

**TEACHING AND TENURE TIPS**  
AEJMC Standing Committee on Teaching

**AEJMC**

Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication  
Founded 1912

## **CONTENTS**

To new faculty .....	3
On teaching .....	4
On research .....	8
On service .....	10
On tenure files and evaluations .....	11
Other thoughts .....	14

## **TO NEW FACULTY**

We realize that your first years in academe can be overwhelming. We know, because we've all been there. Looking back, we also realized it would have been a whole lot easier if someone had given us a few tips along the way.

Some of you will be lucky and have mentors who will guide you along the path to tenure. Others might be told "ask if you need to know anything" — even though you don't know what questions to ask. Still others will be shown an office and then left isolated to figure everything out on your own.

Whatever your situation, the following tips may help.

If you have a mentor, sit down with him or her and see what applies for your department. If your department says "just ask," these tips might help stimulate some dialogue. And for those of you with little or no guidance, this will at least give you a place to start. Whatever your situation, don't hesitate to seek help, even if you have to go to institutional sources or to senior, accomplished faculty in other disciplines.

The following tips have come from our mentors, gems we've learned in workshops or at conference sessions, or through our own experience. This collection of tips has been divided into the three main areas each of us is evaluated on — teaching, research and service. In addition, we've added sections on preparing tenure files and evaluations as well as some other thoughts.

We hope these tips are helpful as you begin your career.

— Standing Committee on Teaching  
Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication

## ON TEACHING

- ❖ Put your class(es) into perspective. That is, let the students know why this is important for them (sell the benefits). Hammer it home, especially for those who don't want to be there. Start with your syllabus and continue throughout the course. In the end, you're the only one who can add value beyond what is expected.
- ❖ The same is true for assignments. If students don't understand why a particular assignment is important, they'll consider it busy work. (And you'll be dinged on your evaluations for it.) For example, I have my students do a typeface scavenger hunt. It's a huge, awful, time-consuming assignment that they hate to do and I hate to grade. But I tell them that it's the only way I know of to get them to look really, really carefully at typefaces — and that it will change how they see type. After the assignment is turned in I reinforce that by asking, "OK, who's starting to look at type on movie credits? Menus? Isn't it driving you crazy?" Then we talk about typefaces and type personalities and how that can match a product or a brand.
- ❖ Involve professionals. Let your students see your relationship with professionals. It gives you credibility. Telling an occasional war story does the same. My best ones that the students seem to get the most out of involve ethical situations, sexual harassment, the drinking and drugs in the business and how I dealt with those situations.
- ❖ Give students assignments to create something they can use for interviews. Resumes, portfolios, string books, plansbooks, pitch story memos, news releases, or whatever. They also can take these home to mom and dad. It gives everyone something to feel good about.
- ❖ Expectations are important. Set a clear vision and authoritative (not authoritarian) tone during the first day of class. Best not to do a drive-by the first day: Do something and make them do something. It's better to be tough early, not later. My students are there the full 80 minutes the first class and get enough of a lecture on Day 1 so they can turn in an assignment on Day 2.
- ❖ A bit more on expectations. That rumor mill among students can work for you. I'm known as being tough but fair, and I've worked hard at getting that reputation. I also tell my students that I've learned over the years that people (including students) tend to live up or down to expectations. That's why I expect a lot. A whole lot. And my

students produce great work because of it. If they expect a blow-off class and get something really hard... well, that's a problem. But if they walk in expecting a tough class that will teach them a lot of good stuff that they'll use in future classes and after they graduate, they'll think they got their money's worth. That's reflected in evaluations, too.

- ❖ Let the students know the value of the class, or what happens in the class. For example, many of our students have a hard time with criticism. I hear, time and again, about how my grading is subjective. So I position that up front, on my syllabus: "Learning to accept criticism in a classroom setting prepares you for life as a professional. Perhaps not now, but someday you'll appreciate these tough standards. Remember, whoever hires you is going to be bigger, meaner, and in charge of your paycheck. This isn't just a class. This is training for life."
- ❖ Mentor your students. Get to know where they're coming from — geographically, culturally, socially. Meet with them individually. Let them talk. See what their anxieties are, then address them. When you talk to students one-on-one they get to know you as a person instead of someone who just stands up in front of the class. That, too, is reflected in student evaluations.
- ❖ Make your syllabus student friendly. It sets the tone for your class. Don't write a Gestapo syllabus and then wonder why the students don't think you're approachable. I attended a pre-conference teaching workshop at AEJMC several years ago that talked about how to write a syllabus. I completely changed how I do mine. (Thanks Tom Bowers.) Instead of "class objectives" I now have "what you will learn." Instead of "assignments" I have "how to demonstrate what you learn." Everything is written from the student's perspective rather than from a tyrannical teacher's perspective. It may seem like a tiny thing, but it says that you're interested in them and what they'll learn.
- ❖ When at all possible, position everything as something we do for students. We have a GSP Test because we know that grammar, spelling and punctuation are important for students to know and be able to use in our program. And it will make them more employable when they get out. Same thing about the things we have to do because of accreditation. "No, we have to limit class size to 20, and while it

makes it harder for you to get in now, you'll really appreciate that when you're in the class."

