

Writing a Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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Statement of Teaching Philosophy

A **narrative description** of one's **conception of teaching**, including the **rationale** for one's **teaching methods**.

Source: Beatty, Leigh, and Dean (2009b), p. 100.

Teachers open the door. You enter by yourself.

- *Chinese Proverb*



Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Conception of Teaching & Rationale

- Makes explicit the underlying values that inspire & motivate one as a teacher and the overarching goals one has for students' learning



Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Teaching Methods

- Makes explicit the processes or methods through which one and one's students embody & enact values and attain goals in the classroom/course



Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Narrative Description

- Expresses the process of reflection on teaching and learning, i.e. one's self-awareness as a teacher and one's awareness of students and their learning



Philosophy

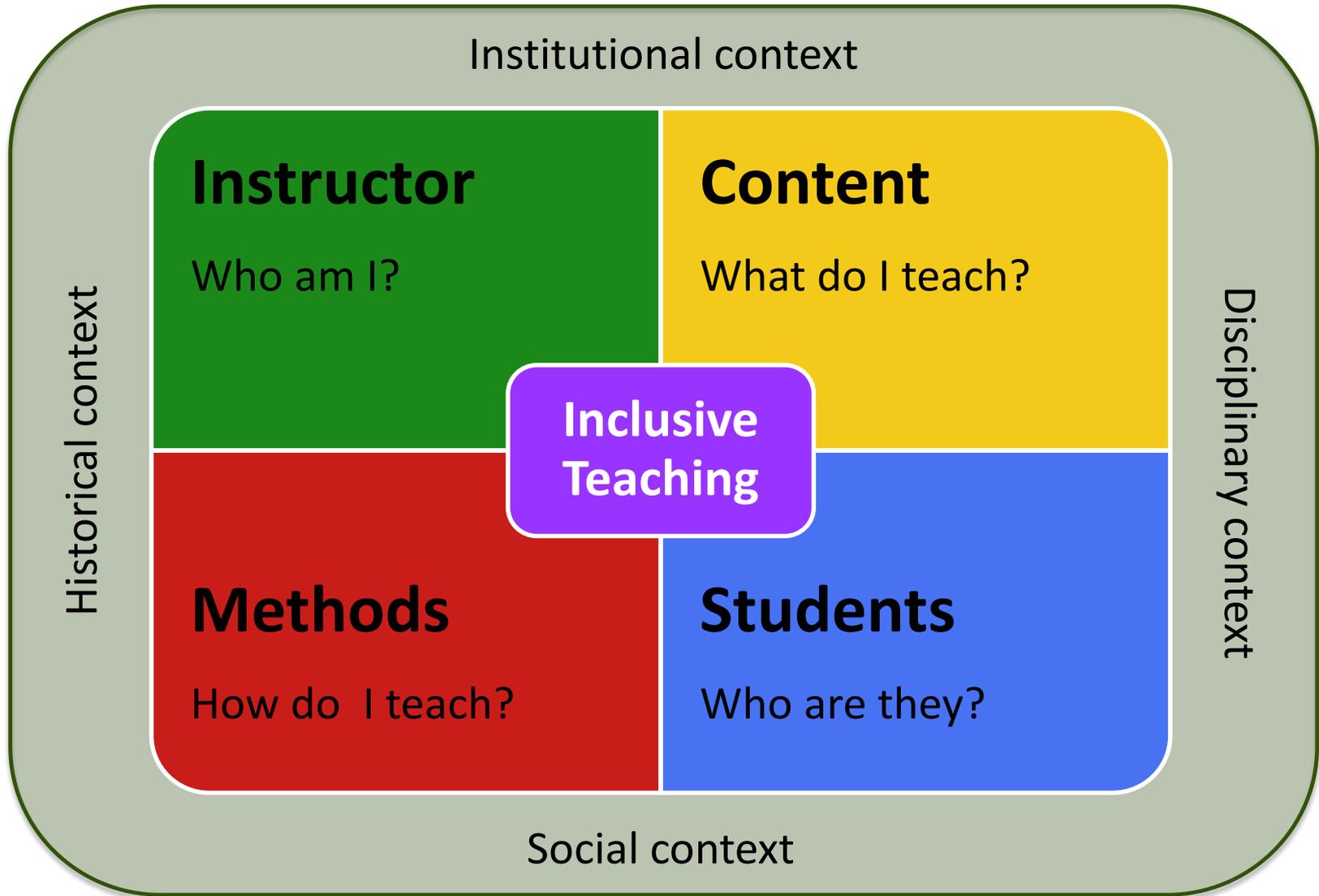
“Anyone setting out to teach has a philosophy of teaching.

