

Statement on Teaching Philosophy

Online document source: University of Minnesota Center for Teaching and Learning
<http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/teachlearn/tutorials/philosophy/index.html>

Writing Your Teaching Philosophy

A teaching philosophy is a self-reflective statement of your beliefs about teaching and learning. In addition to general comments, your teaching philosophy should discuss how you put your beliefs into practice by including concrete examples of what you do or anticipate doing in the classroom.

Teaching philosophies are typically between one and four double-spaced pages but may be longer or shorter depending on your circumstances. They are written for two particular audiences. The first is search committees, since teaching philosophies are increasingly becoming part of the academic job search dossier. The second audience is yourself and your colleagues. In this case, the teaching philosophy serves a formative purpose — a document that helps you reflect on and improve your teaching.

Starting a teaching philosophy can be a difficult task, but it need not be. The steps outlined in this tutorial provide a structure for taking you through the drafting process step by step. Of course, there are as many different ways of writing teaching philosophies as there are writers. What we suggest here is one possible approach to drafting the essay. Feel free to deviate from this plan, skipping or adding steps to accommodate your personal writing style.

This tutorial follows a basic three-part process.

1. You'll begin by generating ideas for your teaching philosophy based on your attitudes, values, and beliefs about teaching and learning.
2. Next, you'll organize your ideas and create a working draft. You'll also check to make sure that you've illustrated your personal beliefs with specific examples of classroom practice that take into account disciplinary contexts and constants.
3. Finally, you'll assess your first draft, comparing it to a rubric — a set of guidelines — for effective teaching philosophies. Your assessment should point the way toward gaps in the essay or areas that need to be reworked during subsequent revisions.

Keep in mind that the teaching philosophy is a document in progress. As your teaching changes and your professional identity grows, your teaching philosophy will also change and grow. So revisit it periodically and rewrite it as your beliefs and experiences progress and change.

Getting Started on Your Teaching Philosophy

Generating Ideas

Teaching philosophies express your values and beliefs about teaching. They are personal statements that introduce you, as a teacher, to your reader. As such, they are written in the first person and convey a confident, professional tone. When writing a teaching philosophy, you should use specific examples to illustrate your points. You should also discuss how your values and beliefs about teaching fit into the context of your discipline.

Below are categories you might address in your teaching philosophy with question prompts that may help you begin generating ideas for your draft. Work through each of the categories, spending time thinking about the prompts and writing your ideas down. Your list of ideas for each category will become the material that will comprise the first draft of your teaching philosophy.

Note your answers to the following prompts. For those of you who are visual learners, consider doing a bit of "clustering." As a way to sketch out themes that hold the pieces together, feel free to draw lines, overlap components, or in some other way trace out interplay among the pieces. If you would like to consider more questions, see the [following list of prompts](#). A [teaching philosophy template \(pdf\)](#) is also available to help you get started.

Getting Started Exercise

1. Your concept of learning: Ask yourself such questions as "What do I mean by learning?" and "What happens in a successful learning situation?" Make sure to note what constitutes "learning" or "mastery" in your discipline.
2. Your concept of teaching: Note your values, beliefs, and aspirations as a teacher. (For example, do you wish to encourage mastery, competency, transformational learning, life-long learning, general transference of skills, critical thinking, etc.) What does a perfect teaching situation look like to you? Why do you consider this "perfect"? What is your role as a teacher? Are you a coach, a general, an evangelist, an entertainer?
3. Your goals for students: What skills should students obtain as the result of your teaching? You may think about your ideal student and what the outcomes of your teaching would be in terms of this student's knowledge or behavior. You may address the goals you have for specific classes or curricula and the rationale behind them (i.e., critical thinking, writing, or problem solving).
4. What methods will you consider to reach these goals and objectives? What are your beliefs regarding learning theory and specific strategies you would use such as case studies, group work, simulations, interactive lectures, etc.? You might also include any new ideas or strategies you have used or want to try.
5. Your interaction with students: What are your attitudes toward advising and mentoring students? How would an observer see you interact with students? Why do you want to work with students?
6. Specific examples: How are the values and beliefs noted above realized in classroom activities? You may discuss course materials, lesson plans, activities, assignments, assessment instruments, etc.
7. How will you assess student understanding? What are your beliefs about grading? Do you grade students on a percentage scale (criterion referenced) or on a curve (norm referenced)? What different types of assessment will you use: traditional tests, projects, portfolios, or presentations?

Professional growth: How will you continue growing as a teacher? What goals do you have for yourself and how will you reach them? How have your attitudes toward teaching and learning changed over time? How will you use your student evaluations to improve your teaching? How might you learn new **Creating Your Teaching Philosophy Draft**

Two Ways of Organizing Your Draft

Now that you've written down your values, attitudes, and beliefs about teaching and learning, it's time to organize those thoughts into a coherent form. Perhaps the easiest way of organizing this material would be to write a paragraph covering each of the eight questions you answered in the previous activity: your concept of teaching, your concept of learning, your goals for students, etc. These would then become the eight major sections of your teaching philosophy.

Another way of knitting your reflections together—and one that is more personal—is to read through your notes and underscore ideas or observations that come up in more than one place. Think of these as "themes" that might point you toward an organizational structure for the essay.