- ❖ Don't think of all this as just show. It isn't. Decisions are tough. Sometimes really tough. Like failing a whole team of graduating seniors for faking research. But it also is just one step in creating a stronger reputation for your department. That, in turn, will produce stronger recruits to your program who become better graduates who get better jobs. See, it all comes back to the students.
- ❖ Be excited. Your enthusiasm and passion for whatever you're teaching will come through. And some of it will even be passed along to your students.
- ❖ Make class exciting, fun, interesting, relevant. Sometimes that means less detail. My mentor told me "the longer I teach, the less I teach, and the more students learn." I've found that true over the years. As I drop some things from my syllabus (teaching less) I spend more time on other things (and they learn more).
- ❖ Teaching is a bit like drama. Don't be too quiet or too stiff. Come out from behind the lectern and talk to them. Whenever I go to class as I walk by the front desk I say "Showtime." Teaching is hard work. I've always said that I'm tired at the end of teaching days... and I should be if I do it right. Put energy into your classes.
- ❖ When I really want students to get a point I say, "Let me tell you a story." Pens go down and students listen. Intently. And then I weave the story that makes the point I want to make. Try it sometime.
- ❖ When you want to emphasize something, try repeating it three or four times, each time with different inflection, tone and rhythm. Your students will laugh, but they'll remember. Or make them say it back to you, all together as a sort of class mantra. If they say something out loud, they're more likely to remember it. I've even had the class sing the Oscar Mayer Wiener jingle (Oh I wish I were...) to teach subjunctive mood. (Side note: there are two examples in the one jingle.)
- ❖ Use your student evaluations to make you better. I always ask for written feedback in addition to the required computer forms. I usually have three specific questions, but my first two are always the same. "Tell me what I did right this semester so I can do it again next

time.” Then “Tell me what I did wrong. But don’t just tell me something sucks, give me some ideas on what I can do to make it better.” Note that this constructive criticism will change the tone of your student evaluations. You’ll have good things that you’re doing, and it also tends to eliminate the whining and venting that you sometimes get. Most important, I’ve gotten some good ideas that have helped me restructure future classes.

- ❖ Four weeks into the class, pass out index cards and ask students to write anonymously the four things they want you to keep doing and four things they want you to stop doing. You’ll be surprised at the things they see that you don’t. Change those things that will improve the class, not just the things that will make the class more convenient for them.
- ❖ Save any notes that you get from students. I just drop them in a file cleverly called “notes from students.” If it’s an email, I print it out and drop it in the file. This has two purposes. Some you may decide to make copies of and put in your expandable file when you go up for midterm or tenure review. And on those really, really bad days when you think that teaching is just too overwhelming and you’re not accomplishing anything anyway — well, it’s nice to go back and read some of those and know that you’re making a difference in at least a few lives.
- ❖ Teaching should be about more than student evaluations. What kind of courses do you teach? (big v. small, skills v. theory, lower-level v. capstone) How much advising do you do? Think of this as mentoring and a chance to spend some one-on-one time with your students.
- ❖ Don’t teach too many different classes in the beginning. New preps can be a time killer. Cover the basics that are required and save the electives that you want to teach for a few years after you’ve established those first classes.

## ON RESEARCH

- ❖ Write down your research agenda. It can change, but just writing it down lets you think through what you want to publish and how the articles will build on each other. Do a five-year plan (you go up in year six). Again, it can change, but know where you want to go.
- ❖ Three refereed articles a year is a great goal. Think strategically about how you can make this happen. For example, you might write a paper to present at AEJMC, then rework it with the comments from the reviewers and submit it, with a revamped title, to a journal.
- ❖ Here's another way to get more publications. When you start a new research project, think about what you can do at the same time but spin off into a separate paper. For example, one of my first research projects as a new faculty member was a national survey of advertising educators that mirrored a national survey that had been sent to advertising creative directors. I had three different sections in the same survey that became three different papers. Here are the words of my mentor: "It took me about 15 years to figure out that these publishing paper trails left by some academic intelligentsia were actually pieces of a puzzle purposively dissected in order to maximize visibility. DUHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH. It's sort of a loaves-and-fishes thing. I suggest that the finer you slice it, the more you pray." Good advice.
- ❖ As you research one thing, dozens of others will pop up, challenging your concentration and your progress. As those serendipitous thoughts come to mind, jot them down in sufficient detail and drop them into a file. Soon, you'll have an excellent pool of research topics.
- ❖ Remember that less is sometimes more. You will need to justify the trajectory of your research and publications at tenure time. You should be able to identify the thread that links all of your research together. Publishing on many different topics with little regard for coherence will not serve you well in the long run.
- ❖ When you get a paper back with reviewer comments, start making the changes immediately. If the reviewers ask for revisions, make them and resubmit quickly. If reviewers/editor reject the manuscript, send it to the next journal down on your list. Don't put it off. It can paralyze you and keep you from writing other papers.