Philosophy does not imply anything esoteric or grand.

Philosophy means only **those things we hold to be true about students, about the process of teaching, and about what we should be doing to teach well.** Nothing so complex and unpredictable as teaching should be done without **thinking about it.** And it is from thinking about it, and seeing what others have thought and said about it, as well as actually doing it, that a philosophy of teaching develops.”

Source: Leamson, Robert. 1999. Thinking About Teaching and Learning: Developing Habits of Learning with First Year College and University Students. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC, pp. viii-ix.

What are some dynamics of inclusive teaching & learning?



Adapted from Marchesani, Linda S. and Maurianne Adams. "Dynamics of Diversity in the Teaching-Learning Process: A Faculty Development Model for Analysis and Action." *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* 52 (Winter 1992): 9-20. The authors cite an unpublished paper by B. W. Jackson as the source of this model.

Philosophy

A basic question:

What is your conception of a great teacher and a great learner?



Philosophy

Key reflective questions:

- Why do I teach?
- How do I establish my presence as a teacher?
- How do I convey my interest or passion for the subject?
- What am I trying to accomplish in my teaching?
- What is motivating about my subject/discipline?
- What are the most essential skills needed to engage as a worker (scholar, practitioner, etc.) in my subject/discipline?
- How are my approaches to teaching a reflection of *who* I think I am, of *who* I think my students are?
- How do I build rapport in my class and relationships with and among individual students?
- How do I include my students in the class – their voices, experiences, interests, etc.?
- Under what conditions do students best learn?
- How do I help students navigate new and different perspectives?
- **What learning goals do I set for my students?**

Another way of phrasing it:
What is most important for students to know, do, experience, or feel to be successful learners and practitioners in my discipline or in life generally?

The answer to this question should be explicit in the statement.

Adapted from: Johnston (2008).

My teaching centers on rigorous questioning: I tell my students that literary texts are sites for inquiry, offering opportunities for us to challenge our thinking through the exchange of ideas. My goal as a teacher of American literature is to equip students with the bravery to inhabit and explore their own uncertainties and ignorance, to provide them with the tools to communicate what stimulates their curiosity, and to build in them the tenacity to interrogate their own thinking.

EXAMPLE learning goals

My goal as a teacher is to create “everyday sociologists”—not necessarily professional sociologists who all attend graduate school and become professors, but rather people who leave the classroom with a new curiosity about why things are the way they are. The most important task of teaching is equipping students with a new way to view the world, through their ability to think critically. They may never remember particular research methodologies or specific facts about the social world, but as long as they are armed with the ability to think critically, make connections between individuals and broader societies, and become more compassionate, analytical, and empowered citizens, who will hopefully challenge existing systems of oppression in their own ways, I have done my job. My teaching practices rest on three core principles 1) create an inclusive, student centered classroom environment 2) provide students with the theoretical tools to place their individual biographies into a broader world history 3) provide students with a comparative historical framework for understanding contemporary issues of systemic inequality.

EXAMPLE learning goals

I want students to succeed on their own journey of discovery and shape the world for the better. I support this intention through the teaching of foundational knowledge, critical thinking, and the skills necessary to facilitate life-long learning. The teaching of mandatory subject-specific information is important for students to gain a foundational understanding of theory and method. But we must also encourage critical approaches to learning, critical thinking that will empower students to take learning seriously and use education to move beyond their circumstances. It is in teaching that we provide students with the experience to tackle issues pertinent to their educational interests and cultivate habits for an actively engaged life.

