



Authenticity, Body Language & Presence- Teaching Authentically

Description

Defining Presence•

Differentiating the Teacher from the Teachings

- The teachings are the content. The teacher delivers the content.
- The teachings are filtered through the presence• of the human doing the teaching.

Why Define & Dissect Your Presence?

What exactly makes up your overall presence? This is a difficult-to-pinpoint aspect of teaching, but here we endeavor to explore it for the purposes of more easily identifying opportunities to increase teaching effectiveness.

- We can think of presence as a collection of attributes and behaviors that include the sonic elements and rhythms of your voice, the words you choose, your body language and other factors related to how you show up and deliver your teaching.
- On one hand, a teacher's presence may be the most obvious thing about them and includes what makes them unique. But on the other hand, it's difficult to tease apart the things that make up a person's presence in order to examine them more methodically.
- The reason we are using this lesson to dissect presence is to enable you to 1) Embrace what is uniquely you, while also 2) Systematically identifying aspects of your delivery that may be improved for maximum effectiveness.
- In other words, while sometimes a teacher can improve by learning to refine a technique such as choosing words to express a teaching, other times improvement comes from finding ways to be more your authentic self.

This is Not About Conforming to Norms•



The point in exploring elements of your teaching style is not to imply there is a “right” way to be a teacher. Your individuality reflects your particular gifts and differentiates you among teachers. This is your strength!

- In other words, you should not confuse analyzing your approach with an effort to change what makes you unique. This examination is not for the purposes of conforming to “norms.”
- Rather, the goal is to use methods that assist you in authentically expressing your unique experience and perspective.

This analysis is intended to:

1. Inspire you to clarify your values and goals as a teacher, and
2. Empower you to experiment with specific techniques to build and improve aspects of your teaching that will help you to meet those goals.

Some aspects of this topic may naturally make you feel vulnerable and imperfect – which, remember, we all are!

- So, we invite you to take a nice, slow breath. Relax your face and shoulders, and choose to be curious.
- Consciously choose to see your own areas for improvement and feel excitement about the power you have to continuously evolve as a person and teacher.

What is Authenticity?

Authentic teaching refers to the process of uncovering what is genuine for you: your own experience, your own truth, your own voice, your own presence.

- You might consider refinements to be less about finding the “right” way to teach and more about uncovering anything that is inauthentic for you.
- The fundamental ground of authenticity is to avoid teaching what you’ve simply been taught (or have heard or read) and instead teach what you know from your own experience (both as a practitioner and as a teacher).
- However, please also note the difference between leveraging your experience vs. teaching your particular path. For more information, see “Stay Focused on the Student’s Experience” in [Teacher-Student Relationships](#).

Saying, “I Don’t Know”

Do you feel as if you should have a definitive answer for every question – to be an expert on any topic brought to you by a student?

Another critical part of being authentic is to become comfortable with saying, “I don’t know. But I will find out and get back to you.”

See also: [When to Refer Out](#)



Avoiding Cliches

Kat Heagberg of Yoga International does an excellent job of explaining the “yoga voice” or “yoga-speak” and why teachers are encouraged to minimize it:

By yoga-speak, I mean the speech patterns, habits, and clichés that we tend to fall into when trying to sound how we think a yoga teacher should sound. The trouble with yoga-speak is that it creates a barrier between teachers and students, often making us come across as perfectly polished, sing-songy yoga-robots (yobots?) instead of real, live, flesh-and-blood humans. And most of all, it prevents us from teaching as ourselves—the unique, interesting, adept, yet (charmingly) flawed teachers that we are.

