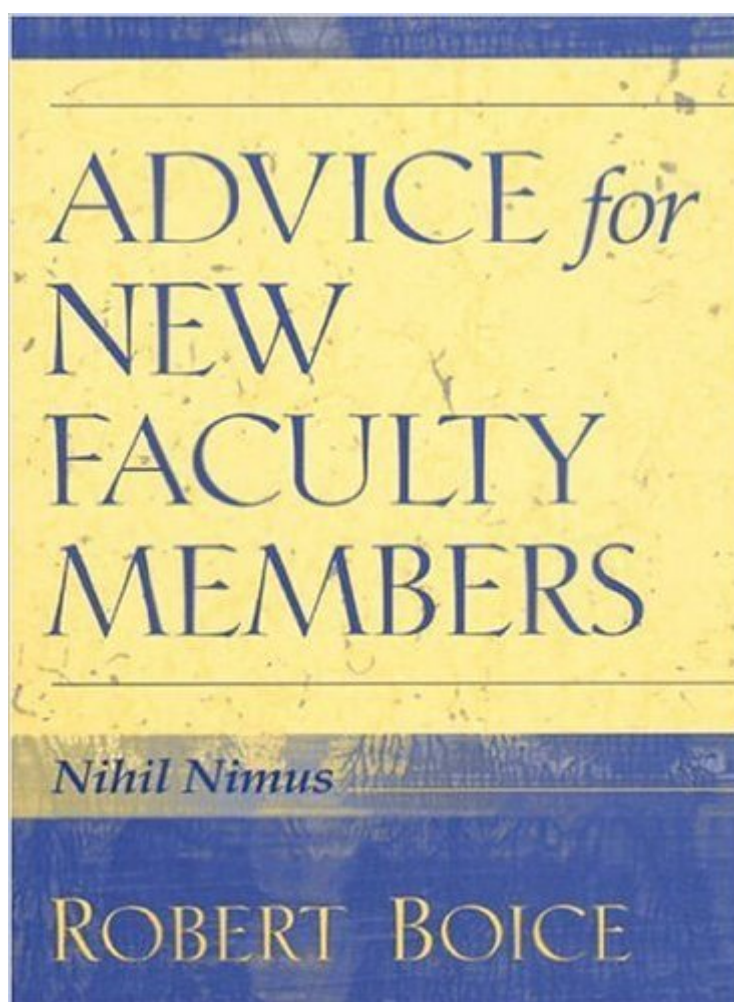


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# Advice For New Faculty Members



## Synopsis

*Advice for New Faculty Members: Nihil Nimus* is a unique and essential guide to the start of a successful academic career. As its title suggests (nothing in excess), it advocates moderation in ways of working, based on the single-most reliable difference between new faculty who thrive and those who struggle. By following its practical, easy-to-use rules, novice faculty can learn to teach with the highest levels of student approval, involvement, and comprehension, with only modest preparation times and a greater reliance on spontaneity and student participation. Similarly, new faculty can use its rule-based practices to write with ease, increasing productivity, creativity, and publishability through brief, daily sessions of focused and relaxed work. And they can socialize more successfully by learning about often-misunderstood aspects of academic culture, including mentoring. Each rule in *Advice for New Faculty Members* has been tested on hundreds of new faculty and proven effective over the long run -- even in attaining permanent appointment. It is the first guidebook to move beyond anecdotes and surmises for its directives, based on the author's extensive experience and solid research in the areas of staff and faculty development. For new teachers.

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## Customer Reviews

Some reviewers have criticized this book for being obvious. I found it anything but. The culture of my field says that the way to write a paper is to set aside large, uninterrupted blocks of time. It was an eye-opening experience to see hard data that show it is more effective to write in brief daily

sessions. These writers are roughly twice as productive by several measures (pages written, manuscripts published) and also report themselves to be happier. This idea changed my professional life. When I recommend this book, I also warn people that also the book is chock-full of useful information, it is also badly written. Life is ironic. I do find it worth wading through Boice's painful prose to get the nuggets of great information. One more word---the advice in Boice's book can be \*very\* difficult to follow. I found the book only somewhat helpful with, for example, the difficulties of stopping when one feels ``on a roll." I have nevertheless found this an invaluable book.