EXAMPLE learning goals

I teach to give others a greater understanding of the natural world. I have found that with a handful of basic principles one can understand many natural phenomena, and that critical thinking about how these concepts are relevant in life brings about a greater understanding and appreciation of the world in which we live. I teach to bring this appreciation and understanding to students, and to give them the tools and mindset that they need to analyze the nature of the world effectively.

EXAMPLE learning goals

I want my students to learn something new, to be curious about it, and to question their beliefs. To do this I seek to help my students have a firm foundation of the concepts early on, to frame their thinking as researchers, and to develop their critical thinking abilities.

EXAMPLE learning goals

What are some learning goals you feel are essential for students to succeed in your discipline?

That is, what is important for students to **know, do, experience, or feel** to be successful learners and practitioners in your discipline or in life generally?

Teaching Inventories

The following online questionnaires *may* be helpful in stimulating thinking about your teaching philosophy and methods:

Teaching Goals Inventory

http://fm.iowa.uiowa.edu/fmi/xsl/tgi/data_entry.xsl?-db=tgi_data&-lay=Layout01&-view

Teaching Perspectives Inventory

<http://www.teachingperspectives.com/>

Teaching Style Inventory

<http://longleaf.net/teachingstyle.html>

Statement

Subject/discipline-specific vs. generalized

(recommendation: be specific to your discipline in how you word your learning goals and the methods you use; include appropriate subject content references in your examples, e.g. reference key texts or subjects taught in your field)

Personalized yet professional style vs. depersonalized style

(recommendation: be personable and professional in how you write)

Personal version vs. official version (personal = any length, just write, write, write what you need to say)
(official version for applications = 1-2pages)

also: consider a “syllabus version” for your students (something short on your approach to teaching; it doesn’t need to be called a “teaching philosophy” on the syllabus)

Concise: 1-2 pages (~800-1200 words) note: the best statements will require two pages; increasingly, though, applicants are encountering one-page limits

Specificity – use concrete examples from the classroom (esp. when discussing methods)

Research Shows...

Successful statements have these qualities:

- Specificity
- Evidence of dedication to teaching
- Indicate writing and communication skills
- Demonstrate thoughtful reflection on one's teaching
- Evidence of student-centered methods
- Convey a match between applicant and hiring institution

Source: Bruff (2007).

Remember...

The **statement** is a **narrative description**

As you write, you might think in terms of this question:

– **“If someone looked into my classroom, what would one see?”**

For example, a person won't just see “active learning” through “discussion,” a person will see: **“students work in small groups of three to identify the terms Hurston uses in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, to transform a hurricane into a ‘monstropolous beast,’ and then they describe the parallels with terms used in news accounts of Hurricane Katrina.”**

Statement Elements

5 Important Categories

- **Learning goals:** discipline-specific knowledge, skills, attitudes that are important for students' academic, personal & professional success
- **Teaching methods:** specific teaching methods & how they contribute to students' accomplishment of learning goals & how they align with student expectations & needs
- **Assessment of student learning:** specific tools used to assess student learning & descriptions of how these tools facilitate student achievement of learning goals
- **Assessment of teaching:** strengths and areas for improvement of one's teaching based on evidence, along with plans for continuing development
- **Learning Environment:** specific ways a variety of diverse identities, experiences, knowledges, etc. are accounted for and integrated into teaching methods; the ways an inclusive classroom are cultivated so that students feel they belong and can succeed in their learning

Tips: Consider Your Audience

- Will this candidate be able to handle the teaching responsibilities of the job?
- Does her approach to teaching suggest that she would be a good “fit” for our department and our students?
- Does this candidate want to teach? If so, why?
- If I were to step into a classroom and observe this candidate teaching, what would I see?

Source: Writing a Teaching Philosophy Statement, Washington University in St. Louis

Tips: Consider Your Audience

- How do this candidate's research interests shape her teaching?
- What will this candidate add to our department? What will our students gain from his classes? What will our department gain in terms of specific courses, new opportunities for students to develop their skills and knowledge, and interesting pedagogical approaches?
- How does this candidate respond to the perennial challenges of teaching, such as motivating students to learn, evaluating student work, maintaining high standards in the classroom, and juggling teaching with other responsibilities we expect faculty to fulfill?