— **Kat Heagberg**

Related to the idea of being “perfectly polished” is attempting to be inauthentically “deep.” See Theresa Elliott’s comment:

THE TEMPTATION TO SOUND “DEEP”

When I teach, I find it tempting to use words and phrases in class because they sound deep. And my using them implies I know what I am talking about. But I wonder, do I really know what these words mean? And then a more troubling question arises: does my use of buzz words like “karma”, “heart”, and “prana” really communicate meaning, or does it get in the way? I have a rule around asana that is shared by many teachers. I do not teach poses I am not intimately acquainted with. I have extended this rule to philosophical or esoteric concepts. I do not talk about the human condition, life or mystical experiences that I have not personally been through. — **Theresa Elliott**

Confidence & Humility

We don’t propose there is a right way to exhibit the traits of confidence and humility. Rather, we invite you to shine a light on your views of these traits and how you view yourself in these areas. Consider:

- What is your experience in authority situations?
- How confident do you genuinely feel about teaching?
- Where is your personal work in terms of confidence and humility?
- How can you be most authentic?
- In what ways does your ego tend to seep out?

The expert readings below offer excellent insight.

THE RIGHT TO SOUND MAGNIFICENT

Liberating our voices is self-improvement of the highest degree. Through vocal experimentation and compassionate self-study, it is possible to discover both our tendencies and their origins. That, for instance, we have been making ourselves sound small because of the responsibility that sounding powerful might hoist upon us. Or because we wish to be taken care of, rather than caring for others. Or because we secretly wish to disappear into the floorboards. Are we worried about being lampooned for



putting on airs? â??Who does she think she is, speaking with such authority and resonance?â?• The truth is, we have every right to sound magnificent. We are here; we are human; we are alive. We are life, speaking to life, and encouraging it to thrive. We amplify the message of yogaâ??s power to connect us with our highest selves when we allow ourselves to sound like all that we are. â?? **Amber Burke**

AUTHORITY & MODESTY

Thank you for saying I convey authority, and in a modest manner, but any authority I may project is really just simple clarity. If you are clear about something, then you are not confused, and then whatever utterances you make or behaviors you exhibit will simply reflect that un-confused clarity. From my perspective, I am mostly clear that I donâ??t know, that my personal ground-level perspective is necessarily limited, and that it makes more sense to no longer make up my own mind about things, and to, instead, go within, become still, ask inwardly for Guidance, and then dare to do as the inner Guidance prompts me to do. This comes across as being confident, yet modest, because you are not in charge of what you find yourself Knowing when you Listen. You canâ??t take credit for it. What comes through you will be powerful and transformative because it is not personally contrived, but it is the wisdom of the Infinite flowing through you, not your personal wisdom. â?? **Erich Schiffman**

See more: [Teaching Methodology Foundations: Mindfulness, Humility, Boundaries](#)

Gaze & Expression

What a person projects, is determined in part by what she does with her eyes and face, as well as overall body language.

- Consider consciously softening your face and expression to support your words.
- Learn what expression you make when thinking or speaking, and when you are listening or reflecting. If you unconsciously create a stern face when thinking, for instance, practice softening your face.
- Consider the potential effects of offering a soft smile and if you might want to consciously increase how often you smile.

We invite you also to notice where you look when you are teaching, including during the opening and during various parts of class.

- How long do you hold a studentâ??s gaze?
- Do you look at every student or a subset of students?
- Whether youâ??re looking into studentsâ?? eyes, at studentsâ?? bodies, at the floor or space while speaking, are you conscious of your tendencies?

Engage in a conscious breath and use that time to soften your expression, gaze and body language.

Teaching to Various Learning Styles

You will have a way of teaching that is most natural for you.



- Become aware of what that is and who it appeals to.
- And then consider how you might grow your skills to appeal to more learning styles.

Here are some ideas for different techniques that might appeal to students with various learning styles.

- Provide clear visual demonstration; as appropriate, consider demonstrating both desired alignment and mis-alignment.
- Use direct language for those who do best with concrete language and clarity.
- Use metaphor and imagery for intuitive and feeling-based learning.
- As appropriate, give feedback through touch.

For Newer Teachers

We're all familiar with the challenges of being a beginner at something, including teaching. It may at times be nerve-racking but it's an honorable state; to begin is an act of courage, faith and inspiration â deserving of support and kudos.