In an earlier book, *First-order Principles for College Teachers*, Bob Boice advised us to moderate classroom incivilities, learn to begin before feeling ready, appreciate the value of waiting, and work in short reflexive intervals. In this latest book, Boice expands his focus to the other aspects of a productive and emotionally satisfying scholarly career. He begins with teaching and then goes on to write about non-teaching activities. In masterful strokes, he lays out the case for mindful work as the key to teaching, writing, and service. Boice urges us to focus on the process of working, rather than its products. We need to work with constancy and moderation, rather than in hypermanic bursts that ultimately burn us out. Moderation is the key, and Boice makes the case with persuasive arguments and excellent examples. I felt my own tension draining away even as I read the book! I have put his principles into practice in my own work, and I will buy copies for all my graduate students, so they can do the same. This is a wonderful, wise, and witty book.

This is one of the first books I recommend to tenure-track junior professors and to graduate students going on the academic job market. It should be on the book shelf of every new faculty member. Boice was a psychologist who studied the work habits of faculty and graduate students to find out what worked and what didn't. This book summarizes his research-based comparison of thriving new faculty ("quick starters") to those who were struggling during the first few years. The book's main recommendation is to practice moderation. Boice recommends writing in brief daily sessions rather than in occasional marathons. He counsels limiting class preparation time rather than letting teaching take over your life. He advocates becoming socially connected with your department and remembering to take time off from work. Boice found that junior professors who developed regular writing habits, avoided procrastination, balanced teaching with other work activities, and sought help from colleagues early ended up publishing much more, received better teaching evaluations, and were much happier than their stressed-out peers. The tips Boice provides are great, but skim rather than pore over the book because he presents the same recommendations

over and over. I give the book 5 stars for content and 3 stars for writing quality. Boice is verbose and pedantic, but his wisdom is well worth wading through his prose. Boice's book is aimed towards successful career management and I've seen academics transform their work habits and career trajectory by applying his advice. Although much of Boice's focus is on general work habits, there are specific suggestions which are helpful in avoiding or overcoming difficulties teaching. Especially useful are Boice's suggestions for managing "student incivilities". His methods will help you keep students from being rude, late and argumentative. The main thrust of his teaching advice is excellent: professors need to focus on process as well as content, and new teachers usually try to cram too much material into their lectures. I'm a clinical psychologist who coaches junior faculty trying to get tenure, and this is one of the first books I recommend to new clients.

I am surprised that anyone who criticizes this book as obvious is bothering to read such a book. If it is so obvious, then you are probably one of the "exemplars" that Boice studied to formulate his analysis. Either that, or one of the struggling faculty members he studied, who fail because they are too proud to believe that anyone else has anything to offer. For the rest of us mortals, this book is fantastic. One thing other reviewers have not emphasized is the extent to which Boice bases his advice on his field studies of faculty. It apparently has been his life's work to study what determines whether university faculty succeed or fail. This gives him unique credibility. Yes, I acknowledge that it may be a bit off-putting because it is written somewhat in the style of self-help books, i.e., very informal, a bit repetitive, with some of that schtick that runs: "follow my 5 step program to success, because I have uncovered the key heretofore only known by a few, etc." However, the big difference between this and any self-help book is that he can back it up with research. I guess that's how you write self-help books for academics. (And don't misunderstand me, even when it sounds like a self-help book, it's like the better self-help books. This is clearly a labor of love for Boice.) This book is like one of those rare, great mentors. It doesn't tell you war stories, or give you a laundry list of techniques. Instead, it tells you how to be effective at your job. It describes the day-to-day processes and habits that so many successful people are terrible at articulating ("well, you just do it"). I suspect most academics really can use this. Yes, it's probably the kind of stuff that would be obvious to an outgoing, outwardly directed person like a salesman or politician, but the inwardly-focused types who tend to be drawn to academia really need this kind of help.

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