

Motivating a Personal Teaching Philosophy

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“The development of a teaching philosophy is a profound search for oneself as a teacher”

STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

This article will serve as a resource in the creation of your teaching philosophy. Regardless of your concentration, educational institutions all over the world from primary to post secondary education use the teaching philosophy.

However, let it be clear from the beginning that there is not a universally agreed upon template for a teaching philosophy and not all employers will require/request a teaching philosophy. For those who do require a teaching philosophy, they do so to evaluate you as a candidate for a teaching/administrative position to see if you are a solid match with their institutional values, philosophy and that you support their long-term vision for the institution.

In the business world, an anecdote that can get you far is to “not talk about yourself but ask questions of others.” This works to build a relationship and foster mutual care and concern for another human being. In developing our teaching philosophy, we should consider this relationship-building component. Although we are unable to “ask questions” in a way that you might think of a one-to-one interaction with an industry leader or institution, we still must ask questions, but in a different way. Our questions are more internal questions:

- What are the traits and skills required of someone in the field? Do I possess these?
- What are the skills necessary for someone in the field? Do I possess these?
- What are my personal approaches to teaching? How have I arrive at these approaches?

These questions and more can be found at the end of the article where you will find a guided pathway to answering these and arriving at your personal philosophy.

FORMATTING THE TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

Before talking about personal philosophies, it is important to discuss the formatting for this crucial document. As with any document used in a job search, your teaching philosophy is generally an introduction to you and your personal style (you are a culmination of both your educational formation and your personal experiences) and should bear the same formatting as your CV/resume. That is, as a job search document, it should have the same feel as your CV, cover letter, etc. Therefore, utilize the same content formatting including: font, font size, headings, footings, peripheral borders, etc. The first way of getting filed away in the round “no” file is to have an amazing CV and a poorly formatted or poorly written teaching philosophy.

Visual semiotics can provide some insight into why this is the case. Visual semiotics is the study of how we make meaning out of what we see. In a way it is a form of communication or language in visual format like in posters or paintings. It differs a little from the traditional study of language because language is generally thought of as having the capability of expression through voice.

However, we do not just communicate through language. You can also communicate through *visual representations* of what we would like to portray to an audience to get our meaning across. Look at the following:



What is it? You do not even need to speak English to be able to get it right! It is a “chien” “perro” “dog”, whatever language you would like to use. Anyone can understand the image if they understand what a dog is. So, you can see how we portray meaning through not just words, but visual representations.

This is important to you and your CV/teaching philosophy because you should carefully evaluate the picture that you are showing people daily in your job search. Think about it, what kind of representation are you presenting of yourself in your CV, teaching philosophy and cover letters? Now, generally, people do not have pictures of cute puppies on their resumes, but how you show yourself in the form and structure of your teaching philosophy and CV can tell a lot about who you are. And this picture can either help or hurt your job prospects.

- If your margins or bullet points are inconsistently lined up, then you might be portraying to someone that you do not have attention to detail!
- Misspelled words might represent you as someone who lacks education or basic spelling abilities (a negative if you would like to work in an office)!
- Lack of credible work experience or skills paints you as someone who is unqualified. (Keep in mind that you may be new to the field. That does NOT mean that you do not have experience that you can use to benefit you!)

Do not blow your chances to land that dream job because of carelessness. You can paint a glowing picture of yourself or one that shows a candidate who lacks experience and real world understandings. Pay attention to the picture you are presenting. Is it a Picasso or stick figure?

Did you know that things that are specifically set out as a little larger than everything else get noticed more?

Keep in mind that this will not work if EVERYTHING is the same size! We tend to notice things that are a little out of the box more than the things that are just the "norm". Try changing font sizes of your name and the sections of your resume to create variety and make your reader want to be reading your resume.

Did you know that most people do not actually read large blocks of information?

Try using bullets to catch and keep the reader's attention.

If a poorly executed teaching philosophy or CV has the ability to move you to the bottom of the pile, then we should care about these documents as they are integral to also moving us to the top of the pile. Be clear that both are tools to help you get into an interview and are essential in the job search. The teaching philosophy gives the search committee a chance to know the personal side of the candidate. Therefore, your passion, drive, previous success and future growth should come through in your discussion. The development of a teaching philosophy is a profound search of oneself as a teacher.

