

Introduction

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) was founded in 1987 in order to achieve the following mission:

To advance the quality of teaching and learning by

- *maintaining high and rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do,*
- *providing a national voluntary system certifying teachers who meet these standards, and*
- *advocating related education reforms to integrate National Board Certification in American education and to capitalize on the expertise of National Board Certified Teachers.*

National Board Certification has proven itself to be a valid and reliable method of identifying the nation's accomplished teachers, with the added benefit of providing candidates with a professional development experience many rate as the best they have ever experienced. They also note, however, that it took a great deal of time—usually the first six weeks to three months of their candidacy, working with their standards, collecting evidence, and drafting portfolio entries—before everything clicked and they suddenly “got it.” Here are some examples of what they “got.”

- An understanding of what the National Board is assessing and measuring vs. what “I” want them to assess and measure.
- The National Board’s concept of “quality teaching” (as defined by NBPTS standards) vs. a collection of definitions for quality, some directly contradicting others, based for the most part on idiosyncratic experience.
- The ability to understand what really matters when demonstrating accomplished teaching vs. good stories that make me feel good about myself but don’t represent productive work.
- The difference between convincing evidence vs. relevant but unconvincing evidence.
- An engagement in critical self-analysis based on high and rigorous standards that lead to better teaching—regardless of how “good” I was before I began.
- An understanding that, for the National Board, the only thing that ultimately matters is improved student learning.
- An understanding that National Board certification is a designation they are working hard to earn, vs. an award or recognition they hope to win.

Our first goal in developing this guide was to help National Board candidates “get it” sooner rather than later: if a candidate would normally have “gotten it” in six weeks, we want the candidate to “get it” in three; if it would have taken three months, we hope to reduce the time to a month-and-a-half. It will still require a great deal of effort on a candidate’s part to “get it,” but it is our hope, by drawing on the wisdom and experience of National Board Certified Teachers, we will mark a path candidates can follow in an attempt to steer this professional growth experience in its intended direction a little sooner than might otherwise be possible.

Our second goal is to encourage school districts throughout Kansas to use this resource as a companion to the Guiding Questions developed by NBPTS and published in the directions on their web site in order to enhance their own staff development activities. All teachers, whether they are working toward National Board Certification or not, can improve the quality of their work if they have a better understanding of the factors related to accomplished teaching. For example, it is not enough to simply assert that knowledge of students matters. An accomplished teacher knows and understands:

- why knowledge of students matters;
- the kind of knowledge about students that is most relevant to a specific teaching assignment;
- how to efficiently and effectively collect that knowledge; and,
- how to use that knowledge to build and/or strengthen instructional skills and abilities that will in turn contribute to improved student learning.

This same level of understanding is also crucial in goal setting and forming meaningful connections between goals, planning, structuring of instructional sequence, formative and summative assessments, analysis, reflection—and the list goes on and on.

It is important to remember that the suggestions included in this resource will not replace the insight and effort a National Board candidate must apply to the individual work as the candidate goes through the candidacy process nor guarantee success. The information in this resource is based on the writers' various personal experiences with the NBPTS certification process. There is much more a candidate will have to address and provide in the way of information, supporting documents, instructional artifacts, etc. for each entry. The guidance authors provide here is, from their experience, what will help candidates overcome their greatest challenges in regard to developing and submitting strong entries—entries focused on the tasks of accomplished teaching and learning, and show evidence of meeting the NBPTS standards.

Support for National Board Candidates

We have titled this resource *Working Wisdom: A Guide to Accomplished Teaching* for two specific reasons. First, and most importantly, the suggestions included in it have worked for the National Board Certified Teachers who made them.

Second, these suggestions reflect the **wisdom** of the NBCTs who made them. By wisdom, we mean something very specific: a clear and convincing understanding of both the ends (National Board Certification) and the means (how to achieve that Certification) of the candidacy process. In other words, following the advice presented here has the potential to increase candidates' respective understandings of what they should be most concerned with, why they should be concerned with it, and how they should act on that understanding. This vision of the "big picture" is essential to help candidates use their time efficiently and effectively.

