

Translating the Northwestern Principles of Inclusive Teaching for Textbook Authors

Brief Description

Guidelines for actionable strategies for authoring textbooks, emphasizing the first five of eight *Northwestern Principles of Inclusive Teaching*.

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Introduction

This guidance for textbook chapter authors is derived from the [Northwestern Principles of Inclusive Teaching](#), a research-informed framework designed to support equitable and effective learning for *all* students. While the principles were originally articulated for instructor pedagogy, they are translated here into concrete authorial practices that shape how disciplinary knowledge is presented in textbooks.

The focus is on chapter-level decisions—such as framing, examples, explanations, tone, and scaffolding—that materially influence learners’ access to content, sense of belonging, and their development as active participants in the discipline. The elements below are organized around the first five principles, outlining the core ideas, explaining why they matter for student learning, and offering a checklist of specific design moves authors can use to put them into practice.

Principle 1: Consider your and your students’ social identities and their implications for learning

1. Represent knowledge as socially situated, not neutral or universal.

Why This Strengthens Learning: When learners understand how knowledge is shaped by people and contexts, they develop stronger critical thinking, are better able to evaluate claims, and are more likely to see themselves as legitimate contributors to the discipline.

- Textbook chapter acknowledges that knowledge is produced by people in specific historical, cultural, and social contexts.
- OPTIONAL:** Textbook chapter includes positionality statement, if needed. (*Refer to example below.*)

Example Positionality Statement:

(The example below is adapted from a journal article and rewritten to be more accessible for student readers.)

This chapter was written by a team of scholars with different backgrounds and areas of expertise, including social psychology, global equity, education, and the biomedical sciences. Their perspectives are shaped by both their identities and their research, as well as a shared understanding that experiences in fields like STEM are not the same for everyone.

In particular, their work recognizes that Black women and other marginalized groups have often been stereotyped or overlooked in academic spaces. Drawing on research about inequality, mentoring, and lived experiences, the authors approach this topic with a focus on how social identities and power shape opportunities, challenges, and outcomes. As you read, consider how different perspectives influence what we study, how we interpret evidence, and whose experiences are centered.

2. Include multiple perspectives as integral, not supplemental.

Why This Strengthens Learning: Integrating multiple viewpoints improves conceptual understanding by revealing the complexity of ideas and prevents learners from mistaking a single dominant perspective for the full scope of the field.

- Diverse perspectives are woven throughout the textbook chapter, rather than isolated in sidebars or special sections.

Principle 2: Establish and communicate clear course standards and expectations

3. Surface the hidden curriculum of one's discipline.

Why This Strengthens Learning: Clarifying how one's field evaluates evidence, constructs arguments, or approaches problem-solving reduces unnecessary barriers and allows learners to focus cognitive effort on understanding and application.

- Textbook chapter makes disciplinary norms explicit, rather than assumed.

4. State learning goals in clear, action-oriented terms.

Why This Strengthens Learning: Clear goals support self-regulation and metacognition, helping learners monitor their progress and align their study strategies with intended outcomes.

- Textbook chapter explicitly communicates what readers are expected to be able to do with the content.

Principle 3: Offered varied ways for students to demonstrate their learning and knowledge

5. Provide multiple means of representation.

Why This Strengthens Learning: Multiple representations deepen comprehension by allowing learners to approach ideas through different cognitive pathways, reinforcing understanding over time.

- Textbook chapter uses a mixture of narrative text, visuals, examples, data, and representations.

6. Invite multiple forms of sensemaking and application.

Why This Strengthens Learning: Allowing varied forms of engagement increases motivation and transfer, enabling learners to connect new knowledge to prior experience and real-world contexts.

- Textbook chapter uses analytic, reflective, applied, and creative ways to engage with ideas.

Principle 4: Communicate sources of support for learning

7. Normalize struggle as part of disciplinary learning.

Why This Strengthens Learning: Normalizing challenge reduces anxiety and supports persistence, helping learners interpret difficulty as productive rather than as a signal of inadequacy.

- Common difficulties and misconceptions are acknowledged within the textbook chapter.

8. Scaffold learning processes, not just outcomes.

Why This Strengthens Learning: Scaffolding helps learners internalize the author's approaches to thinking in the discipline, fostering independence and long-term skill development.

- Textbook chapter models thinking, revision, and step-by-step reasoning.

Principle 5: Cultivate a welcoming and inclusive course climate

9. Use language, tone, and examples that signal belonging.

Why This Strengthens Learning: A welcoming tone reduces affective barriers to learning and increases engagement, particularly for learners assessing whether they belong in the field.

- Textbook chapter is written in ways that affirm many kinds of learners and experiences.
- OPTIONAL:** Textbook chapter includes content note, if needed. (*Refer to example below.*)

Example Content Note:

This chapter passes through topics including [e.g., loss, inequality, identity, etc.], which may feel emotionally significant or challenging for some readers. Engaging in ways that support your learning and well-being is encouraged—whether that means slowing down, stepping away, or returning when you’re ready.

10. Portray learners as emerging contributors, not passive recipients.

Why This Strengthens Learning: Positioning learners as contributors promotes intellectual confidence, deeper engagement, and the development of disciplinary identity.

- Textbook chapter frames readers as active participants in knowledge building.

Conclusion

Taken together, these ten guidelines demonstrate how the [Northwestern Principles of Inclusive Teaching](#) can be embedded directly into textbook chapters. By contextualizing knowledge, clarifying expectations, offering varied engagement, scaffolding learning, and affirming belonging, authors strengthen learning for all readers while preserving—and often enhancing—disciplinary rigor.

AI Tech Tip

Use a secure generative AI tool (e.g., Copilot, ChatGPT) to review how your draft aligns with these guidelines. Use only institutionally-approved tools for sharing unpublished content.

Prompt:

Analyze the attached chapter using the checklist items from “Translating the Northwestern Principles of Inclusive Teaching for Textbook Authors”

(<https://searle.northwestern.edu/resources/learning-teaching-guides/translating-principles-of-inclusive-teaching-for-textbook-authors.html>) listed below:

- **Textbook chapter acknowledges that knowledge is produced by people in specific historical, cultural, and social contexts.**
- **OPTIONAL: Textbook chapter includes positionality statement, if needed.**
- **Diverse perspectives are woven throughout the textbook chapter, rather than isolated in sidebars or special sections.**
- **Textbook chapter makes disciplinary norms explicit, rather than assumed.**
- **Textbook chapter explicitly communicates what readers are expected to be able to do with the content.**
- **Textbook chapter uses a mixture of narrative text, visuals, examples, data, and representations.**
- **Textbook chapter uses analytic, reflective, applied, and creative ways to engage with ideas**
- **Common difficulties and misconceptions are acknowledged within the textbook chapter.**
- **Textbook chapter models thinking, revision, and step-by-step reasoning.**
- **Textbook chapter is written in ways that affirm many kinds of learners and experiences.**
- **OPTIONAL: Textbook chapter includes content note, if needed.**

For each item, note alignment level, give examples, and suggest revisions. Also summarize overall strengths and 2–3 priority improvements.

How to Cite this Guide

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