

Instructor Guide
Common Read 2022-23
Win or Learn: The Naked Truth about Turning Every Rejection
Into Your Ultimate Success

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1. Background on *Win or Learn*

Written by Harlan Cohen, *Win or Learn* is the culmination of two decades of experiences, research, and interviews focused on how people can reframe the way they set goals and they can choose to react to setbacks along the way to achieving their dreams. This text is an ideal fit with the First Year Experience curriculum because it addresses many of the anxieties that incoming students have as they enter college, and it provides templates for students to use as they navigate their way through an unfamiliar environment.

Harlan Cohen is best known as the author and motivational speaker behind *The Naked Roommate: And 107 Other Issues You Might Run Into in College*, a best-selling self-help guide for people who are in their first year of college. As a student himself, Cohen authored a popular advice column for the *Indiana Daily Student* that was syndicated in newspapers around the world. At the center of Cohen's message is the idea that in order to experience life fully, we need to "get comfortable with the uncomfortable," a concept that comes up repeatedly in *Win or Learn*.

Harlan Cohen will be visiting campus this fall, so including *Win or Learn* in your curriculum will prepare students to participate in the FYE activities that will unfold later this year. Cohen also has a popular website and YouTube Channel where you can find lots of videos that focus on the first year of college. <https://harlancohen.com>

Win or Learn can be shared in a standalone unit or throughout the entire semester. The book is short, engaging, and will be an easy read for most FYE participants. It's also extremely affordable, coming in at under \$7.00.

The Common Read committee is excited to share *Win or Learn* with the university community, and we welcome your feedback. If you find any errors in the guide or want to see some

additional resources, reach out to us. Because this is a digital guide, we can make changes quickly and easily.

2. Developing a Teaching Plan for *Win or Learn*

Developing a teaching plan involves incorporating required elements into the syllabus and taking your learners' interests, needs, and abilities into account. When it comes to integrating *Win or Learn* into your FYE course, you will also need to consider your *own* strengths as a facilitator so that you can feel confident about the experience. In this section, we will go over understanding ourselves as teachers, as well as understanding what our students may need in order to interact in a meaningful way with the material.

a. What are your strengths as a facilitator?

If you think back to your own experience as a student or trainee, you will know that there are many different teaching methods that educators use to share information in a course or module. The choice of how to approach teaching a course is something you have probably thought about with the goal of finding a balance between an approach with which you are comfortable and an understanding of what your students need from you in order to learn. You will also have preferences for ways of teaching based upon the skills that are central to your job at WMU.

As you consider your strengths as a facilitator, you might identify with one or more of the following categories that seek to understand how teachers view their classroom approach.

An **academic orientation** emphasizes educators' subject expertise as their professional strength that they share with students.

For those of you who have majored or minored in English or have taught English language arts in K-12 and university settings, the idea of sharing a Common Read text with your students may seem like a familiar activity. Others of you may be motivational speakers or wellness experts who engage with the public around self-reflection topics with ease. For you, *Win or Learn* might represent an opportunity to invite students into a subject that has been of true interest to you.

A **personal orientation** emphasizes the importance of interpersonal relationships in the classroom.

Thus, even if you are not used to dealing with wellness topics, you can still play to your strengths in order to find a way into the material. For instance, if you have a personal connection to the some of the examples that Cohen mentions in his text and are willing to share that with your students, it can increase your comfort level about discussing ways that students can rebound from a disappointing outcome. It is also possible that you have specialized in counseling or in mentoring of young people. Again, those experiences can help you to link the text to your life experience.

A **practical orientation** emphasizes practical experiences in the classroom that involve active learning practices and experimentation.

If you are interested in wellness and student retention, you could help your students look up information on first generation learners or on self-reflection techniques. Or, if you have a particular talent at using and sharing the Western Wellness Wheel, you could pair up a number of examples and ideas in *Win or Learn* with aspects of the wheel.

When facilitators can find ways to engage with students that match their teaching orientation(s), they are far more likely to enjoy the process and to connect well with students. Therefore, as you build your syllabus and read through this Instructors Guide, you can lean on your strengths.

b. What are your students' interests and needs?

If you are an experienced instructor, you can attest to the fact that no two sections of a course are ever quite the same. One group of students may be incredibly enthusiastic participants, even if the course meets at 8:30 AM, while another group of students may need a lot of scaffolding in order to engage in a meaningful discussion.

Students are also impacted by their past learning experiences and by the cultural climate at the time that they enter college. In Fall 2022, many of our incoming students have spent portions of the last three years learning remotely or in a hybrid environment. They or their families may have faced unemployment or economic insecurity because of the pandemic, and their own outlook has undoubtedly been impacted by the ongoing political divide in the US or by the war in Ukraine.

As you plan how to integrate *Win or Learn* into your teaching plan, you can anticipate many of the interests and needs of your students, but you may also want to hold off on solidifying all of your plans until you have had a chance to interact with your class and learn their outlooks and interests. Waiting a bit to get a sense for your section and their needs can go a long way towards ensuring active participation.

3. Setting Up Class Activities

a. Process Steps and Experiments

Each chapter of *Win or Learn* focuses on five steps in what Cohen terms “The Process” (19):

1. Want Something
2. Get Comfortable with the Uncomfortable
3. Think People, Places, and Patience
4. Tell Your Story as If It Has Already Happened
5. Celebrate, Reflect, and Repeat

For each of the steps, Cohen includes an experiment. For instance, in the chapter entitled, “What Do You Want,” the experiment involves participants identifying “one thing you want to create, change, or experience in the next ten months,” and asks them to write that down (19).

One way of integrating the text into your course would be to have students read a chapter per week and do the associated experiment. Or, you could devote a week to the entire text and have students work on the experiments in close succession.

Either way, the experiments are good place to start, and there is an online component that you could include. Cohen has provided videos of a 25-day risk taking experiment challenge related to the content of *Win or Learn* that you and your students can access here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OaGHVJLFijE&list=PLOzZM0r5-3QBOxSrsxdBm98D6jHGa6LbP>

b. *Win or Learn* and the Wellness Wheel

Chapter 2 of *Win or Learn*, “Get Comfortable with the Uncomfortable,” focuses on how students can learn to react effectively to rejection. Specifically, Cohen focuses on what he terms “The Universal Rejection Truth,” which “says that not everyone and everything will always respond to you in the way you want” (25-26). The Social, Emotional, and Purpose/Spiritual aspects of the Wellness Wheel could be paired with this chapter, as students can discuss the various components of risk taking, including psyching themselves up to take risks, learning to deal with rejection, and using what they’ve learned to keep on their paths.

c. Publisher Discussion Guide

Cohen’s publisher has provided a discussion guide that offers up questions for every chapter of *Win or Learn*. You could base your assignments and discussions around those questions. Here’s a link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/17IfV0GBExPmIgyu5x_jHBo3I7HAwyee-/view?usp=sharing