



teaching & learning
transformation center

Writing a Teaching Philosophy Statement An Introduction for Graduate Students

A teaching philosophy statement is a 1-1 ½ page (single-spaced) document articulating your beliefs about teaching and learning with evidence of how you enact those beliefs in your teaching. When someone reads your teaching philosophy statement, they should have a sense of what you want your students to gain from taking your classes and should be able to visualize you in the classroom and interacting with your students. Your statement should paint a consistent picture of you and your teaching from objectives and ideals to examples. How do you achieve this?

Identify your Objectives as a Teacher

Your ideas or beliefs should be summarized in 3-4 objectives related to student learning or development that you want to accomplish as a teacher. In other words, what should students leave your class knowing or being able to do? Consider including objectives that range from short-term (can be accomplished in a semester) to longer-term (can be accomplished across several semesters or years). Define any buzzwords or technical terms. You can write about your objectives in terms of beliefs (*I believe that _____ is important for student success*) or as factual statements (*_____ is important for student success*). Your objectives should be relevant and specific for the field in which you are applying to teach. Objectives should be easily identifiable, and can be signaled through the use of headings, boldface, or italics. When writing about your objectives, make sure to provide some explanation of what they mean for you and your students. Without these explanations, the use of educational terms may leave your reader uncertain as to whether you understand the concepts or are just using educational jargon. Your objectives will not be completely unique, but strive to make them personal.

Provide Evidence of How You Achieve Each Objective

Back up your beliefs and ideas with concrete evidence or examples. Think about activities or discussions that have excited you or best supported student learning. Include examples of formative or summative assessments as well as interactions with students in one-on-one or group settings. Make sure that your examples align with your objectives. If there is a mismatch, consider whether you need to reconsider your objectives, revise your examples, or make changes in your teaching to match what you value. Include both general and specific examples to capture the breadth and depth of your teaching. In certain places it will be more effective to list activities or teaching techniques, but for other examples, set the context (*When discussing memory development*) and go into detail about the activity or assignment (*I have students complete memory tasks and compare their data to their peers*). For the more specific examples, get to the main point of the example as quickly as possible and avoid rambling. For graduate students who have limited teaching experience, talk about what you will do in the future (*I will...* or *I plan to...*), but avoid overemphasizing a lack of experience. Think outside of the box: are there examples from mentoring undergraduates in research or from your own experience as a student that could illustrate your points?

Style and Format

Write in first person, use present tense when possible, and apply strong and active language. This may mean writing in a style very different from how you discuss your research or scholarship.

Teaching philosophy statements can vary in format from more narrative in style to more straightforward and informational. Ideally, you will want to start with a hook. This could include discussing a passion for teaching and learning (or your subject area) and how that came about,

setting up an analogy, presenting an overarching objective for teaching and learning, telling a story, or building on a quote. This should be consistent with and set the stage for the rest of your philosophy. Then, move fairly quickly to your teaching objectives and supporting evidence. It often works well to have one paragraph for each objective and the associated examples and evidence. For your conclusion, it is okay to make a bit more grandiose statement about teaching or the impact you want to make. If possible, return to the ideas in your introduction, but do not spend time simply restating previous points.

Consider Your Audience

Your audience will typically be faculty on a hiring committee, which can include individuals inside and outside of your field. Avoid too much jargon, and use language that is clear and precise to demonstrate competence in teaching and in your content area. Remember that the committee reading your philosophy will have a range of teaching styles and that they are looking for a good colleague. A teaching philosophy statement is not the place to criticize other methods of teaching, discuss the downfall of the educational system, or complain about students. The tone should be generally positive and enthusiastic. If you are applying for various types of positions that require different teaching responsibilities (undergraduate vs. graduate, research-university vs. liberal arts college, department of psychology vs. family studies), pay close attention to the courses that they want you to teach and to the values of the department and university. Does your statement align with their values and demonstrate that you have read and understand the position requirements? Before you send out your statement, have others inside and outside of your field read and provide feedback.

A Final Note

A teaching philosophy statement is an evolving document. You are not wedded to the objectives or evidence or the organizational structure or flow. With experience, your views on teaching and learning will likely shift, you will build a more thorough repertoire of examples to use as evidence, and you will develop better ways to articulate your ideas.

Getting Started in 5 Steps

Step 1: Brainstorm short, mid, and long-term goals that you have for your students. What should they be able to do during your class, by the end of the semester, or ultimately by the end of their university education? List as many as you can.

Step 2: Group similar goals together. Do certain goals complement others? Are there overarching categories? Do this until you have 3-4 themes.

Step 3: Blend goals together and name your themes. For example, the goals “to develop interpretive skills” and “to learn to read well” could be combined into the following: “develop the necessary skills to read, to interpret, and to communicate effectively.”

Step 4: Brainstorm examples from your experience to support each goal.

Step 5: Imagine your retirement party: Would you be satisfied by your career if your colleagues stood up and said that you achieved these goals as a teacher? If they provided the examples that you listed? If not, reconsider your goals and examples.