- ❖ Know when to cut your losses. Some articles just won't ever be published. Put your time into what's going to be productive.
- ❖ You should be able to justify your journals. Have the following information for any journal in which you've published to submit to your Promotion & Tenure Committee:
  - Journal title
  - Focus of journal
  - Ranking, if known
  - Circulation
  - Who receives the journal
  - Acceptance rate
  - Number of articles you've submitted to the journal and dates

Give your P&T committee the ammo they need to make your case.

- ❖ At the college level, P&T committees look for gaps. You want to make steady progress year after year.
- ❖ Think about what conferences you attend. For example, AEJMC is an important conference for journalism. The papers/panels presented there are peer reviewed. Better to submit something there than to someplace that isn't peer reviewed, or accepts a presentation based on an abstract rather than a peer-reviewed paper. Spend your time on what will make your file stronger.
- ❖ Go to conferences to see and be seen. Get to know people. One, it makes the conferences much more fun when you see the same folks year after year. Plus these are the people who one day might be writing your external letters reviewing your tenure file. You don't have to be best friends (and, in fact, don't want to be for external reviews). But it never hurts for them to have a face with a name on a dossier.

## **ON SERVICE**

- ❖ You want to be a good citizen. But remember, of the three — teaching, research, service — service counts the least. Focus on the department and what you can do there. For political reasons, avoid service at the college or university level. If someone asks, say that your department wants you to focus on research and teaching at this point. If it's something that you really want to do, tell them that you'll have to talk to your chair first. Then do that.
- ❖ Show the impact of your public service, especially if it's something your class has done. Ask your contact person to write a letter to the dean with a copy to you. Then keep that letter for your files. It will become part of your expandable folder when your dossier goes up for tenure.
- ❖ Pick one professional organization that you want to become involved in, then do it. This is a good way to develop a national name for both you and your department/university. It also helps in the “be seen” part mentioned above when your file goes to external reviewers.

## **ON TENURE FILES AND EVALUATIONS**

- ❖ Make a “stuff to add to vita” file on your computer. Whenever you do something, write something, whatever, just put down enough to jog your memory so when you revise your vita for the next year you don’t forget something.
- ❖ Keep records of all incidents/situations that may impact your tenure process. Document everything with dates/times/places and such.
- ❖ Keep a “hero” copy of all publications in your files. That is, make a clean, neat copy without smudges or black copy lines on it. Don’t staple it. You’ll use this to make all the copies for your annual and tenure review packets. Remember, it didn’t happen if you don’t have a copy of it. Never ever give away the original.
- ❖ Make your “hero” copy right away — as soon as the publication comes out. If it comes from the library and you wait, it might have been sent to the bindery when you need it. (OK, that’s personal experience there.) It will make your life way easier to do it now instead of trying to find everything later when you’re under pressure to get the file together. Make a copy of the cover/contents page of the journal at the same time.
- ❖ When it’s time to prepare your tenure dossier, be sure you follow the instructions that your department/university provides to the last detail. Every institution has different requirements for what is included, how it is to be identified and organized, and how many copies are necessary. Don’t make a bad first impression on the tenure committee through careless preparation of the file materials. Follow directions.
- ❖ When you make multiple copies for your files, plan to come in over the weekend (both days) when it’s quiet and you can spread out. Keeping everything straight is sometimes challenging, and it’s easier to do so when no one is around, needing to make copies, or moving your stuff. Make sure you have a complete set of all copies for yourself and your advocate if your university uses one.
- ❖ Go through and highlight wherever your names appears on all those copies. Contents, article, wherever. This is part of making it as easy as possible for those reading your file.

- ❖ Consider making a cover page for Research, Teaching, and Service for those sections in your expandable file. This page will function as a table of contents on everything in that section. It serves three purposes: some won't read what's in that section, so it lets them know what is there if they had read it; some will read it and it will serve as a reminder when they go back to look a second time; it will make you look more professional and buttoned up. Again, this is part of making it easy for others to review your file.
  