Source: Writing a Teaching Philosophy Statement, Washington University in St. Louis

Tips: Stand Out from the Crowd!

Begin with the End

- In what way is a student leaving my class different than from the one who entered on the first day?

Make Distinctions *(if they exist...)*

- Note differences in types of classes taught: different objectives, methods, etc.

Source: Lang (2010).

Tips: Stand Out from the Crowd!

Be Specific

- Tell a story or two about how your objectives or methods have played out in the classroom

Note Your Sources

- Where did your philosophy or ideas about teaching come from?

Source: Lang (2010).

Tips: Show, Don't Tell!

Be Mindful of Insider Language

- Jargon should be explained and exemplified

Be Mindful of Emotions

- Demonstrate through examples that you “love” teaching, are “passionate” about what you do, “care” about students, or are “inspired” by your students

Possible Components	Excellent	Needs work	Weak
<p>Goals for student learning: What knowledge, skills, and attitudes are important for student success in your discipline? What are you preparing students for? What are key challenges in the teaching-learning process?</p>	<p>Goals are clearly articulated and specific and go beyond the knowledge level, including skills, attitudes, career goals, etc. Goals are sensitive to the context of the instructor's discipline. They are concise but not exhaustive.</p>	<p>Goals are articulated although they may be too broad or not specific to the discipline. Goals focus on basic knowledge, ignoring skills acquisition and affective change.</p>	<p>Articulation of goals is unfocused, incomplete, or missing.</p>
<p>Enactment of goals (teaching methods): What teaching methods do you use? How do these methods contribute to your goals for students? Why are these methods appropriate for use in your discipline?</p>	<p>Enactment of goals is specific and thoughtful. Includes details and rationale about teaching methods. The methods are clearly connected to specific goals and are appropriate for those goals. Specific examples of the method in use within the disciplinary context are given.</p>	<p>Description of teaching methods not clearly connected to goals or if connected, not well developed (seems like a list of what is done in the classroom). Methods are described but generically, no example of the instructor's use of the methods within the discipline is communicated.</p>	<p>Enactment of goals is not articulated. If there is an attempt at articulating teaching methods, it is basic and unreflective.</p>
<p>Assessment of goals (measuring student learning): How do you know your goals for students are being met? What sorts of assessment tools do you use (e.g., tests, papers, portfolios, journals), and why? How do assessments contribute to student learning? How do assessments communicate disciplinary priorities?</p>	<p>Specific examples of assessment tools are clearly described. Assessment tools are aligned with teaching goals and teaching methods. Assessments reinforce the priorities and context of the discipline both in content and type.</p>	<p>Assessments are described, but not in connection to goals and teaching methods. Description is too general, with no reference to the motivation behind the assessments. There is no clear connection between the assessments and the priorities of the discipline.</p>	<p>Assessment of goals is not articulated or mentioned only in passing.</p>
<p>Creating an inclusive learning environment, addressing one or more of the following questions: •How do your own and your students' identities (e.g., race, gender, class), background, experience, and levels of privilege affect the classroom? •How do you account for diverse learning styles? •How do you integrate diverse perspectives into your teaching?</p>	<p>Portrays a coherent philosophy of inclusive education that is integrated throughout the philosophy. Makes space for diverse ways of knowing, and/or learning styles. Discussion of roles is sensitive to historically underrepresented students. Demonstrates awareness of issues of equity within the discipline.</p>	<p>Inclusive teaching is addressed but in a cursory manner or in a way that isolates it from the rest of the philosophy. Author briefly connects identity issues to aspects of his/her teaching.</p>	<p>Issues of inclusion are not addressed or addressed in an awkward manner. There is no connection to teaching practices.</p>
<p>Structure, rhetoric and language: How is the reader engaged? Is the language used appropriate to the discipline? How is the statement thematically structured?</p>	<p>The statement has a guiding structure and/or theme that engages the reader and organizes the goals, methods, and assessments articulated in the statement. Jargon is avoided and teaching terms (e.g., critical thinking) are given specific definitions that apply to the instructor's disciplinary context. Specific, rich examples are used to bolster statements of goals, methods, and assessments. Grammar and spelling are correct.</p>	<p>The statement has a structure and/or theme that is not connected to the ideas actually discussed in the statement, or, organizing structure is weak and does not resonate within the disciplinary context. Examples are used but seem generic. May contain some jargon.</p>	<p>No overall structure present. Statement is a collection of disconnected statements about teaching. Jargon is used liberally and not supported by specific definitions or examples. Needs much revision.</p>

