

Beginning a Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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What is it?

A statement about why you teach
A declaration of your beliefs or assumptions

Why write one?

Introduce yourself as teacher
Set the stage for your teaching portfolio
Consciously articulate a framework for your teaching
Take time for reflection and self-examination
Identify ways you can grow and improve
Provide a writing sample

What can go into a statement?

There is no one “right” way to write a statement.
The learning theory to which you subscribe
A teaching or learning issue in your field
Skills and attitudes you believe students should gain
Goals for your teaching career
Themes that pervade your teaching

How do your teaching strategies match your philosophy?

Dealing with diversity
Creating a class atmosphere
Motivating students
Grading and evaluating students
Discipline and class management
Physical environment – arranging chairs, etc.
Use and role of technology
Types of assignments
Specific practices

Statement-writing strategies

- Start with a goal.
- Your statement will be very personal.
- Write in the first person.
- Take your time
- Use quotations.
- Create a metaphor.
- Give specific examples.
- Read other people's statements.
- Get other people's opinions.
- Expect to write multiple drafts.
- Write more than you need, then edit it down.

Remember your audience

- Identify them
- Meet their needs
- Limit the assumptions you make about them
- Tailor your statement to position and the institution

Most popular advice

- Include anecdotes
- Be honest
- Limit the jargon
- Emphasize learning
- Describe a strategy you want to explore

Following Chism's five components: One way to start a statement of teaching philosophy

1. Conceptualization of learning
 - What do you think happens when students learn?
 - What learning theory do you subscribe to?
 - What assumptions do you make about learning?
 - What does your experience tell you?

2. Conceptualization of teaching
 - What is your role in the learning process?
 - What metaphor do you identify with teaching?
 - What themes pervade your teaching?

3. Goals for students
 - Content-area knowledge
 - Thinking and problem-solving skills
 - Writing or research skills
 - Technical skills
 - Social skills – group work, etc.
 - Appreciation of the subject
 - Encourage lifelong learning
 - Other values

4. Implementation of the philosophy
 - How do you deal with a diverse student group?
 - How do you create a class environment, rapport with students?
 - How do you grade or evaluate students?
 - What is the role of technology?
 - What types of assignments do you prefer?
 - What specific practices do you prefer?

5. Personal growth plan
 - What are your goals for your teaching career?
 - What is your vision of your future?

The components are from Chism, Nancy. (1997) "Developing a Philosophy of Teaching Statement." *Essays on Teaching Excellence* 9.3. The rest comes from a variety of sources.

CIDR Teaching and Learning Bulletin

Information for People who Teach at the University of Washington

Vol. 7, no. 2, 2003

Writing a Teaching Statement

Teaching philosophy statements are becoming increasingly important in hiring, promotion, tenure, and even grant proposals. However, writing a teaching philosophy statement can be a challenge for a number of reasons. Some people find it daunting to put a “philosophy” into words, and others are not sure if they actually have a philosophy of teaching. It can also be difficult to determine what to say and how to say it in a limited space. In this issue of the *Bulletin*, we offer suggestions for easing the process of articulating and developing a statement of teaching philosophy.

Elements of an Effective Teaching Statement

There are many ways to develop and organize a teaching statement, but statements that communicate effectively often include elements that are:

- **Descriptive:** What you do when you teach, types of activities or thinking in which you engage your students
- **Analytical:** Why you teach in the ways that you do, how your thinking about teaching has changed over time
- **Empirical:** Experiences or observations of student learning on which your decisions about teaching are based

Starting a Teaching Statement

Here are some different starting points to help you begin organizing your thoughts and putting ideas on paper:

One way to start is to write out answers to questions about typical **learning goals and teaching practices**:

- What do I want students to learn?
- How do I help them learn?
- What obstacles are there to student learning?
- How do I help students overcome these obstacles?

Another way to start writing is to focus on **specific learning activities** that you have used in class recently:

- What did I want students to learn from this activity?
- How well did it work?
- How do I know how well it worked?
- What would I change next time? Why?

In addition to your experience teaching in classrooms, consider how you have helped people in **other learning situations**, even if you weren't formally “teaching”:

- tutoring
- leading a research or design team
- advising
- working with patients or clients
- coaching
- mentoring a new associate

How is teaching and learning in those situations similar to what you do in class? How is it different?

Instead of writing your teaching statement from your perspective as an instructor, try writing from a **learner's point of view**. How would students describe their experience in a class that you teach?

Developing and Revising a Teaching Statement

After writing in response to one or more of these questions, review your notes and identify main ideas, themes, or underlying principles that characterize your teaching.

Most people find that it takes many drafts to organize their ideas and develop a statement that is a satisfactory representation of the way they think about their teaching.

To help you as you write, ask others to read drafts of your statement, identify ideas or themes that stand out to them, and indicate what might need to be clarified or elaborated:

- If you're writing a teaching statement for your department or college, find a colleague who has developed a teaching statement for a similar audience.
- If you're writing a teaching statement as part of a job application, find people with experience at the types of institutions that you are applying to.
- If you have colleagues who are also developing teaching statements, form a writing group so that you can periodically read and review one another's drafts.
- Consult with CIDR staff for feedback and suggestions to help you continue developing your teaching statement.

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Additional Resources

CIDR has collected additional resources and examples at <http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/PortfolioTools.htm>

Metaphors for Learning and Teaching

Learning

Journey

Dance

Banking (Freire)

Two-way street

Learner

Container

Disciple

Teaching

Coaching

Storytelling

Weaving

Lighting a lamp

Teacher

Yoda

Cicero

Matador

Guide

Midwife

Social worker

Classroom

Stage

Garden

Zoo

Studio

Others

No child left behind

Raising the bar

Quotations about teaching and learning

He who can does; he who cannot, teaches. What is more they are the only available teachers, because those who can are mostly quite incapable of teaching, even if they had the time for it.

-- George Bernard Shaw

You cannot teach a man anything; You can only help him to find it within himself -- Galileo

One test of the correctness of educational procedure is the happiness of the child.

-- Maria Montessori

It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge.

-- Albert Einstein

Teaching should be such that what is offered is perceived as a valuable gift and not as a hard duty

--Albert Einstein

Example isn't another way to teach, it is the only way to teach. --Albert Einstein

The authority of those who teach is often an obstacle to those who want to learn.

-- Cicero (Quoted by Montaigne)

If you are planning for a year, sow rice; if you are planning for a decade, plant trees; if you are planning for a lifetime, educate people. -- Chinese proverb

Education is a progressive discovery of our own ignorance. --Will Durant

Education's purpose is to replace an empty mind with an open one. --Malcolm Forbes

There are two types of education... One should teach us how to make a living, And the other how to live.

--John Adams

Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire. --William Butler Yeats

Education is not a form of entertainment, but a means of empowering people to take control of their lives.

--Unknown

Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young.

The greatest thing in life is to keep your mind young. --Henry Ford

Learning is not compulsory... neither is survival. --W. Edwards Deming

Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever. --Mahatma Gandhi

He who dares to teach must never cease to learn. --Richard Henry Dann

Nothing has more retarded the advancement of learning than the disposition of vulgar minds to ridicule and vilify what they do not understand. --Samuel Johnson

The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires. --William Arthur Ward

Teacher

Identify a great teacher you once had in college or before.
Why does that person stand out or bring back memories?

Student

Describe a student (real or imaginary) who valued your class.
How would s/he describe your teaching or remember most about it?

Learning

Describe a metaphor for teaching, learning, or the classroom.

Class

Describe a memorable class that really “made your day” ... in a good way. How did you know it was a success? What keeps it in your memory?