

Strategies for Developing a Teaching Statement

Many graduate students find it difficult to write a teaching statement for the first time. The strategies described below have successfully been used as aids to get started writing first drafts. You can use any one of these activities or simply read them for inspiration.

Role Models for Teaching*

- Who is the best teacher or mentor you have ever known?
- What did this teacher expect you to do in the course? How were these expectations communicated to you?
- What did this teacher do to help you master the subject matter?
- What do you remember doing in their class? What has stayed with you?
- What do you remember doing in the class that helped you learn the most?
- How did this instructor interact with students?

Teaching as Decision-Making*

1. Identify a course you have taught or would like to teach.
2. Brainstorm the decisions you made/will make about teaching and learning for the course.
3. Arrange the decisions into a pattern that makes sense to you. Not only will you gain insight from the topics of your decisions, but also from the pattern.

Working from Teaching “Artifacts”*

A teaching “artifact” is any item that that reflects or represents any aspect of your teaching (e.g. syllabus, assignment, examples of student work).

1. Identify a number of artifacts that you would want to be sure to include in your portfolio.
2. What is important about these artifacts?
3. What do they say about student learning in your courses?
4. Why did you make the teaching choices that these artifacts reflect?
5. What themes emerge or cut across your answers to the above questions?

Teaching Models*

1. Identify a model a) that describes you as a teacher or b) for how students learn, and then identify how you fit into it as a teacher. This model can come from any field or part of life.
2. Brainstorm characteristics of the model.
3. Draw links between those characteristics and the teaching & learning environment.

Inflection Points in Teaching†

1. Identify a course you have taught.
2. Draw a line across a piece of paper representing the duration of the course.
3. Mark points along the line where students took advantage of a learning opportunity.
4. Mark points along the line where students were “shut out” of a learning experience.
Examples: the first day of class, the first student question, the first graded assignment, the first time the class understands a complex concept, the first time students work in teams...

Teaching and Learning Trigger-Questions†

- Have you ever taken a course in which in your mastery of the material was less than optimal? If you were going to teach that class, what would you do differently?
- What do you hope to accomplish when you teach? What does this say about you as a teacher?
- What is a “personal best” achievement for you as a teacher?
- If you were writing a book about teaching, what would the title be? What three points about teaching would you make?
- Create a list using the following as a prompt: “When I teach, I...”
- How would you describe the learning process? What steps do people go through to learn something?

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† Adapted from Ellis, D. and Griffin, G (2000) Developing a Teaching Philosophy Statement: A Special Challenge for Graduate Students, *Journal of Graduate Teaching Assistant Development*, 7(2): 85-92.