and experience, that behind the scenes teachers are struggling, making mistakes, and always learning. It is alright for me to second-guess my assignment prompts or how I am running my class because my fellow TAs, and even tenured professors, do too.

As we move into our second semester as TAs, my cohort's professorial identities are a little more stable, but they are not solid yet. I anticipate that this identity may never really be considered finished. But I learned it does not have to be. The best teachers are ones willing to learn, change, and grow. And that's my goal.