

Teaching Philosophy

My approach to teaching writing is grounded in the belief that writing is fundamental to active participation in society, and thus students need to be actively involved in both critically examining the writing they interact with as readers and as writers and in practicing a variety of types and genres of writing. Writing instruction should show students *how* to do rather than *what* to do and should prepare students to write not only for academic situations, but also for situations they encounter at work, socially, or in their communities.

Writing instruction is about helping students see that writing is not just something they do because it is required in school, but a way to interact with, and more importantly, change the world around them. My courses emphasize that writers, including student writers, should focus on answering questions and solving problems through their writing. Ultimately, my goal with each student is for them to learn that writing produces responses/actions—both from the writer and the reader(s).

To accomplish these goals, my teaching seeks to blend three principles to help students engage with multiple types of writing and multiple types of writing situations.

1. Writing is learned by hands-on experience.

Students learn to write by writing. My classroom approach emphasizes building useful habits and practices through experience—that is, drafting and responding to feedback, collecting, analyzing and making use of primary research data, or presenting final products to an outside audience for review. Students may design their own primary research projects to study some aspect of writing in their own field of study or design digital portfolios to showcase their work and develop professional identities. All of my courses, in various ways, include a feedback process—sometimes students respond to my feedback, sometimes to the feedback of their peers and sometimes to feedback from an external audience, such as faculty in another department or a community partner. The goal with all of these opportunities is for students to see how their writing is working—how it is being received and what responses/actions it is producing.

Part of learning by experience includes failure. My classes are also places to embrace and learn from failure. Students are encouraged to take risks in designing research projects or choosing topics because it is only with some risk taking that students can begin to see how they can contribute to the conversations already going on around them. My courses are designed to allow students to fail—particularly with opportunities for revision, but also with opportunities to earn grades by reflecting on projects that don't go as planned—thereby reinforcing with students that while the product matters, learning about *how* to do something, and how to do it better in the future, is equally important.

2. Writing is learned by reflection on both the writer's process and the effectiveness of the texts produced.

Because I embrace that failure is a learning experience, reflection—both formal and informal—on the process of completing a project is another central component of my teaching. When students think about their processes, and the processes' of others, it

reminds them that writing is intended to produce a response and offers them an opportunity to examine how they attempted to produce a response and how effectively they produced their desired response. Students may compose a final group letter reflecting on their process of composing a proposal, including lessons learned about how to compose this genre and how to compose collaboratively, and explaining why they've made particular choices in response to feedback from myself and a panel of reviewers in their final proposals. Or, students may sit with me for informal debriefs about their final collaborative research projects as their final examination. I believe that as students think about how they are writing and how their writing has been successful or not in a particular situation, they are more able to see how they might draw on current writing experiences in future writing situations.

3. Writing is learned by experience with different genres.

Part of making helping students see how writing can allow them to produce responses is helping them discover and examine the many and various ways they already use writing and the many and various ways they might interact with writing in their lives beyond school. For this reason, I use and assign a variety of types of writing and genres in my classes. I define writing broadly to include not only more formalized genres like essays, stories, or letters, but also email, text messages, websites, and video. I encourage, and in some courses require, students to compose digital writing in addition to standard print texts. In first-year writing classes, I assign a variety of essays, but also include primary research projects that culminate in poster presentations, museum-style displays, or animations. In upper division courses, I often leave the choice of genre to the students for at least one project. Letting students choose a genre and medium is an integral part of writing instruction because students will need to make these choices in many non-classroom writing situations.

Students also read and engage with a variety of texts and a portion of class time is devoted to examining where and how various types of texts are used, as well as discussing what standards are used to judge these texts as effective or ineffective. These discussions are grounded in the underlying premise that all texts are trying to produce a response and we discuss what the author was trying to do, how we know what the purpose of the text is, who the audience is and how purpose and audience affect the choices the author made.

As a teacher, my goals for students are (1) to not only see, but experience, the complexity and messiness of writing, (2) to confront the challenges of writing various genres to various audiences and (3) to be aware of the choices they can and do make when composing texts and how those can choices impact the effectiveness of their texts.