TEACHING PHILOSOPHY WORKBOOK

Getting Started on your Teaching Philosophy

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<u>Creating Your Teaching Philosophy</u>

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.

<u>"Questions for Reflection" Brainstorming Exercise</u>

- What do you fundamentally believe about how people learn?

- What do you think "good teaching" (teaching that promotes learning) is? How does what you believe about good teaching enhance, resonate with, or flow from the basic content, theory and skills required for learning in your discipline? What does good teaching look like in practice, i.e., what do you do in and out of the classroom to make it happen?

- What is a method of teaching you rely on frequently? Why don't you use another method? Imagine what would happen if you changed. What does this tell you about the outcome of your teaching?

- How would you describe the ideal outcome of your teaching in terms of a student's behavior? What should the student know or be able to do? How does this tie specifically to your discipline?

- Describe your classes now: fun, enjoyable, learning, exciting, different, important, basic, enlightening, not work, adventurous, etc.,

- If your students would describe your teaching, what would they say?

- Think about a particular class session that you taught that went very well. What happened in that class? How do you know it went well?

- Now consider a particular class session that did not go well. What happened then? When did you realize that things were going wrong? Could you have changed anything at that point?

- Why do you want to teach? What do you want to get out of the teaching experience? What makes you feel good about teaching? What gives you reward? What are the reasons behind the feelings?

- Do you consider yourself an easy or hard grader? Why? How do you assess student learning? How do you assess your teaching effectiveness? How have you modified your teaching in response to student feedback?

- What aspects of teaching come easily for you? What aspects are most difficult?

- Do you prefer to write assignments that are structured and traditional? Why or why not? Do you prefer to grade assignments that are structured and traditional? Why or why not?

- As a teacher, what do you do when you think students are not "getting" the material? What do you do as a learner when you are in the same position?

- What learning goals do you have for your students? Do you have different goals for freshmen, seniors, majors, and non-majors? How do you know if you have achieved these goals?

- Think about how *you* learn the best and describe in detail some of the best and worst learning experiences you have had. What worked or did not work for you as a learner?

- What are your plans for developing or improving your teaching? Do you have resources (people, books, workshop notes, etc.) that you can draw upon for help? Do you want to learn new skills? Try out new approaches? Develop a new course?

- How do you believe the intellectual environment (content, curriculum level, institution, discipline, etc.) influences the learning process?

- How do you believe the physical environment (classroom size, number of students, seating type, windows, available technology, etc.) influences the learning process?

- How does what you personally believe about teaching (e.g., from experience, references to literature, mentors, colleagues, kinds of students you have taught, etc.) influence your students' learning?

- What are you most proud of in your teaching? Why?

- What kinds of things do you struggle with in your teaching?

- How do you believe you teach? What process do you follow in planning, designing, executing, and assessing your teaching? What kinds of technology do you use in your teaching?

<u>Generating Ideas</u>

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. Think back to the brainstorming exercise "questions for reflection" in the previous section. Your list of ideas for each category below will become the material that will comprise the first draft of your teaching philosophy.

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?

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

Creating Your Teaching Philosophy 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. There are two basic ways you can do this, or even a combination of both.

The first way of organizing this material would be to write a paragraph covering each of the eight questions you answered in the "Generating Ideas" section above (i.e. your concept of teaching, your concept of learning, your goals for students, etc.) These will now become the eight major sections of your teaching philosophy.

The second way of knitting your reflections together, and one that is more personal, is to read through your answers to all of the questions asked previously 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 your teaching statement.

For example, say you read through your answers 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 focus points of your teaching philosophy. You should then discuss what it says about your attitudes toward teaching, learning, what is important in your discipline, etc.

Whichever was you decide to write your teaching philosophy draft, it is important that you provide specific, 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.

- **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?

Teaching Philosophy Template

Here is a template that you can use to write you Teaching Philosophy draft

Areas to address in your Teaching Philosophy:	
My aspirations/goals/objectives **As a teacher:** (i.e., encourage mastery, competency, transformational learning, life-long learning, general skill transference of skills, meaningful learning, critical thinking, etc.) *Describe and give example(s)*	
What methods will I consider to reach these goals/objectives? (i.e., your beliefs regarding learning theory and specific strategies you would use…such as case studies, group work, simulations, interactive lectures, learning/reading circles, etc. You might also include any new ideas/strategies you have used or want to try. *Describe and give example(s) of strategies/practices that you prefer).*	
How will I assess student understanding? (What are your beliefs about grading…norm- referenced or criterion-referenced? What different types of assessment will you use….traditional tests? Alternative assessments such as projects, papers, panels, presentation, etc.?) *Describe and give example(s)*	

How will I improve my teaching? (i.e., How will you use your student evaluations to improve your teaching? How might you learn new skills? How do you know when you have taught effectively?) Any examples you can share?	
Additional Considerations: • Why is teaching important to me? • How do I collaborate with others? • What beliefs, theories, and/or methods mark my successful teaching? • How do I maintain positive relationships with your students? With colleagues?	

<u>Assessing Your Teaching Philosophy Draft</u>

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. Doing this 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

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

Voice

1. Is it "authentic" - focused on the writer and personal? Does it provide you 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 Rubric

Here is a sample rubric that can be used by you or others to score your draft teaching philosophy.

Content	Evident	Suggestions for Improvement
Content is organized around a central theme, essential questions (see box below!) or a broad concept		
Content Addresses at least 3-4 of the following: • How do I know when I am effectively teaching? • What beliefs, theories and/or methods mark my successful teaching? • What types of outcomes do I want for my students? • How do I develop and maintain positive relationships with students? • How do I collaborate with others? • How do I create a supportive learning environment? • What approach or strategy has worked especially well in my discipline? • What are my most important learning goals? • How have/can I make a difference in the lives of your students?		
Content indicates analytical thinking, including depth and complexity.		
Examples support statements.		
Content includes my opinions/beliefs/concerns regarding teaching and learning.		

Format	Evident	Suggestions for Improvement
Statement can be in the form of: • A statement of beliefs • Narrative/essay • A list of objectives • A policy statement • An art form (poem, song, visuals, etc.)		
Length: 1-2 pages, single spaced (can be printed out as double spaced).		
Typed in font size 12.		

Writing Quality	Evident	Suggestions for Improvement
Introductory paragraph		
Well-organized, clear, and coherent		
No punctuation errors		

No grammatical and spelling errors		
Effective sentence structure		
Well-developed paragraphs		
Conclusion/summary paragraph		

References

- **Iowa State University, Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching – http://www.celt.iastate.edu/teaching-resources**

- **North Carolina State University, The Graduate School - http://www.ncsu.edu/grad/preparing-future-leaders/teaching-programs/fit/workshops.html**

- **Ohio State University, University Center for the Advancement of Teaching – http://ucat.osu.edu/read/teaching-portfolio**

- **University of Minnesota, Center for Teaching and Learning – http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/teachlearn/tutorials**

- **University of Notre Dame, Kaneb Center for Teaching & Learning – http://kaneb.nd.edu**