

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

I approach teaching as a means of building confidence and capability in my students. By confidence, I refer to the student's trust in their ability to listen, absorb, and construct a thoughtful argument or well-considered stance. By capability, I refer to the critical thinking, subject development, organized construction, and writing skills necessary for any student to succeed in higher education. Instead of outlining my goals for my students, I'll elaborate on my three main priorities as a teacher.

One initial priority is the use of diverse teaching methods to engage each student in the classroom melting pot. A routine classroom may be predictable for an instructor, but is dull for a student, to the point of tuning out - or worse, shutting down. It is my responsibility to diversify my lessons and present a mix of classic, cultural, and unexpected materials to stimulate each unique class.

Lecture is a necessary and valuable component of class, and my lecture frequently involves the students. By incorporating simple strategies, such as taking a 'show of hands' to gauge composition issues, posing questions on new material before teaching answers, and using student responses to steer my discourse, my students take an active role in each lecture and make it their own. In addition to student-fed lectures, my lessons are formatted to include individual brainstorming, partner sharing, small group activities, peer review workshops, open discussion, and debate, depending on the prescribed course objectives.

Besides varying the format of the class, I also want to present wide ranging subject matter in a variety of ways. For instance, a lesson on persuasive essays could incorporate a 1950s print ad for laundry detergent and a recent Superbowl commercial. To evaluate effective methods of personal narrative, we may read a selection from *The Diary of Anne Frank*, watch a portion of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, or listen to Billy Joel's "Piano Man" and discuss the differences. I find that it is important to blend elements of technology with the material as it plugs unprepared students into their wireless world and keeps savvy students engaged.

A second ongoing priority is to focus on each student's progress as an individual. By showing respect in the classroom, hosting positive reinforcement, and encouraging self-assessment, I help my students build their academic confidence and realize their potential. It's important to give momentum to the classroom as a whole, but I also feel each student needs to recognize their worth and take pride in their education.

Respect is a two-way street: I want to listen to my students and let them hear each other, but I also want to elevate their assumed value of the classroom, the material, my teaching and most importantly, their intellect. I show respect to my students by doing something simple like learning their names. I also show respect for their intellect by asking them the leading questions

that will launch our discussion, conversation, or debate. Beyond participation, it's important for students to know when they're doing well. This is not about placating or being a cheerleader, rather, it's meant to remind students that they need to recognize their strengths as well as their weaknesses.

As I build my student's confidence in class, they too must learn to evaluate their performance in relation to what they are capable of. Self-assessment is inextricably linked to self-improvement. At the end of the term, I ask students to write a reflection on what they have accomplished. I also issue the same grammar quiz on the first and second-to-last meetings so that the student can actually see their improvement. I build revision and draft time into the course schedule for many reasons, but primarily to teach students how to analyze their own work. I provide a letter grade on first drafts so that students can see what their additional effort meant to their final grade. I want to soften the intimidation of the first draft, and it's my hope that a student would carry that confidence into other instructor's classrooms.

A third and crucial priority is to teach and rigorously enforce the basics of composition: listening and thinking, building credibility, and constructing the final product. First comes listening: hear and understand the conversation. My students will know how to interpret a work at its fundamental value by practicing with topical essays, book chapters, films, poems, other student's work, and anything they find stimulating. By dissecting the material and working through it together, we model a simple process in class that they can translate to their studies. Once we understand the subject, we apply critical thinking: this is what it says, now what does it mean? By asking students their opinions and what they think about other's opinions, I challenge them to put their opinion in context. By opening up to the possibility of criticism, skepticism, and even rejection in the safe space of classroom discussion, they instinctively invest more effort in the development of an opinion. Beyond critical thinking, they must build a credible argument: address both sides of the story, know the shortcomings of either side, do the research and speak with confidence.

Then there is the challenge of a well-written paper. With 15 minute mini-lessons on grammar, sentence structure, citations, and anything that I see my students struggling with built in to the schedule, we will work together to comprehend, practice, and master basic skills. Grammar quizzes on the corresponding lessons are graded and factored into their score, but I also mark their papers for grammar based on the topics we have already covered. Reading from a grammar book is not teaching, but enforcing the application promotes learning.

My student-centric approach is flexible, simple, and effective. It's not about me; it's about their experience and their education. It's about real-life skills and practical knowledge that can be used at school, at work and in the community. It's about laying the foundations for who they are as a student and who they will be as a professional. I am not only building skills, I am building confidence.

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