THE SEARCH COMMITTEE

As the teaching philosophy is the first introduction to the search committee, it is important to understand what the search committee is looking for in a candidate. While each organization has its own specific criteria for evaluating candidates, they are all looking for candidates who are the "right fit", meaning that the candidate matches the values and philosophies of the organization and that the candidate will help the organization meet the long term goals of institution. Therefore, it is essential to express how you, as a teacher, will enact your personal teaching philosophy, that you are thoughtful and reflective, exude professional enthusiasm, create a student-centered learning environment and will provide quality.

- Enacting a personal teaching philosophy –Search committees wish to see that a candidate has a goal and methods for implementing their philosophy in the classroom. To accomplish this goal, the candidate should use personal experiences or useful anecdotes that are reflective of the enactment of the philosophy.
- Thoughtful and reflective –The successful candidate will convey that they are life long learners and seeking to grow in their own pedagogical understanding. This will include information on how you plan to seek personal-professional development. Faculty members should constantly seek ways to develop themselves both within their teaching-field of practices/methodologies but also seek development in fields that can offer insight into your area of expertise.
- Professional enthusiasm –Committees can read through many applications for one position. Candidates should demonstrate that they are enthusiastic about their profession and possess a long-term drive and dedication to the field.

- Student-centered learning environment –Search committees are looking for candidates who understand that the environment is as important as the content being learned in the classroom. Candidates should include information about their understanding and ability to keep in tune with the needs of students, their individual abilities and ability to meet learning objectives.
- Provide Quality –The teaching philosophy should be well organized, clearly written, readable and error free. The committee will glean intuitive information from the statement regarding the candidate’s ability to write and create a professional profile.

ORGANIZING THE TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

The Teaching Philosophy should include, just as any scholarly work, an introduction, body and conclusion. The basic elements of the teaching philosophy are the following: an introduction, your goals and objectives as a teacher, your approach to teaching, philosophies and methodologies that have influenced you as a teacher and a conclusion. There are two basic forms of a teaching philosophy: a long form (contains all of the above elements) and a short form (contains most or all of the elements above in a shorter format).

The elements of the Teaching Philosophy

The main elements of the teaching philosophy are crucial to the presentation. Each of these elements is characterized below:

- An introduction –A paragraph introducing who you are, your area(s) of study and expertise and a brief summary of what the search committee will be reading about you.
- *Your goals and objectives as a teacher* –A description of your goals as a teacher including but not limited to your long term professional development plans, a characterization of your goals for your long term growth, etc.
- *Your approach to teaching* –Create a picture of what your classroom would look like if the search committee were sitting in on a lecture. This should include how you interact with students, your professional presentation and how your work to helping students achieve learning outcomes.
- *Philosophies and methodologies that have influenced you as a teacher* –Describe how you have developed as a teacher regarding the methodologies that you use or have been of influence to you. These could be both personally developed or those adopted by mentors, authors or schools of thought.
- *Conclusion* –Summarize your teaching philosophy and express your interest in being able to implement your teaching philosophy.

The Long Form

The long form of your teaching philosophy should be one to two pages in length. As previously mentioned, you should format the overall look of your teaching philosophy in the same formatting as the CV (therefore it should contain both your name and contact information at minimum). The philosophy should contain the following elements: an introduction, your goals and objectives as a teacher, your approach to teaching, philosophies and methodologies that have influenced you as a teacher and a conclusion.

The Short Form

The short form of your teaching philosophy is a condensed version of the longer format. This would include a minimum of an brief introduction, your approach to teaching and the your objectives as a teacher.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Should I conform my teaching philosophy to each school?

The core components of your teaching philosophy should not change. The ideas expressed in your teaching philosophy are personal and represent your individuality as a candidate. However, recall that search committees search for candidates who will match their institutional or departmental goals. If you feel that you can elaborate upon a point that will highlight how your personal philosophy meets the goals of the organization, this is acceptable and encouraged.

