

Teaching Philosophy

For me, teaching, learning, and writing are intrinsically bound together. As a professional writer, college instructor and a parent, I am often faced with what I don't understand. However, this state of confusion is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, it's an intelligent first response as we try to assimilate and master new concepts and skills. We can start with ourselves by reflecting upon what we *do* know. Only then, with our first question, can we begin to engage each other honestly and with integrity.

Problem-solving

That means my teaching philosophy is also a lot about problem-solving. Whether reading or writing, I encourage you to approach reading and writing as problems to be figured out. Scholarly writers are detectives, too. We solve mysteries. Put another way, not knowing something, when it comes to learning writing, is often the best place to start. I think it takes courage for anyone—student, instructor, research scholar, parent—to admit not knowing something or feeling lost in the language of a specific subject discipline, or even in the tangled web of your own formative thought. Writing helps us think clearly about ourselves as much as it does any academic subject.

Making an impact

Through reading, writing, we ask questions of a text. Think about it. When we read, we reflect on what it is *doing to us*, and when we write, we try to imagine what we want to *do to a reader*. Good writers want to affect their audiences. As a teacher I want to affect you, my students; as a collaborator in learning, I also want your writing and your ideas to impact me. That is why I insist we question our assumptions—not because they might be wrong—but so that each of us can better articulate our ideas and create order from the chaotic pulses of airy mental thought. So much of writing and teaching is about becoming conscious: of other people and their values, of how an equation “works” or how a beautiful transition builds from one thought to the next so organically it feels seamless. As in writing, as in life.

Developing perspective

Learning through writing and the teaching of writing are a lot about imagining and trying on other perspectives. I work at this so that I can better help you do the same thing—through this odd discipline of empathy. Empathy requires an active imagination, and should we lose these abilities, we are dead as a culture. As in writing, as in life!

Team work

My best teachers keep their minds, hearts, and imaginations open to new ideas, new ways of thinking, writing—they show me how they learn by doing. How do we develop a sustained and meaningful dialogue with ourselves and others? Writing is one way and the teaching of writing is another. As an instructor, I believe this dialogical engagement with you when we talk and write about writing is critical to the success of this course. Teaching is kind of like a team sport or a performance in which we all have positions or parts to play. I have expertise, you also have expertise, and during this course we will put our various strengths and perspectives together. We will work to develop writing strategies that will serve you throughout your academic lives and beyond.

What else should you know about the course?

I don't do much lecturing. Instead, I expect that you come to class having read and thought about the material for the day, and we put that material on its feet together, using what you've read about so that you learn more deeply. We do a lot of teamwork and collaborate in a variety of ways, both in and out of the classroom. Let me be clear: I expect a LOT from you. This is because in my experience, students rise to the standards set for them—so why would I set the bar low? I care deeply about my students and enjoy their company; I aim to create an atmosphere of civility, inquiry, a dual emphasis on process and product (*how* we learn/create as well as *what* we learn/create), collaboration, and fun. AND out of all that I demand rigorous, disciplined work. You are all smart people, and I believe in our ability to do exceptional work together.