



TIPSHEET

WRITING A STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

Your statement of teaching philosophy is a short, one- to two-page document that should function both as a stand-alone essay that describes your personal approach to teaching, and as a central component of the teaching dossier. Your statement should not simply describe your experiences and initiatives in teaching, but, as Schönwetter et al. (2002) write, should provide “a systematic and critical rationale that focuses on the important components defining effective teaching and learning in a particular discipline and/or institutional context” (p. 84). It is personal and reflective, drawing on your own experiences as a teacher.

Purposes

Your statement of teaching philosophy does several things for you. It can:

- Clarify what you believe good teaching to be.
- Explain what you hope to achieve in teaching.
- Contextualize your teaching strategies and other evidence of teaching effectiveness.
- Promote and provide an opportunity for reflection and professional development in teaching.
- Provide a means for others to learn from your experiences.

Components

A statement of teaching philosophy is a flexible document, and can be successfully constructed in a number of different ways. One way in which statements of teaching philosophy vary is in whether or not they include descriptions of an instructor’s specific teaching strategies (e.g. a description of a particular assignment or class activity) alongside the instructor’s teaching beliefs. Some instructors prefer to integrate these strategies into the philosophy statement; others prefer to describe them in a separate document (a “Statement of Teaching Practice”). Other common components of a statement of teaching philosophy include:

- Your definition of good teaching, with an explanation of why you have developed or adopted this particular definition.
- A discussion of your teaching methods: how do you implement your definition of good teaching?
- A discussion of your evaluation and assessment methods and a description of how they support your definition of good teaching.
- A description of your students, and their most important learning goals and challenges.
- A description of your teaching goals: with what content, skills, or values should students leave your classroom? What are your goals for improving your own teaching?

Format

- As concise as possible: 1-2 pages single spaced (the document may be slightly longer if it includes information on specific teaching strategies).
- Include generous white spaces between paragraphs to allow for ease of reading and to provide space for comments.
- Written in a personal, relatively informal tone, usually in the first person. Sometimes mentioning the names of scholars who have been particularly influential to your teaching can be valuable, but the statement should generally *not* include a substantial review of relevant research.

10 Steps to Completion

1. Identify one or two of your most effective teaching methods. Why are these methods effective?
2. Jot down what you know about your students and how they learn.
3. Review some of your teaching materials (assignments, syllabi). What are their strengths? How would you improve them?

4. Consider some of the issues that most shape your teaching: What do you hope will be the result of your teaching? What disciplinary or institutional structures affect the way you teach? What were some critical moments or experiences for you as a teacher? How do you know that a teaching activity or a course has been successful?
5. Consider how these issues are connected. Do your teaching materials reflect your understanding of your students and their needs? Do you derive your teaching goals from a positive or negative experience with particular teaching activities?
6. Using these notes and reflections, write a draft of your philosophy statement in narrative form.
7. What evidence do you have of your teaching effectiveness (teaching materials, feedback from students and colleagues)? Does this evidence reflect what you have identified as your strengths and priorities as an instructor?
8. Re-write the philosophy statement, taking into account your evidence of teaching effectiveness.
9. Have someone else read the statement.
10. Re-write the philosophy statement a second time, incorporating feedback from others.

Avoiding common pitfalls

Some common complaints from people who evaluate teaching philosophy statements include:

- **Too general:** A statement that does not reflect the particular beliefs, experiences, and circumstance of the author.
- A statement that is **not reflective:** it simply lists teaching techniques or experiences, but does not describe how these techniques or experiences have contributed to the author's beliefs about what constitutes effective teaching.
- A statement that dwells too much on **negative experiences or circumstances.**
- **Too clichéd:** A statement that expresses a belief in a popular contemporary approach to teaching without establishing how that approach has been integrated into the author's teaching.
- **Too oblique:** A statement that references a philosophy or belief but never describes it outright.
- **Too few examples:** A statement that does not include information about how the author knows his or her teaching to be effective.

Additional resources

Websites:

- Angelo, T.A. & Cross, K.P. (1993). Teaching goals inventory. Retrieved from http://fm.iowa.uiowa.edu/fmi/xsl/tgi/data_entry.xsl?-db=tgi_data&-lay=Layout01&-view
- Faculty & TA Development Office, Ohio State University. (2005). Writing a philosophy of teaching statement. Retrieved from <http://ucate.osu.edu/portfolio/philosophy/Philosophy.html>
- Pratt, D.D. & Collins, J.B. (2001). Teaching perspectives inventory. Retrieved from http://teachingperspectives.com/html/tpi_frames.htm
A free online tool for identifying your approach(es) to teaching, developed by Professors Daniel Pratt and John Collins at the University of British Columbia.
- Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. (2002). The deep end: Self-reflection: Easier said than done. Retrieved from <http://mcmaster.ca/cll/posped/current%20issue/index.htm>
Teaching philosophies of some 3M National Teaching Fellowship award winners.

Articles & books:

- Chism, N. V. N. (1998). Developing a philosophy of teaching statement. *Essays on Teaching Excellence*, 9(3), 1-2. Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education.
- Goodyear, G.E. & Allchin, D. (1998). Statements of teaching philosophy. In M. Kaplan (ed.), *To improve the academy*, 17, 103-122.
- Grundman, H. (2006). Writing a teaching philosophy statement. *Notices of the American Mathematical Society*, 53(11), 1129-1133. Available online at: [PDF] <http://www.ams.org/notices/200611/comm-grundman.pdf>
- Schönwetter, D., Sokal, L., Friesen, M. & Taylor, L. (2002). Teaching philosophies reconsidered: A conceptual model for the development and evaluation of teaching philosophy statements. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 7(1), 83-97.