



## Philosophy of Teaching Statements - “Let the Brainstorming Begin!”

Philosophy of teaching statements are concise statements of what you believe about the teaching and learning of languages, and possibly also about education in general. Most sources recommend that you keep your teaching philosophy statement between **one and two pages in length**, covering **what you believe, why, and brief examples of how you implement it in the classroom**. Often, people do not include every single aspect of their philosophy of teaching in such statements but instead focus on its **core elements**, the ones that are most important to or indicative of them as a teacher. (Recently, a number of employers have also begun asking for variants of teaching philosophy statements, such as philosophy of education statements and philosophy of classroom management statements.) Additionally, university faculty positions have also begun asking for statements of philosophies of research, educational administration, and/or advising, depending on the position.

While a statement of your philosophy of teaching is an important item to include in your teacher portfolio, it also serves a much more important role. It guides and informs you as you prepare other portfolio items, it helps you prepare for a job interview, and it helps you to ensure that you are consistent in the way you answer job interview questions.

Especially if you’ve never done one before, perhaps the hardest thing about writing a philosophy of teaching statement is where to begin. We recommend looking at a number of sample teaching philosophy statements (such as the ones on the TiPPS website) and then brainstorming or freewriting on one of the following prompts: “What’s important to you in your teaching?” or “Being a professional in my field means . . .” Often, people produce a list of items. We would encourage you to go through that list, marking or highlighting the ones that are most important to you and trying to think of ways those are implemented in your classroom teaching.

If you need help with your brainstorming, try perusing through the following:

### **Job interview questions that may get at teaching philosophy**

- If I were to ask your students about your teaching, what would they say? (If you were one of your students, what would you say about your teaching?)
- If I were to ask your supervisor about your teaching, what would he or she say? (If you were your supervisor, what would you say about your teaching?)
- Think of an activity you used that you feel was both successful and a good reflection of you as the kind of teacher you want to be. What was it about the activity, and the way you implemented it, that made it so?
- How do you establish rapport in your classes?
- Think of an activity that bombed in the classroom. Why do you think it didn't work? How would you change it and/or the way you presented it? Why?
- How do you go about motivating students?
- How do you feel about grading? How do you go about deciding what grades to give students?
- What do you think are important attributes of successful language learners or literature students?
- What do you do for your own professional development? What do you hope to be able to do, as part of your job, for your own professional development?
- What do you think makes an excellent teacher (in general)? An excellent language or literature teacher?
- What are your conceptions of language learners?
- What are you interested in researching, if anything? How does this relate to your teaching?
- What is something you've learned in your study that you would like to try to apply to your teaching? Why?
- How do you feel teachers can get better at what they do?
- What do you think is the most important issue in language or literature teaching today?
- As a language or literature teacher, what are some of your main concerns? What can you do (or what can be done) about them?
- How do you think people learn second languages successfully (whether it is reading, writing, conversation, etc.)? For literature teachers, how do you think people learn to interpret literature successfully? How does instruction help?
- How can materials help?

## Possible Teaching Philosophy Components

- the theoretical underpinnings of your belief system and how your belief system affects decisions such as materials selection, teaching strategies, and classroom management
- two to three illustrative examples of what you actually do in the classroom, why doing things that way benefits your students, and how you know when teaching strategies are working well

From Wolfe-Quintero, K. & Brown, J.D. (1998), Teacher portfolios. *TESOL Journal*, 7(6).

- the teacher's role & responsibilities
- students' role & responsibilities
- the balance of learning and use
- teaching and learning in general
- teaching and learning second languages
- teaching as a form of activism (how does teaching languages mesh with your world views?)
- content (what it is you're teaching)
- meaningfulness (drawing on students ideas, interests and concerns)
- speaking to students' needs
- classroom dynamics and class atmosphere
- affective and emotional components
- evaluation (and placement testing?)
- being flexible (working within the needs and constraints of the institution, the students, and your beliefs as a teacher)
- theory and practice
- the classroom as a learning environment for all
- fluctuation on the continuum between teacher-as-dictator vs. teacher-as-facilitator (when are/aren't you open to negotiation)
- learning styles
- tuning in to the students
- teacher awareness, reflection, and development
- discipline
- rapport
- motivation
- ideal vs. reality (working within the constraints of the institution where you teach)
- reflective practice
- collaborating with other teachers (sharing and developing ideas)