For example, say you read through your notes and realize that you spend a good deal of time writing about your interest in mentoring students. This might become one of the three or four major foci of your teaching philosophy. You should then discuss what it says about your attitudes toward teaching, learning, what's important in your discipline, etc.

Using Specific Examples

As noted previously, it's important that you provide concrete examples from your teaching practice to illustrate the general claims you make in your teaching philosophy. In most cases, initial drafts of teaching philosophies don't include enough specifics. The following general statements about teaching are intended as prompts to help you come up with examples to illustrate your claims about teaching.

Prompts for Adding Specific Examples to Your Draft

- General Statement: "I value helping my students understand difficult information. I am an expert, and my role is to model for them complex ways of thinking so that they can develop the same habits of mind as professionals in the medical field."

Given the statement above, how would you describe what happens in your classroom? Is your description specific enough to bring the scene to life in a teaching philosophy?

- General Statement: "I enjoy lecturing, and I'm good at it. I always make an effort to engage and motivate my students when I lecture."

Given the statement above, how would you describe what happens in your classroom? Is your description specific enough to bring the scene to life in a teaching philosophy?

- General Statement: "It is crucial for students of geology to learn the techniques of field research. An important part of my job as a professor of geology is to provide these opportunities."

Given the statement above, how would you describe what happens in your classroom? Is your description specific enough to bring the scene to life in a teaching philosophy?

- General Statement: "I believe that beginning physics students should be introduced to the principles of hypothesis generation, experimentation, data collection, and analysis. By learning the scientific method, they develop critical thinking skills they can apply to other areas of their lives. Small group work is a crucial tool for teaching the scientific method."

Given the statement above, how would you describe what happens in your classroom? Is your description specific enough to bring the scene to life in a teaching philosophy?

- General Statement: "As a teacher of writing, I am committed to using peer review in my classes. By reading and commenting on other students' work in small cooperative groups, my students learn to find their voice, to understand the important connection between writer and audience, and to hone their editing skills. Small group work is indispensable in the writing classroom."

Given the statement above, how would you describe what happens in your classroom? Is your description specific enough to bring the scene to life in a teaching philosophy?

8. skills? How do you know when you have taught effectively?

Assessing Your Teaching Philosophy Draft

Check Your Draft

Now that you've completed an initial draft, you should compare it to other teaching philosophies by instructors in your discipline. You might also ask a colleague to review your draft and offer you recommendations for revision. (Consider printing out a [teaching philosophy rubric](#) to provide your reviewer with guidelines to assess your draft.) These exercises will give you the critical distance necessary to see your teaching philosophy objectively and revise it accordingly.

To begin, look at the following guidelines to assess your draft for tone and content. In particular, pay attention to whether you've included relevant examples to support your points and whether you've adequately situated your draft in the context of your discipline.

Teaching Philosophy Checklist

Purpose & Audience

Given the intended audience and purpose that the writer has shared with you:

1. Is there a clear focus or theme(s)?
2. Are the language and tone appropriate without relying on trite phrases or jargon?
3. Would it hold the audience's attention?

Voice

1. Is it "authentic" - focused on the writer and personal? Do you have an idea of who this person is as a teacher (or aspires to be)?
2. Does the writer reveal self and personal/political/pedagogical commitments?
3. Is enthusiasm for teaching evident?
4. Does it sound as though the writer cares about the beliefs expressed and the arguments being made?
5. Would you like to take a course taught by the writer?

Beliefs/Arguments/Claims & Illustrative Support

1. Does it detail what the writer believes in a way that is engaging, specific, and easy to understand?
2. Does it detail why these beliefs are held?
3. Does it detail how these beliefs came to be held?
4. Does it define the writer's goals for and expectations of learners?

5. Are the beliefs/arguments/claims grounded in the writer's discipline?
6. Is the relationship between the writer's discipline and beliefs about teaching and learning made clear?
7. Does the organization/structure support the arguments/claims being made?
8. Are the beliefs/arguments/claims supported by evidence, examples, anecdotes, etc.?
9. Are there specific examples of strategies, methods, or theories used to achieve teaching and learning goals and to help students meet or exceed expectations?

Conventions

1. Are headings, transitions, and paragraph design appropriate to the content?
2. Are length and thematic structure appropriate to the content?
3. Are the elements presented in a parallel style and format across and within sections/paragraphs?
4. Are there any distracting grammatical, typographical, or spelling errors?

Teaching Philosophy Resources

Links to web resources are provided below. A simple web search will turn up scores of discipline-specific samples and commentary on teaching philosophies, so you'll want to do your own research while you're in the process of completing your draft.

- [Teaching Philosophies of Graduate Student Winners of Teaching Excellence Awards](#)
- [Evaluating Your Own Teaching](#), L. Dee Fink.
- ["How to Write a Statement of Teaching Philosophy."](#) Gabriela Montell. from the Chronicle of Higher Education, March 27, 2003.
- [Samples of University of Georgia graduate student teaching philosophies from many disciplines](#)
- [Beginning a Statement of Teaching Philosophy](#) from the University of Notre Dame.
- [Developing Your Reflective Teaching Statement from Tomorrow's Professor \(pdf\)](#). A brief guide that contains useful resources.