

Writing a Teaching Philosophy Statement

What is a Teaching Philosophy Statement?

The Statement is a one- to two-page document that provides a clear, concise account of your teaching approach, methods, and expertise. *Each statement should be unique.* Nonetheless, the following guidelines should be helpful to you as you prepare your statement. A Teaching Philosophy Statement should answer four fundamental questions: 1) Why do you teach? 2) What do you teach? 3) How do you teach? 4) How do you measure your effectiveness?

--1. *Why do you teach?*

Why are you drawn to the rewards and challenges of teaching? What is it that you can accomplish in teaching that you find particularly valuable and worthwhile? When you teach, for example, you can mentor students and contribute to their intellectual growth, gain new perspectives on topics that occupy your research, and reexamine the key ideas and assumptions that shape the production of knowledge in your field.

--2. *What do you teach?*

What are the specific subjects and courses you are prepared to teach? What are your *objectives for student learning*? Why are these objectives important? Do your objectives differ depending on the type of course or the background of students you are teaching? If so, how? What should students gain from taking your courses? Examples include an understanding of foundational concepts in the field, sophistication as critical thinkers, or the ability to write concise and well-supported arguments.

--3. *How do you teach?*

What teaching methods and strategies do you use to meet your objectives? Do you prefer lecturing, leading discussions, or group work? Do you use a combination of these methods? *Why and in what circumstances?* What kinds of assignments and assessments do you use? *Why?* How do you take into account students' varied learning preferences? How do you approach teaching students of varying aptitudes and levels of interest in the topic? How do you approach teaching non-traditional students? Do you use instructional technology? *If so, why and how?*

--4. *How do you measure your effectiveness?*

How do you know whether you are meeting your objectives? How can you tell if your students are learning? How do you use student evaluations to develop new strategies for engaging student participation or to meet other objectives? Has your teaching been observed by a faculty member or other evaluator? If so, how did you use the feedback provided to improve your teaching skills? Have you had a class or teaching presentation videotaped? If so, what did you learn from this experience?

The Teaching Philosophy Statement should include concrete examples of specific course topics, assignments, assessments, and strategies drawn from courses that you have taught or are or prepared to teach, or from past mentoring and advising experiences. These examples should 1) demonstrate the range of your teaching expertise and 2) illustrate your objectives, methods, and approaches. Compiling a Teaching Portfolio will allow you to flesh out these examples by collecting "supporting documents," such as syllabi, actual assignments, exams, evaluations, and graded student papers..

Consider your Audience

When you write your teaching philosophy statement, try to anticipate questions that a search committee would want your statement to answer. Ask your faculty mentors and graduate students who have interviewed for academic positions what they think search committees are looking for; these individuals are your best sources for learning about the expectations and issues that are particular to your field. Consult the Web site of the school to which you are applying to get a sense of the school's mission and students, and the relative importance of teaching and research within the institution and the department.

Here is a list of potential questions that may be motivating search committees when they ask you to submit a statement of teaching philosophy:

--*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?*

--*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?

The Teaching Philosophy Statement is NOT a summary of the experiences on your CV, nor is it an article on pedagogy. It is a concise, specific discussion of the objectives and approaches you currently use, have used in the past, and plan to use in the future. Keep in mind that search committees are looking for *colleagues*. Reviewing in detail your past experience as a Teaching Assistant, without discussing specific methods or approaches you have developed and used in the classroom, may create an image of you as a *student* instead of a colleague.

Formatting Conventions

Limit the length of the final draft to between one and two pages. Again, consider your audience. Steering committees are buried in paper. The more concise your statement can be, the more likely that the members of the committee will read it. A statement submitted for a position at a liberal arts college might be longer and more detailed than a statement that you submit for a position at a research university.

Use the first person and, wherever possible, the present tense. The exceptions to the latter are the instances in which you are describing what you have done in courses taught in the past and what you will do in courses planned for the future. Avoid technical jargon. Your statement may be read by evaluators representing different disciplines and specializations. One of the hallmarks of effective teaching is the ability to explain concepts to audiences who are not experts in the field.

Strategies for Getting Started

Writing an effective Teaching Philosophy Statement can be a daunting task. Think of the process as a writing project and give yourself some time to explore ideas and try out different ways of expressing those ideas before you write the first draft of the statement. Here are some strategies for more informal, preliminary writing exercises on the topic of teaching:

--1. Write a letter addressed to someone outside of academia on the joys and challenges of teaching.

--2. Make a list of the qualities of an effective teacher.

--3. "Free-write" on a memorable experience in the classroom that you experienced or observed.

Consider what went well, what you might do differently, and why.

--4. Develop your "dream course."

What would be your topic?

What would you want to achieve in terms of helping students learn?

How would you try to achieve those objectives?

How would your research interests inform your approach?

--5. Imagine yourself in your first academic position.

How will you teach an introductory, undergraduate course in your field?

How will you organize a graduate-level seminar?

How will your research inform your approach in each case?

--6. Begin with concrete details.

What sets you apart as a teacher?

How would an observer describe your teaching?

What are the specific skills and knowledge that students should gain in the classroom?

What should happen in the classroom? Why?

What are the teaching methods that you consider most effective? Why?

Links and Resources

"TA Mentors' Teaching Philosophy Statements." The Center for Teaching and Learning. The University of Georgia.

http://www.ctl.uga.edu/teach_asst/ta_mentors/philosophy/index.html

Haugen, Lee. "Writing a Teaching Philosophy Statement." Center for Teaching Effectiveness. Iowa State University.

<http://www.celt.iastate.edu/teaching/philosophy.html>

Montell, Gabriela. "How to Write a Statement of Teaching Philosophy." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. March 27,

2003. <http://chronicle.com/article/How-to-Write-a-Statement-of/45133>.

O'Neal, Chris, Deborah Meizlish, and Matthew Kaplan. "Writing a Teaching Philosophy for the Academic Job Search." CRLT Occasional Papers. No. 23. University of Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching. 2007.

http://www.crlt.umich.edu/publinks/CRLT_no23.pdf

Van Note Chism, Nancy. "Writing a Philosophy of Teaching Statement." Ohio State University.

<http://ftad.osu.edu/portfolio/philosophy/Philosophy.html>

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