

FLO MicroCourse Handout:  
Bringing the Practice of Positionality into Teaching and Learning

“There is no thing as a single-issue struggle because  
we do not live single-issue lives” - Audre Lorde

**Introduction:**

Positionality refers to the dynamic relationship between an individual and their various personal and social identities, encompassing dimensions such as gender, race, class, ethnicity, ability, and place, among others.

“A positionality statement is an explicit recognition of your own identity and the ways your identity might affect how you listen, how you are perceived, how you move through the world, and what barriers you face or privileges you have. It is an exercise in self-reflection. It asks you to think about various aspects of your identity: things like nationality, race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, education level, familial roles, occupation, physical ability, mental health, and age.” (Grain, 2022, p. 3)

**Positionality in the Context of Teaching and Learning:**

Positionality influences our course design, teaching methods, and feedback and grading practices, all of which play a critical role in student learning and success. Therefore, engaging in positionality praxis could help us imagine a pedagogical practice that is iterative, fluid, flexible, and self-reflexive.

[Harrington \(2022\)](#) emphasises the value of positionality practice for educators:

- Demonstrating reflection for students.
- Recognizing potential privileges as well as biases and mitigating the power dynamics in the learning environment.
- Considering ways to meet the needs of diverse students and inviting more underrepresented voices into classes.

Here are some practical applications of positionality in the learning environment ([Dzioba, 2013](#)):

- Draft a positionality statement to present on the initial day, on the syllabus, or in the introduction module.
- Encourage students to write and share their positionality statements in small groups to facilitate community building and encourage reflection on how identities shape learning experiences.
- Propose arts-based activities so that students can express their multifaceted identities through diverse mediums like paintings, poetry, collages, or digital artworks.

## Getting Started with Crafting your Positionality Statement:

A positionality statement can be crafted in many different forms from a written paragraph, a poem, a drawing or painting, a video essay, or a story. You can even combine multiple methods, such as photo-voice, to convey your positionality in the way that best reflects your intersecting identities.

Before you pick your method, a great place to begin is to write down everything that makes you, *you*.

Start with some preliminary questions [adapted from [SFU Library-Shield Assignment \(2020\)](#)]:

- What is your name?
- Are you a settler/non-Indigenous person?
- Are you Black?
- Are you a Person of Colour?
- Are you Indigenous?
- What is your relationship to the organisation you are working with (are you student/faculty/staff/etc.)?
- What department are you located in at that organisation?

Then focus on these reflective questions [adapted from [Harrington \(2022\)](#)]:

- What social identities - race, gender, sexual orientation, age, social class, religion, ability and so on - do I identify with and how significant is each identity to how I teach?
- What type of training and experiences do I have? How have they shaped who I am professionally, and how might they impact how students relate to me and my teaching style?
- Where do I know from? How was my discipline developed? What role did my discipline play in reifying dominant ideologies or worldviews? What role do I play in this work? In what ways do I challenge or divest from some of these practices? Why or why not?
- What elements of my identity, experiences, and worldviews shape my:
  - Teaching philosophy, course design, teaching practices, and content
  - Research
  - Scholarship

## References:

Dzioba, B. (2023). Bringing the practice of Positionality into Teaching and Learning. *BCcampus* <https://bccampus.ca/2023/03/01/bringing-the-practice-of-positionality-into-teaching-and-learning/>

Grain, K. (2022). *Critical Hope: How to grapple with complexity, lead with purpose, and cultivate transformative social change*. North Atlantic Books.

Harrington, C. (2022, Jan. 26). Reflect on your positionality to ensure student success. *Inside Higher Ed*. <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2022/01/26/successful-instructors-understand-their-own-biases-and-beliefs-opinion>

Simon Fraser University. (2023, Sept. 6). Positionality statement and Land Acknowledgement Workshop. *SFU Library*. <https://www.lib.sfu.ca/help/academic-integrity/indigenous-initiatives/icrc/land-acknowledgement-workshop#positionality>