

## Dealing With Imposter Syndrome As A Teacher

You're not the only one.



*Today's the day my principal is going to realize I don't know what I'm doing.*

*How did I even get this job in the first place?*

*I don't have a clue how to manage a classroom.*

*I teach English, and I still make grammar mistakes!*

*There are so many teachers with more experience that could do this job better than me.*

If you have thoughts like this, you're not alone. Many teachers struggle with [imposter syndrome](#), or feelings of self-doubt or inadequacy, often in spite of evidence to the contrary.

When I was teaching, I struggled with imposter syndrome too. I compared myself to other teachers at my school and on social media. I worried my students would think I didn't know what I was talking about. When you feel this way, it's really hard to trust your instincts and enjoy teaching. Fortunately, there are ways we can deal with imposter syndrome as a teacher.

## **Know that you are not the only teacher dealing with imposter syndrome.**

When you're experiencing imposter syndrome, you're certain you're the only teacher that has ever felt the way you feel. There's no way the confident teacher down the hall with her Pinterest-worthy classroom doubts herself! Wrong. Just because someone looks like they have it all together on the outside, doesn't mean they aren't carrying a lot inside. No teacher is immune to bad days at school, whether the lesson falls apart or the kids won't settle.

I've noticed that we have no problem complaining to our teacher friends, but we rarely share feelings of self-doubt. If you have a teacher bestie or a trusted colleague, tell them how you are feeling. I felt so much better when I told a veteran teacher at my school, "I still don't know what I'm doing," and she said, "Me either. We're all winging it!" She had over 20 years of experience. But she's right. Some days are magical, others are a slog.

## **Affirmations and positive self-talk can help silence your inner critic.**

We all have that voice in our heads that tells us we aren't good enough or don't know what we're doing. It's difficult to silence it. When you're in the thick of imposter syndrome, try to approach your thoughts with curiosity rather than judgment. Ask yourself questions like, "What happened that triggered this feeling?" "Am I overtired?" "Do I need to take a break?" Just because we think a thought doesn't make it true.

As silly as it might sound, sometimes [a few deep breaths](#), a walk around the school, or drinking some water does wonders for silencing our inner critic. Another idea? Find an affirmation you like, write it down, and put it on a sticky note on your desk. When I had a difficult class period or a rough teaching day, reading that affirmation between classes helped. Some of my favorites are, "I am becoming a better teacher every day," "There is no right way to teach," and "I worked hard to get here."

## **Pay attention to what works, and do it again and again. Over time, you'll gain confidence and build systems that work.**

A teacher in a [Reddit forum on imposter syndrome](#) posted, "I feel like the first time teaching, you're constantly second guessing. When I was a year in and started repeating already taught lessons, I could see what did/didn't work and felt a lot more confident with execution." I couldn't say it better. This was my experience too. If your students love Kahoot and it really

engages them, then keep using it! If you try a station rotation model, and it allows you to better differentiate, then try it again.

Too often, I see teachers I coach looking for the next “quick fix” instead of trying and modifying a strategy or teaching move. Creating systems builds confidence. We can stop searching and start refining. For example, I coached a teacher who really wanted her students to set goals. So they set goals every Monday. But then things got busy, and suddenly it was Friday. There was no mid-week check-in, and the kids really weren’t sure if they met their goals or not. The teacher felt like a failure and was ready to never set goals again. But with some patience, and a little planning, she prioritized the mid-week check-in, and goal-setting became much more meaningful for her and her students. No one failed. Sometimes these things take time.

### **Not everyone will like you or how you teach, but that’s OK.**

This advice comes from Angela Watson, who started the [40 Hour Teacher WorkWeek Club](#) and has written several books for teachers. She writes about how embracing the fact that not everything is for everybody will help you move past feelings of being a fraud. It’s good advice. There are always going to be administrators, other teachers, parents, and students who don’t like our teaching style or question what we teach and how. So many of us are people pleasers. We just want to be liked. But we will have moments in our teaching careers where that isn’t the case, and that’s OK.

