

Writing Your Teaching Philosophy Statement

In your teaching philosophy statement, you must show a selection committee that you'll be able to fulfill the teaching components of graduate school or the teaching position you're applying for. In this handout, you will learn some strategies for writing your teaching philosophy.

1. Express your teaching goals and the methods you use to achieve them.

What do you want students to get out of your class and how do you achieve those outcomes? To answer this question, you usually have to explain how you think learning happens, using teaching theory.

To learn more about teaching theory, refer to the following Eberly Center resources.

- *Principles of Teaching and Learning*
<http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/principles/index.html>
- *Research on Teaching and Learning*
<http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/resources/Research/cognitive/index.html>

COMPOSITION EXAMPLE

I believe that good writing, like learning, is inherently social: we write with an audience in mind, in response to what others have written. Thus, as a composition instructor, **my primary goal is** to help students plan, write, and revise with an eye toward the reader. **The concept of audience informs all aspects of my classroom practice**, from physically reorienting desks so that students are looking at each other, rather than me, to asking students to assume various audience positions while reading their peers' texts.

Teaching goal

*Teaching method used
to achieve goal*

ENGINEERING EXAMPLE

The most successful engineers build systems that combine technological acumen and innovative thinking. **When students leave my class, I want them to** have the foundational knowledge to ground their ideas in practice and the inspiration to let go of constraints about what they think is possible. **This technological-innovative approach is embodied in** my pairing of class instruction and assignments. For example, when instructing my students on supramolecular engineering, I combine direct instruction of electrophoretic techniques with "recommendation exercises" in which students are asked to provide suggestions about how these techniques could be applied to improve real world water treatment systems.

Teaching goals

*Teaching method used
to achieve goals*

2. Use specific examples to show that you've reflected on your teaching practices.

You should showcase your teaching experience but also demonstrate to the committee that you've carefully thought out the teaching practices you use. You should explain that you're always looking for ways to improve your teaching practices.

To highlight your teaching experience, however minimal, use specific anecdotes as evidence for your main claims. Use the following techniques to explain how you work to improve your teaching.

- Discuss how you've reflected on and revised your teaching practices
- Describe how you responded to a challenge or obstacle and state the lessons you learned
- State how your past experiences will influence your future practices

CHEMISTRY EXAMPLE

My teaching practices have been developed in a manner similar to scientific research: testing and retesting, analyzing and redirecting, each time moving a step forward. I spent much of my first semester as an undergraduate teaching assistant reiterating material from that week's lectures, watching as students seemed more interested in their laptops and cell phones than my insight. **I realized that** my students were struggling in the same way I had struggled as a first-year chemistry major—they were having trouble learning not because the information was not repeated enough but because it was not being reinforced. **Instead of** rephrasing material and hoping for thoughtful comments or questions, **I began** incorporating mini-lessons in unusual places. Quiz grades, for example, weren't represented as a raw score but as a chemical formula so that if my students wanted to know their grades—which they all did—they had to calculate the formula weight of a (made-up) compound. **This change in my teaching helped me** see other areas where I could promote learning outside of the typical lesson.

Shows that applicant has reflected teaching practices

Gives specific examples of revised teaching practices

HISTORY EXAMPLE

The first time it happened, I thought my class had cheated; the second time it happened, I felt like I had cheated them. **Out of twenty essays, nearly all sounded identical.** Maybe it was the group work, I thought. But when I looked over the essay prompt, I realized that my instructions were formulaic—I had asked them why they thought Martin Luther King's argument in "Letter from Birmingham Jail" applied to current civil rights struggles, rather than how they thought it might apply to contemporary issues. The difference between why and how was the difference between description and interpretation, between rehashing what they had heard about King's significance to American history and developing their own insight into the larger lessons that King stood for. **This experience** as an introductory history instructor **showed me** the importance of developing assignment prompts that offered supportive – not confining – guidance.

Shows the obstacle applicant encountered

Explains how applicant overcame the obstacle and the lessons he or she learned

TUTORING EXAMPLE

My approach to classroom instruction is supplemented by my experience as a tutor at Carnegie Mellon University's writing center. The one-on-one nature of tutoring sessions has shown me the importance of identifying the unique concerns writers have about particular assignments or genres – concerns that would otherwise go unnoticed in the classroom. **In addition, one strategy I will enact in my classrooms is** requiring individual conferences with students before major writing assignments. In these conferences, I can use the techniques of guided inquiry **I learned** from tutoring to help students independently see the inconsistencies and potential in their ideas.

Shows how tutoring has added to applicant's teaching experience

Shows how applicant can use tutoring to improve teaching

Starter Phrases for Teaching Philosophy Statements

These phrases can help you start writing your teaching philosophy statement. Just complete them with your own examples and experiences.

To express your teaching goals and the methods you use to achieve, you can use the following phrases:

- As a teacher, my primary goal is to ...
- My goal is to help students learn...
- When students leave my class, I want them to be able to...
- In my classroom, I consistently try to...
- I believe that effective teaching begins with...
- In order to do X, I design assignments by...
- Successful teaching means...
- I believe that X promotes learning by...
- My role as an educator is to...

To show that you have reflected on your teaching practices, you can use the following phrases:

- My approach to teaching has been influenced by...
- Each semester, I assess my teaching practices by...
- To overcome X challenge, I...
- To meet my goal of X, I...
- The most effective aspect of my teaching is X because...
- To accommodate different learning styles, I...
- While I always try to X, sometimes I find it necessary to...
- When teaching X, I...