2. What should I do if I do not have a lot of teaching experience?

The teaching philosophy is essential for all faculty, including newer teachers. Remember that, although you may not have a lot of actual teaching experience, you have been in an educational environment for years working toward a personal philosophy and educational formation. Therefore, highlighting your learned experiences and methodologies that have influenced you in your development are essential.

3. How do I know if I should use a long or short form?

Each institution has different specifications for the teaching philosophy/statement. Generally, if it is not specified, you can submit the long form. For others, they may specify "no more than 1,200 words." It is of utmost importance that you follow the requirements of the institution's specifications. Not adhering to the requirements is a certain way of being disregarded early in your candidacy. It is easier to cut down the long form of the teaching philosophy and thus, you should create your long form first and edit to meet the requirements of the institution.

THE TEACHING PHILOSOPHY AS A LIVING DOCUMENT

Be mindful that a teaching philosophy is a living document and should change as you and your professional identify grow. Therefore, remember to update your teaching philosophy as your methods and beliefs change. You are the right person for the job! All you need to do is show it!

My Future Career: Motivating a personal teaching philosophy

Once you have completed your CV/resume, you need to begin to compare this information with the requirements of the job. This will help you to define the skills and abilities that make you perfect for this position. Focusing on the requirements for the job will assist you in the writing of your other essential documents including your personal (teaching) philosophy and your cover letter.

What are the core values, traits and qualities necessary for the job? Which of these traits do you possess? Which of these are fundamentally yours as a person and which of these were promoted or fostered in your education?

What are the skills necessary for the job? Which of these skills do you have? Which of these are personally motivated skills that you fundamentally possess as a person and which of these were promoted or fostered in your education?

What experiences do you have that relate to the position? *(Please keep in mind that your previous experience (education, work, volunteer, etc.) can all be used to show relevant knowledge of the position that you are applying for. Think of the skills that you learned in those experiences that are transferable).*

Do you have any specific certifications/credentials that relate to this job? Do you plan on getting any?

Where do your philosophies come from? Are you developing your own methodologies or are you using other's developed philosophies? These could include philosophies that you were exposed to in a course or your upbringing, faculty mentor, books or articles, your own teaching, etc. If they are not your personally developed philosophies, how did you arrive at adopting these as your own, what value do they bring to you and your own teaching?

What are your (general) teaching objectives and how do you approach teaching? How do you approach course content and present it to your students? How do you approach the student as an individual in a course with other students?

Describe a moment in which you were fundamentally changed as a teacher. This could include an anecdote from a class or your program, an experience while teaching, an outside observation of teachers that you have observed in which you had a moment of clarity affecting your personal philosophy or approach to teaching.

Describe your ability to adapt to new ideas, approaches, methods and changes in your field?

Describe how you approach personal development including how you gain professional knowledge, knowledge about fields affecting your field, the importance of personal and professional development, and how you will continue to do develop yourself in the future.

Describe your role in developing relationships, engaging your colleagues, engaging your students and moving the organization forward.

Describe yourself in a motto, anecdote, noble cause or mission statement.

Consider the following pages for skills and traits that might be relevant to the position that you are applying for.

Character Traits

- Accurate
- Adaptable
- Adept
- Adventurousome
- Aggressive
- Alert
- Appreciative
- Assertive
- Astute
- Attention to Detail
- Authentic
- Authoritative
- Calm
- Cautious
- Charismatic
- Competent
- Concentration
- Consistent
- Cooperative
- Courageous
- Creative
- Decisive
- Deliberate
- Dependable
- Diligent
- Diplomatic
- Discreet
- Driven
- Dynamic
- Eager
- Easygoing
- Economical
- Effective
- Energetic
- Enthusiastic
- Exceptional
- Experienced
- Exhaustive
- Expert
- Firm
- Flexible
- Friendly
- Generous
- Good judgment
- Helpful
- Honest
- Independent
- Innovative
- Integrity
- Inventive
- Knowledgeable
- Loyal
- Multitasking
- Objective
- Open-minded
- Optimistic
- Orderly
- Organized
- Outgoing
- Patient
- Perceptive
- Perform under pressure
- Persevering
- Persistent
- Pioneering
- Poised
- Polite
- Practical
- Professional
- Punctual
- Rational
- Reliable
- Realistic
- Reliable
- Resourceful
- Responsible
- Self-controlled
- Self-motivated
- Self-reliant
- Sensitive
- Sincere
- Strong
- Sympathetic
- Tactful
- Thorough
- Tolerant
- Trustworthy
- Unique
- Versatile
- Vigorous