### **Your kids don’t expect you to know everything.**

At first, I thought that if I was going to call myself an English teacher that I had to be an expert in everything I taught. I quickly realized how unrealistic that is! Yes, I have a bachelor’s degree in English and a master’s degree in English Education, but I have never read some classic novels (*Brave New World* I will get to you, I promise). When I saw they were on the curriculum, I panicked. Sometimes I was one chapter ahead, and I felt terrible about it! But, teaching a book I was reading for the first time actually helped me with imposter syndrome. I realized I didn’t have to be an expert to teach. Teaching can be facilitation and learning with my students. And sometimes we have to “fake it until we make it.” It’s OK to say, “I’m not sure how to answer that, but let’s figure it out together.”

## **Questioning yourself means you're reflecting on your teaching, and that's a good thing.**

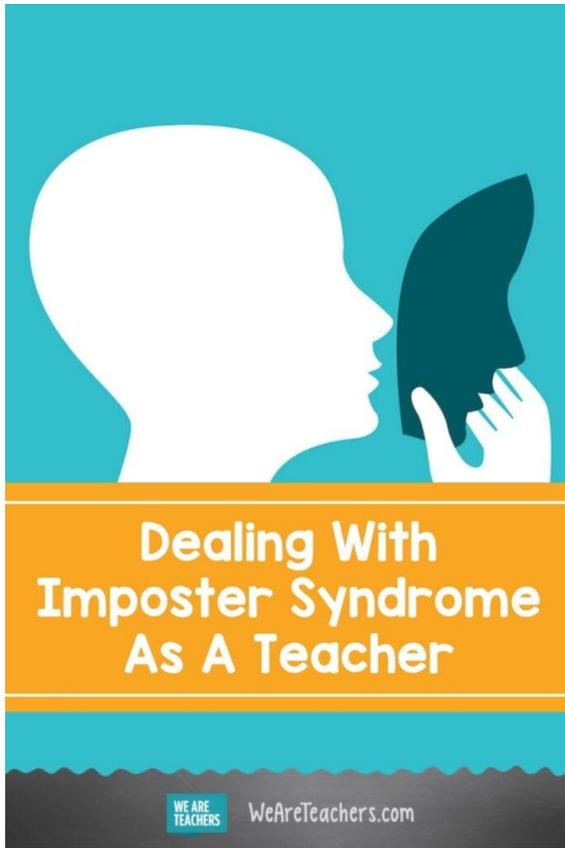
There's no one-size-fits-all magic approach to teaching. Sure, there are best practices and research we can draw on, but what, how, and why we teach will vary depending on our students. So if you are five years into teaching and still questioning everything you do, that's OK. When you ask questions like, "Did I explain that clearly?" and "Are my students ready to move on or do I need to reteach?" you are reflecting on your teaching. What's most important is that you ask those questions with curiosity instead of judgment. Rely on data and student feedback rather than your thoughts and feelings.

## **If you're worrying about whether you're good enough, you're good enough.**

Imposter syndrome isn't always a bad thing. You never stop learning when you're a teacher. You'll get knocked down from time to time, but you'll also surprise yourself. If we never question or critique ourselves, then we will stay the same. You'll find some relief from imposter syndrome when you push yourself a little, take risks, and try new things even if you think you shouldn't. When the negative thoughts creep in, "Who am I to try this?" or "I'm not ready for this!" trust that you are, and that tomorrow is another day. It's never going to be perfect, but the more you stretch outside your comfort zone, the more confident you'll feel about teaching.

**We'd love to hear about how you deal with imposter syndrome. Come and share in our [WeAreTeachers HELPLINE group on Facebook](#).**

**Plus, [How teachers are creating boundaries right now](#).**



## Posted by Julie Mason

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By [Julie Mason](#) on April, 2021