If you focus on awareness, discernment and faith, it will surely be a joyful and rewarding journey.

- Newer teachers (as with beginners of anything) are in a unique phase of their journey. A beginner's techniques typically undergo an appropriate phase of imitation of more experienced and skilled mentors. Inexperienced teachers might imitate aspects they have learned from their own favorite teachers, including how they verbalize and demonstrate. This is a natural way of learning to teach.
- We invite newer teachers to consider the interesting dynamic of teaching what one personally knows while appropriately using teaching techniques that are learned from others.
- Please also note that some techniques can be considered âcommon knowledgeâ as opposed to imitation.
- We invite your conscious consideration of the subtle differentiation of what arises from within based on your unique experience, what is common knowledge, and what is being consciously imitated.
- An unrivaled way to improve your skills efficiently is to engage a mentor and/or specifically request feedback from others you respect and trust.

From the Experts

SPEAK FROM EXPERIENCE

How you communicate is just as important as what you communicate. Teaching in a genuine way is the key to being a great teacher. If it's clear that you are speaking from experience, you'll win your students' confidence and trust. â **Melanie Cooper**

DON'T TEACH IT UNTIL YOU KNOW IT

There's talk in yoga classes about spirit but most of it is not genuine. It's just somebody reading something. That's a start but it easily turns into a sort of New Age blather. But when the teacher can



get confident enough to teach from [his or her] own truths, then whatever they have to say is so much more profound. If you're feeling like you are uneducated regarding your own spirit, go on a quest. Go on a quest for coming into a relationship with your own spirit and don't teach it until you know it! Go work with people that can help you! It's work. But do the work because, oh, my god, your life will be so much richer! Do the work for yourself and then you will begin to speak honestly and authentically in a way that can help your students quest also. • **Ana Forrest**

IMITATION TO BEGIN

In teacher training, my trainer colleagues and I use the phrase •Imitate, integrate, innovate• to describe the process by which a new yoga teacher uncovers his or her unique and authentic voice. • **Caitlin Casella**

TEACH LIKE YOU'RE TEACHING YOUR FRIENDS

Here's a tip that has been a HUGE help for me and one that I often share with the new teachers that I mentor and train: Teach as though you were teaching a group of your closest friends or family members. You don't have to perform. You don't have to play a role. You don't have to sound ethereal. Just speak in your regular voice and tell them how to do the pose. • **Kat Heagberg**

Teaching Authentically

Questions Answered Here

1. How might you describe authenticity in teaching?
2. What is •yoga-speak• and what is the trouble with it?
3. What are some considerations for newer teachers regarding a natural need to imitate teaching techniques?

What is Authenticity?



By authentic teaching, we are referring to the process of uncovering what is genuine for you: your own experience, your own truth, your own voice, your own presence.

- Ultimately, a teacher might consider her job less about finding the “right” way to teach and more about uncovering anything that is inauthentic for her.
- We might define the fundamental ground of authenticity as avoiding teaching what you’ve simply been taught (or have heard or read) and instead teach what you know from your own experience (both as a practitioner and as a teacher).
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- Do you feel as if you should have a definitive answer for every question to be an expert on any topic brought to you by a student?
- What is your comfort level with saying, “I don’t know”? We propose that this is another critical part of being authentic.
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For Newer Teachers

We are intimately familiar with the nerve-racking challenges of being a beginner and we honor those in that state! We hope that by offering the following, you can use awareness, discernment and faith in your challenging and rewarding journey.

- Newer teachers (as with beginners of anything) are in a unique phase of their journey. A beginner’s techniques typically undergo an appropriate phase of imitation of more experienced and skilled mentors. Inexperienced teachers might imitate aspects they have learned from their own favorite teachers, including how they verbalize and demonstrate. This is a natural way of learning to teach.
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Author

michaeljoelhall