Skills

- Accomplished
- Accounted for
- Achieved
- Acquired
- Acted
- Adapted
- Adjusted
- Administered
- Addressed
- Advised
- Aided
- Analyzed
- Anticipated
- Applied
- Appointed
- Appraised
- Arranged
- Ascertained
- Assessed
- Assisted
- Assumed
- Assured
- Attended
- Audited
- Authored
- Authorized
- Awarded
- Began
- Boosted
- Bought
- Briefed
- Brought
- Budgeted
- Built
- Calculated
- Cataloged
- Caused
- Changed
- Checked
- Chose
- Classified
- Closed
- Coached
- Combined
- Communicated
- Compared
- Compiled
- Completed
- Composed
- Conceived
- Conceptualized
- Concluded
- Conducted
- Conserved
- Consolidated
- Constructed
- Continued
- Controlled
- Convinced
- Coordinated
- Corrected
- Counseled
- Counted
- Created
- Critiqued
- Decided
- Defined
- Delegated
- Delivered
- Demonstrated
- Designed
- Determined
- Designed
- Detected
- Determined
- Developed
- Devised
- Diminished
- Directed
- Diverted
- Discovered
- Distributed
- Drafted
- Dramatized
- Earned
- Edited
- Educated
- Elected
- Eliminated
- Employed
- Encouraged
- Enforced
- Enlarged
- Ensured
- Entered
- Established
- Evaluated
- Excelled
- Executed
- Expanded
- Expedited
- Explained
- Familiarized
- Filed
- Financed
- Fixed
- Foresaw
- Formulated
- Forwarded
- Fostered
- Found
- Gained
- Gathered
- Garnered
- Generated
- Greeted
- Grossed
- Guided
- Handled
- Headed
- Helped
- Highlighted
- Identified
- Implemented
- Improved
- Included
- Incorporated
- Increased
- Indicated
- Initiated
- Innovated
- Inspected

- Instituted
- Instructed
- Integrated
- Interpreted
- Interviewed
- Introduced
- Inventoried
- Investigated
- Joined
- Judged
- Labored
- Launched
- Lectured
- Led
- Maintained
- Managed
- Maximized
- Modified
- Monitored
- Motivated
- Negotiated
- Netted
- Observed
- Obtained
- Operated
- Ordered
- Organized
- Oversaw
- Paid
- Participated
- Perceived
- Performed
- Persuaded
- Piloted
- Placed
- Planned
- Played
- Predicted
- Prepared
- Presented
- Processed
- Produced
- Profited
- Programmed
- Projected

- Promoted
- Proved
- Purchased
- Qualified
- Questioned
- Raised
- Ran
- Rated
- Realized
- Received
- Recognized
- Recommended
- Reconciled
- Recruited
- Reduced
- Referred
- Rendered
- Repaired
- Reported
- Researched
- Resolved
- Responded
- Restored
- Returned
- Revealed
- Reviewed
- Revised
- Saved
- Screened
- Scrutinized
- Selected
- Separated
- Served
- Shaped
- Shared
- Showed
- Simplified
- Solved
- Sought
- Spearheaded
- Specified
- Spoke
- Started
- Stopped
- Streamlined

- Strengthened
- Submitted
- Suggested
- Summarized
- Supervised
- Supported
- Surveyed
- Systematized
- Targeted
- Taught
- Team-building
- Tested
- Toured
- Tracked
- Trained
- Transformed
- Translated
- Traveled
- Tutored
- Undertook
- Uncovered
- Unified
- Updated
- Upgraded
- Utilized
- Won
- Wrote

Suggestion: Use an "-ing" ending instead of "-ed" for positions/experiences that are current.

