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Getting Started—Or Barely Beginning

What we call the beginning is often the end and to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from.

—T.S. Eliot

What a wonderful journey you have chosen to begin!

Some friends and even some colleagues may be asking you, “Why on earth would you do THAT?” Every candidate seems to have a different reason, but maybe yours can be found in this list:

**What a wonderful
journey you have
chosen to begin!**

1. You have too much time on your hands. (In your mind, those extra 400 or so hours won't make that much of a difference, right?)
2. It looks easy enough to do. (How hard could it be? You do this day in and day out anyway.)
3. Your principal or superintendent thinks it's a good idea. (They would never steer you wrong.)
4. Your peers are encouraging you to “Go for it!” (They all assure you that they will be there for you as you write your entries. No time to make your own lunch? Don't worry - your peers promise to do it for you.)
5. You're confident that you will get some recognition for your efforts. (That's why teachers choose their profession.)
6. You REALLY like a challenge. (Mountain climbing has lost its mystique all of a sudden!)



7. This will bring you the respect of others. (Your name will be in the papers and then everyone will share in your jubilation.)
8. There's a monetary reward waiting at the end. (Well, for some of you anyway. Good for you.)
9. You want to help better the teaching profession. (If not you, then who?)
10. The process will provide a validation of all your hard work and best efforts. (You deserve it!)

Before you turn the page, take a moment or two (this will be the last of your free time, you know) and reflect on the overriding reason for YOUR decision. Whatever your reason, National Board certification is a challenging AND rewarding experience.

**[T]ake a moment
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for YOUR decision.**

I am in my third year as a facilitator for National Board candidates as part of the New York State United Teachers Effective Teaching Program's Professional Portfolio/Certification Laboratory. In the three years of my facilitating, I have gleaned several tips and techniques from the candidates' efforts, and I now offer them as a companion to you as you begin the professional experience of a lifetime. They range from steps to organize your entries to ways to write your commentary. Some are specific to videotaping and others serve as sanity savers.

This chapter looks at the entire process and identifies several planning steps that precede immersion in the detailed activities.



The Whole in Parts

The rigorous process of National Board certification comprises two components. First, and foremost, preparation: each candidate must prepare written commentary and provide supporting validation and verification of work in the classroom and participation in efforts outside the classroom walls that have an impact on student learning. Second, completion: each candidate must complete an Assessment Center test—six 30-minute writing prompts based on topics in each specific certification area. Chapters 1 through 8 address the preparation component; chapters 9 and 10 focus on the completion component.

The rigorous process of National Board certification comprises two components: preparation and completion.

Throughout the course of the certification process, candidates collect and analyze student work; videotape small- and large-group lessons; and describe, analyze, and reflect on their practice. As well, they communicate with parents and other significant people in their students' lives and collaborate with other professionals about the art and science of teaching. To begin, however, candidates must complete the application, send their deposit, and in time, receive a blue-and-white box that provides detailed instructions for this momentous endeavor.

Getting Started—Unpacking the Box

Affectionately referred to as “The Box,” candidates mention this object at least once every hour in every class meeting and in nearly half their e-mails. The bright blue-and-white object came to be revered and protected.



However, when you look inside the box, one thought may go through your mind: “What have I gotten myself into?” All of the materials will be used before your journey is done. Diving right into the box may be foremost in your mind, but I urge you to take it slowly.

The National Board has taken the utmost care to cram as much information into each section as is humanly possible.

Digesting the information in pieces allows you to linger over the learning and begin the first important step—the planning stages.

There are standards, directions, hints, forms, directions, diagrams, directions, prompts, more directions, and even more forms. You also encounter mailing envelopes, candidate ID labels, and a CD with your portfolio requirements and the standards for your certification area. These materials contain detailed information on completing and submitting entries. It’s a good idea to have a highlighter or two handy as you begin your investigation of this material. Digesting the

information in pieces allows you to linger over the learning and begin the first important step—the planning stages.

Separating the Whole Into Parts

If you are eager to peruse the standards and portfolio requirements prior to receiving your candidate box, they are available online at nbpts.org. After printing the portfolio entry requirements and standards from the CD, many “concrete sequential” personalities want to turn immediately to page one and work their way through the sections, page by page—always in the order presented. Some “global random” learners may want to turn to the last page first. Because certification is an immense task, it