Rubric for Statements of Teaching Philosophy developed by Matt Kaplan, Chris O'Neal, Debbie Meizlish, Rosario Carillo, and Diana Kardia

Teaching Statement Worksheet

Student Learning Goals

Identify three student learning goals that answer the following question: **What is most important for students to know, do, experience, or feel to be successful learners and practitioners in my discipline or in life generally?**

Goal 1.

Goal 2.

Goal 3.

Teaching Methods and Examples

Identify at least one method, and one concrete example of that method, for each student learning goal you have listed.

Method 1:
Concrete example:

Method 2:
Concrete example:

Method 3:
Concrete example:

Learning Assessment

Identify at least one assessment (formative or summative) for each student learning goal you have listed.

Assessment 1:

Assessment 2:

Assessment 3:

Teaching Assessment

Identify 1-3 ways you assess your own teaching or engage in professional teaching development to enhance your teaching.

Learning Environment

Identify ways you cultivate and maintain the learning environment of your classes, including ways you get to know students, help them interact with each other and you, and how you present yourself.

Teaching Statement Review Questions

1. Does the statement articulate student learning goals explicitly? What are they?
2. Are the student learning goals appropriate for the discipline, and does the statement articulate them in a discipline-appropriate way?
3. Does the statement articulate specific teaching methods? Is it clear how the methods connect to and facilitate the learning goals? Are there any methods noted that appear to have no obvious connection to one of the stated learning goals? Are there any learning goals without any obvious connection to methods for accomplishing them?
4. Are concrete examples provided to illustrate the methods? [Can you answer this question: “For this method and/or example, does the description in the statement more or less match what I would see if I was standing in the back of the room observing it taking place?”][Can you also answer this question: “That sounds interesting. Is it clear to me more or less how this works?”]
5. Are there opportunities to insert even more concrete details to enrich the methods or examples that are noted? [For example, if the statement is describing methods/examples from more than one course, is it clear from which course each method/example comes? For the methods/examples, could a quick reference to a specific text (i.e. source of content) be inserted?]
6. Are assignments or assessments (graded or not graded) included? Is it clear what they are and how they work? Is it clear how they connect to one of the learning goals or methods noted?
7. Is it clear how the learning environment of the class is established or cultivated? If the methods emphasize “interaction” or “engagement” or “student-centered,” is it clear how students come to feel empowered or confident to contribute?
8. If “diversity” or “equity” or “inclusion” or related terms are indicated as important (e.g. as an explicit learning goal or in order to bring in “diverse perspectives” or “diverse voices,” etc.), is it clear how the methods/examples or assignments/assessments facilitate this aim? Are there opportunities to be more explicit about how to promote this aim (such as reference to particular texts used or guest presenters or ways to include/highlight diverse student experiences or voices in the class, etc.)?
9. Does the conclusion refer back to the opening in any way – in order to reiterate it, extend it, or otherwise invoke it to make a final, concluding point [especially if a story or anecdote is used in the opening]? Is there an obvious alternative to the current opening/ending – for example an interesting example used that might serve as a more intriguing opening or conclusion?
10. Is the language used – terms, references, etc. – clear? In general, does the statement “tell” me something or is it showing me with examples? Is there jargon that needs explained or exemplified with an example? Are emotional terms present (“love teaching” “passionate” etc.) rather than examples that demonstrate this?