

## On Writing a Statement of Teaching Philosophy

S.Rausch, 1/11/99

What's in one:

**Career goals** – how teaching fits into your plan for your academic career  
(e.g., relationship with research, professional interests, etc.)

**Meaningful experience** – what you can draw from; expand on c.v.

**Teaching goals** – what you want to impart to students  
-- what you want to develop in your teaching

**Methods and strategies** – techniques, assignments, what works best, lessons learned

Writing Tips:

1) **The purpose is reflection, not getting the right answer.** A statement of teaching philosophy shows that you have thought about your goals, experiences, methods, and pre-conceived notions. It shows that you have at least a general plan for your immediate teaching career, and more importantly that you see value in learning how to learn lessons and improve. If early in your teaching career, you can use the statement as a kind of proposal – you have a general goal and a plan to carry it out, like a research project. It is kind of a statement of purpose, like what you wrote applying to graduate school.

2) **You have experience, whatever your academic level.** Experience relevant to teaching comes from many sources. Even if you have never taught, assisted, tutored, or graded a class, you have important experiences to draw from, and write with the confidence that you trust your experiences. As a graduate student, for example, you have **at least 16 years** of school, which means lots of examples of what works and what doesn't. And don't discount the influence of inspiration. Always explain how a particular experience has application to your future teaching.

3) **Balance your statements:**

General ideas backed up by specific examples

Ideals along with practical notions

Goals for teaching and also methods

Positive but not a know-it-all – Show that you have learned some things, you **have done** and **will do** things instead of “try” or “attempt,” but also bear in mind that teaching development is a continual process, and no one has all the answers. You will no doubt be writing to someone with many more years experience than yourself, but someone who may not be so self-reflective on teaching.

4) **Use your natural voice, and avoid too much jargon.** Do not use your most formal voice as you would in a cover letter or an essay. Straightforward language comes across much better than pedagogical buzzwords, especially if you do not have a mastery of the latest pedagogical theory. Discussing teaching in practical, concrete terms will reach a wider audience and shows deeper thought.