



A Professional Development Program
for Graduate Students and Postdoctoral Fellows
Offered by the Teaching Resource Center

Developing Your Reflective Teaching Statement¹

What Is A Reflective Teaching Statement (RTS)?

Also known as a teaching philosophy statement, the Reflective Teaching Statement is, as Stephen Brookfield defines it “a personal vision of teaching; a critical rationale of teaching; sense of purposes of teaching.” Similarly, Barbara Fuhrmann and Tony Grasha, in *A Practical Handbook for College Teachers*², explain the RTS expresses our “personal values in teaching that ... represent the importance and stable ideas, beliefs, and assumptions that affect our behaviors.” Specifically, the statement is a short reflective essay that describes your teaching philosophy, strategies, methods and objectives. RTS typically include your beliefs about optimal teaching and learning, examples of how you put these beliefs into practice, and your goals—both your teaching goals and your goals for students’ learning.

Why Develop One?²

Why do teachers need to articulate their philosophy of teaching? What purposes does a philosophy of teaching serve? In his book, *The Skillful Teacher* (1990), Stephen Brookfield points out that the development of a teaching philosophy can be used for four purposes:

1. Personal purpose: “... a distinctive organizing vision—a clear picture of *why you are doing what you are doing* that you can call up at points of crisis— is crucial to your personal sanity and morale.” (p. 16)
2. Political purpose: “... a sense that your position is grounded in a well-developed and carefully conceived philosophy of practice.... You are more likely to *gain a measure of respect for your thoughtfulness and commitment*, which is important both for your self-esteem and for your political survival.” (p. 17)
3. Professional purpose: “... a commitment to a *shared rationale* for college teaching is important for the development of a collective identity and, hence, for the development of professional strengths among teachers.” (pp. 17-18)
4. Pedagogical purpose: “Teaching is about making some kind of dent in the world so that the world is different than it was before you practiced your craft. Knowing clearly *what kind of dent you want to make* in the world means that you must continually ask yourself the most fundamental evaluative questions of all—What effect am I having on students and on their learning?” (pp. 18-19)

How to Structure One³

There is no standard format for Reflective Teaching Statements; their structure, content, and wording varies by individual and disciplinary preference. Despite these differences, some common rules of thumb for formatting such a document have emerged over the years. Philosophy of teaching statements are usually *brief, one or two pages long*. For some purposes, an extended description is appropriate, but length should suit the context.

1. Most statements *avoid technical terms* and favor language and concepts that can be broadly appreciated. A general rule is that the statement should be written with the audience in mind.
2. Narrative, *first-person approaches* are generally appropriate. In some fields, a more creative approach, such as a poem, might be appropriate and valued. But in most situations, a straightforward, well-organized statement is preferred.

¹ Materials adapted from a 2004 January Teaching Workshop led by Mandy Hege, Former TRC Graduate Student Associate, Dept. of Psychology.

² Adapted from: http://www.acs.ohio-state.edu/education/ftad/portfolio/philosophy/phil_purp.htm

³ Adapted from: http://www.acs.ohio-state.edu/education/ftad/portfolio/philosophy/phil_how.htm

3. The statement should be *reflective and personal*. What brings a teaching philosophy to life is the extent to which it creates a vivid portrait of a person who is intentional about teaching practices and committed to his/her career.

Questions to Consider

- I. General Overview of You as a Teacher
 - a. Why do you teach?
 - b. What do you find rewarding about teaching?
 - c. What are the basic principles that underlie your teaching?
 - d. What are your standards or criteria for effective teaching?
- II. Your Style of Teaching
 - a. What is unique about your teaching?
 - b. How do you establish rapport with your students?
 - c. What are your expectations for your students' intellectual accomplishments?
- III. Teaching Goals
 - a. What do you wish for students to learn?
 - b. Within what sort of context do you teach (liberal arts, pre-professional training, both)?
 - c. What sorts of skills do you deliberately attempt to teach in your classes and why?
 - d. How do you evaluate whether you've accomplished your teaching goals?

Further Resources on Reflective Teaching Statements

WebPages:

<http://trc.virginia.edu/RonT/TA.html>

Sample reflective statements from Teaching Assistants at the University of Virginia taken from the Teaching Resource Center's publication, "Reflections on Teaching."

<http://www.library.arizona.edu/users/mmorales/philos.html>

Micaela Morales' Teaching Philosophy Page. Describes five principles on which her teaching philosophy is based: learner-centered environment, produce self-sufficient learners, introduce life-long learning skills, relevance to users/students, and integrate enabling technologies.

<http://www.utep.edu/cetal/portfoli/philos.htm>

"This page profiles the nature of teaching philosophy as a personal expression of values and goals -- which links further to Roles & Responsibilities and to Teaching Methods & Strategies." (from the webpage)

http://www.acs.ohio-state.edu/education/ftad/portfolio/philosophy/phil_sampl.htm

Contains other samples of reflective statements on teaching.

Journals and Books:

Brookfield, S. (1990). *The Skillful Teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Chism, N. V. N. (1998). Developing a Philosophy of Teaching Statement. *Essays on Teaching Excellence*, 9 (3), 1-2.

Fuhrmann, B. S., & Grasha, A. F. (1983). *A Practical Handbook for College Teachers*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

Goodyear, G. E. & Allchin, D. (1998) Statement of Teaching Philosophy. *To Improve the Academy*, 17, 103-22. Stillwater, OK: New Forums Press.

Grasha, A. F. (1996). *Teaching with Style: A Practical Guide to Enhancing Learning by Understanding Teaching and Learning Styles*. Alliance Publishers.

O'Neil, C., & Wright, A. (1993). *Recording Teaching Accomplishment*. (4th ed). Halifax, Nova Scotia, CA: Dalhousie University.

Seldin, P., & Associates (1993). *Successful Use of Teaching Portfolios*. Bolton, MA: Anker.