

## GETTING STARTED

*Picture a student walking out of the final exam of your course: In what way is that student different from the one who entered your classroom on the first day of the semester? What has the student learned over the course of the past three months? – [James Lang](#)*

- What does your response tell you? What are 2-3 goals you have for students as a teacher?
- How do you go about achieving those goals/helping students achieve them? What does that tell you about your beliefs about how students learn and your specific instructional strategies?

## WHAT IS A TEACHING PHILOSOPHY? (from Western University in London, Ontario)

“A teaching philosophy statement is a written description of your values, goals, and beliefs regarding both teaching and learning. [It] uses evidence from your teaching to make the case that you have excelled as a teacher. As a general expression of your beliefs and practices, your teaching philosophy can shape your syllabi, assessments, and your day-to-day classroom.

Teaching philosophy statements...reflect contextual factors such as the discipline, influential mentors, personal educational experiences, type of teaching (graduate vs. undergraduate, large vs. small classes etc.), and program-related teaching requirements (e.g. case-based learning).”

## WHY WRITE A TEACHING PHILOSOPHY?

Writing a teaching philosophy help us to reflect upon and articulate our ideas about what makes for effective teaching. And doing so helps to ensure that what we do in our classes is consistent with those beliefs and promotes student learning.

Teaching philosophies are often required for job applications, promotion files, and when being considered for teaching awards. But more than a chore or a high-stakes assessment, approach the writing of your teaching philosophy as a celebration of your time in the classroom and a vision for the future.

## GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR YOUR TEACHING PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT (from Vanderbilt University)

- **Make your Teaching Statement brief and well written.** While Teaching Statements are probably longer at the tenure level (3-5 pages or more), for hiring purposes they are typically 1-2 pages in length.
- **Use a narrative, first-person approach.** This allows the Teaching Statement to be both personal and reflective.

- **Be sincere and unique.** Avoid clichés, especially ones about how much passion you have for teaching.
- **Make it specific rather than abstract.** Ground your ideas in 1-2 concrete examples, whether experienced or anticipated. This will help the reader to better visualize you in the classroom.
- **Be discipline-specific.** Do not ignore your research. Explain how you advance your field through teaching.
- **Avoid jargon and technical terms,** as they can be off-putting to some readers. Try not to simply repeat what is in your CV. Teaching Statements are not exhaustive documents and should be used to complement other materials for the hiring or tenure processes.
- **Be humble.** Mention students in an enthusiastic, not condescending way, and illustrate your willingness to learn from your students and colleagues.
- **Revise.** Teaching is an evolving, reflective process, and Teaching Statements can be adapted and changed as necessary.

**TEACHING PHILOSOPHY AS PERSONAL NARRATIVE** (from *The Chronicle of Higher Education* "[4 Steps to a Memorable Teaching Philosophy](#)")

Consider these ideas from Lang (2010) about *how* you might construct and convey your teaching philosophy:

Reflect before writing: “**Begin with the end.** A teaching statement resembles a syllabus in that you should begin by thinking about the end. Picture a student walking out of the final exam of your course: In what way is that student different from the one who entered your classroom on the first day of the semester? What has the student learned over the course of the past three months?”

Be thoughtful about your opening: “**The story of how you developed your teaching philosophy** can make for a great opening. It will immediately set your statement apart from those—and they are legion—that begin with a standard expository paragraph.”

Ensure you have examples: “**Be specific.** The ends that you articulate will have to be at least a little abstract, which means that your next step—and the most important one, in my estimation—must be to find ways to make your philosophy concrete. You can do that quite simply by telling a story or offering a detailed description of an innovative or interesting teaching strategy you have used.”

Consider your narrative approach: “I consider a teaching statement to fall under the genre of creative nonfiction. As every teacher in that field knows, the first inclination students have when they are assigned to write an essay of creative nonfiction is to explain everything. They spill out expository

prose from start to finish. As every reader of nonfiction knows, readers remember and respond to your stories, not your explanations.”

### **BRAINSTORMING THE PHILOSOPHY OF A TEACHING STATEMENT** (from The University of Iowa)

- If I were to ask your students about your teaching, what would they say? (If you were one of your students, what would you say about your teaching?)
- Think of an activity you have used that you feel was both successful and a good reflection of you as the kind of teacher you want to be. What was it about the activity, and the way you implemented it, that made it a good activity?
- How do you establish rapport in your classes?
- Think of an activity that failed in the classroom. Why do you think it didn't work? How would you change it and/or the way you presented it?
- How do you motivate students? Is there a difference in how you motivate different students?
- How do you feel about grading? How do you go about deciding what grades to give to students? What kinds of exams do you use and why?
- What do you think makes an excellent teacher? What kinds of assessments do you use and why?
- What is something you've learned in your disciplinary study that you would like to try to apply to your teaching?
- How do you feel teachers can improve their performance?
- What are you interested in research and scholarly work? How does this relate to your teaching?

### **SOURCES & FURTHER READING**

- [“4 Steps to a Memorable Teaching Philosophy”](#) in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. (UWGB Library Access)
- [Writing a Teaching Philosophy Statement](#) from Western University's Centre for Teaching and Learning
- University of Waterloo's [Exploring Your Teaching Philosophy: Sample Exercises](#)
- University of Minnesota's [Center for Educational Innovation](#) (includes sample teaching philosophies and rubrics); [this sample](#) illustrates on one teaching philosophy changed over time.
- University of Michigan's overview of [Teaching Philosophies and Statements](#) has excellent overall resources and many, many examples on this page: [Teaching Philosophies from U-M](#)
- [What is a Teaching Portfolio?](#) from Duquesne University
- University of Calgary's [Sample Teaching Dossiers](#)