- ❖ If your department/university requires one, your narrative is important. You may want to write one, even if it isn't required. If the committee isn't going to read your whole file, you want to give them your spin on what you've done. In fact, you might write four: a personal narrative that goes in the main binder, then a Research Philosophy, Teaching Philosophy and Service Philosophy that goes in the front of each of those sections in your expandable file. Remember, this is your chance to position yourself. This may be the most important writing you ever do. Slave over it. Rework it and rewrite it several times. Have others look at it for both content as well as grammar, spelling and punctuation. Write a draft of this now so that you know what's important to you. (It's sort of like teaching to the test.) Then you have a chance over the next several years to do what you need to support that. And, of course, you'll rewrite it before your midterm and tenure reviews. Consider it a work in progress.
  
- ❖ Your external reviewers will only address research. Not teaching. Not service. Well, they may, but that's not the focus. Think about that when you give your P&T chair names for external reviewers. We all love professionals, but they may not be the best to evaluate your research. Have those professionals that can address teaching or service write letters to the chair that can go in your expandable file.
  
- ❖ Think about the names that you'll submit for your list of external reviewers at least a year ahead of time. Put a list of 10 together that you think would be qualified to review your file. Know a bit about them. Their rank, university, area of research. Think about why they would be qualified and write it down. As you see these people over the months before your file goes up, ask them face to face if they would be willing to review your tenure dossier — and watch their reaction. If they make excuses about time or whatever, they're telling you not to put their name down. Don't. It may be because they think they'd give you a bad review, for whatever reason, and would prefer not to be put in that situation. You want reviewers who respond with

something like, “Of course, I’d be honored to review your file.”  
Don’t submit anyone who is wishy-washy.

- ❖ Make copies of all your honors, awards, recognitions and such for your expandable files.
- ❖ Show the impact of your research, if you can. How often has your work been cited? Have you been asked to present in workshops or on panels because of your expertise? Have you been interviewed by the media?
- ❖ Check your Probationary Faculty Calendar. Follow all the guidelines for your department/college/university.
- ❖ Your annual reviews are important. If there’s a deficiency noted in one of your annual evaluations, you should specifically address that over the next year. Be sure that those doing your annual evaluation are aware that you’ve made those changes so it is noted in your next evaluation.
- ❖ Save your letter with your original offer from the Dean. Many universities require this as part of your dossier. In fact, you should save all letters from anyone at the university about your performance, appointment or reappointment.
- ❖ Save all copies of annual performance evaluations.
- ❖ You’re ultimately responsible for your file. It should be organized, complete and look professional. Make it an easy sell. And get it done early in case you have to redo anything before the final deadline.
- ❖ For your annual evaluation submit both an updated CV as well as a set of bullet points for teaching, research and service. This is what you think is important in each of the big three categories. Break it out, and remember you should have something in each of the three. Give your P&T committee good ammo to write the evaluation. The more specific you can be, the better. As with all writing, specifics sell better than glittering generalities. Spell out abbreviations so that someone won’t have to come back and ask what something means.

## OTHER THOUGHTS

- ❖ Be proactive. No one will do it for you. Review your record every semester and keep all files up to date.
- ❖ Your third year is pivotal for getting manuscripts into the pipeline so it can work its way through the system for publication and then be included on your CV. Six years may sound like a long time, but it isn't. In fact, it's only five because your dossier goes up the beginning of your sixth year. And many people spend the first year just getting their feet on the ground. That means that Years 2, 3 and 4 should be very productive.
- ❖ If you feel overwhelmed, talk to your chair and/or a trusted director or a seasoned faculty member who you are certain has your best interests in mind. Don't get in so deep that you can't dig out. You may have to set priorities and not do everything at one time.
- ❖ Think about who will be going up the same year that you do. It shouldn't but it may have an impact just because the comparison is so easy to make.
- ❖ Be a nice person. Maybe it shouldn't make a difference, but collegiality counts. Just like in the real world, if you have two people trying to sell you the same product and all things are equal, you buy from the person you like. It's harder to vote for someone for tenure if they're a bad fit for the department and just don't get along.
- ❖ Get a mentor/advocate who will fight for you. Make sure it's someone who doesn't like to fail – and someone who commands respect from a majority of the faculty and all the administration.
- ❖ If you know who your external reviewers are, write a note to each telling them the outcome of your tenure review and thanking them. But wait until all is over and you have your official letter from the Board of Regents/Curators/Trustees.
- ❖ Remember that you have a life – and tenure is not the end of the world.