Assumptions

We make three assumptions about National Board Candidates who choose to use this document for assistance in their pursuit of National Board Certification:

- *You have read and studied the standards for your certificate area.*

- *You have read and studied the instructions for each portfolio component for your certificate area.*
- *You have read and studied the rubrics provided in the Scoring Guide for your certificate area.*

Note: The Portfolio Instructions and the Scoring Guide can be found by going to the downloads section of the NBPTS Website (www.nbpts.org), finding your certificate area, and following the appropriate link to the desired destination.

Getting Started

Once you have completed the three tasks listed above, the “working wisdom” of a National Board Certified Teacher can be of help to you. There are many ways to use these suggestions, but here are what we believe will be the most helpful.

If you haven’t already printed out the “Composing Written Commentary” section from your portfolio entry instructions, do so now. Then sit down with (1) that document, (2) a copy of the standards for your certificate area, and (3) the corresponding section (by both certificate area and portfolio entry number) of this booklet.

You will notice a series of italicized questions in your portfolio instructions. The questions were designed to help you collect the clear, consistent, and convincing evidence you will include in your response to each of these questions, while the suggestions in these documents will both help clarify what is meant by “clear, consistent, and convincing” and make very specific suggestions regarding how to collect that evidence. These documents can also serve as a check on yourself to make certain you have covered what you need to cover.

Begin by identifying the suggestions from Working Wisdom that both relate to a specific prompt in your portfolio instructions and appear to offer you the most fruitful use of your time.

It is important to remember not all suggestions will be equally helpful to all candidates. Each contributor has offered suggestions for gathering evidence to support a candidate’s decision of how to possibly respond effectively to these prompts. The candidate should use whatever combination of those suggestions that will best help answer the prompts in a manner that is clear, consistent, and convincing for the reality of the candidate’s own classroom and journey through the National Board process.

The candidate must remember there is limited space in which to respond to each prompt; therefore, all information cannot be included because all information is not equally compelling for the reality of the candidate’s own classroom. The suggestions provided in this resource serve as a possible guide for responding to the written commentary prompts for each portfolio entry.

In any certificate area, a candidate must use professional judgment to select the best evidence possible to include in a portfolio entry rather than just the relevant evidence. Merely relevant evidence just fills space and compels an assessor to ask “So what?” Best evidence, however, is convincing and compels an assessor to smile and nod in agreement. It is the same experience you have as a teacher when a student “gets it,” and you are amazed that someone so young has such significant understanding.

Always aim for amazement.

What? So What? and Now What?

The prompts for the written commentary in each portfolio should lead the candidate to three types of thinking: description, analysis, and reflection. All three are essential to providing a clear, consistent, and convincing written response. To aid in this thinking, the candidate could review the written commentary to determine if the following three questions have been addressed:

What? (description) **So what?** (analysis) **Now what?** (reflection)

Standards Matter

A word about standards in general. Standards are written with a certain group in mind and, therefore, are not interchangeable. For example, the *Next Generation Science Standards* are written to focus on P-12 science learning, the National Science Teachers Association's programmatic standards are written to focus on what college students studying to be science teachers should know at the beginning of their teaching careers, and the *NBPTS Science Standards* focus on what an accomplished science teacher with at least three years of teaching experience knows and does. While all are important and appropriate at times, when the National Board process talks about standards, it is normally the last of these.

Working Wisdom: A Guide to Accomplished Teaching is designed to provide educators with specific suggestions that will help them know and understand "these things." We hope you find it useful.

Alvin Peters, NBCT
Director, Great Plains Center for
National Teacher Certification
Emporia State University

Dr. Roger Caswell, NBCT
Director (2006-2012),
Great Plains Center for
National Teacher Certification
Emporia State University

Linda Sobieski
Director (1995-2006),
Great Plains Center for
National Teacher Certification
Emporia State University

Andrew Davis, NBCT
Wichita Public Schools