

## Preparing a Teaching Philosophy Statement

By Natasha Kenny, Cheryl Jeffs, and Carol Berenson, 2015

### What is a Teaching Philosophy Statement?

Teaching philosophy statements clearly communicate what our beliefs are about teaching and learning, why we hold these beliefs, and how we translate our beliefs into practice. They provide a foundation that informs our teaching practice.

### Why Prepare a Teaching Philosophy Statement?

Teaching philosophy statements can be used for a variety of purposes such as: job applications, as a foundational element of a teaching portfolio, within the context of tenure and promotion reviews, and for teaching award applications (Chism, 1998; Kearns & Sullivan, 2011; Schonwetter et al., 2002). Perhaps most importantly, teaching philosophy statements support our own growth and development as educators by providing us with an opportunity to reflect upon and communicate why we do what we do to support teaching and learning (Beatty et al., 2009).

### What does a Teaching Philosophy Statement Look Like?

Although there are no ideal format, teaching philosophy statements are typically presented as a 1 to 2 page reflective document, and written in the first person narrative (Chism, 1998). Building upon the work of Chism (1998) and Schonwetter et al. (2002), it is useful to communicate the structure of a teaching philosophy statement around 4 key components (Figure 1): Beliefs (what do you think); Strategies (what do you do); Impact (what has been the impact); and Goals (how will you improve)?

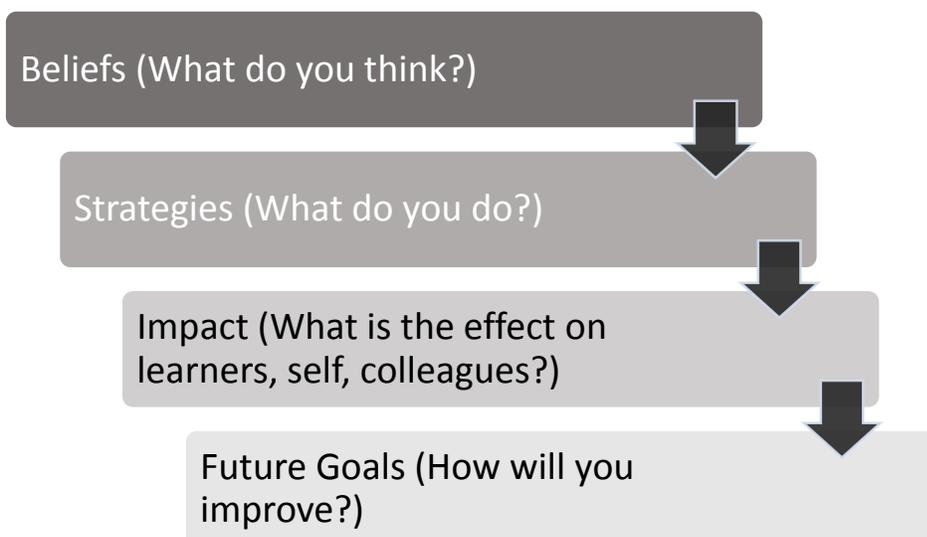


Figure 1: Example structure for a teaching philosophy statement

Based on this framework, the introductory section of a teaching philosophy statement summarizes your core **beliefs** about teaching and learning, and describes why you hold these beliefs based on personal experience, and scholarly literature related to teaching and learning in higher education. The next section provides an overview of specific **strategies** that you use in your practice that actively demonstrate and align with these beliefs. The final sections highlight the **impact** that your teaching and learning approaches have had on yourself and others (e.g. students and colleagues). This section may also highlight the methods you use to assess and evaluate your teaching. Finally, the concluding section most often summarizes your key beliefs, and highlights your **goals** and commitment to continuous growth and improvement. Table 1 provides a further break down of each of these sections with some guiding questions for further reflection.

Philosophy Statement Components	Guiding Questions
Beliefs about teaching and learning and post-secondary education	What are my beliefs about teaching and learning in post-secondary education? Why do I hold these beliefs? Who or what has most informed my teaching approaches? How have my beliefs been influenced by my teaching experiences and/or scholarly literature related to teaching and learning? What difference do I hope to make as a teacher? What does it mean to be a good teacher in a post-secondary context? What does good teaching look like in my discipline? What does it mean to be a good learner in a post-secondary context?
Teaching strategies and strengths	What teaching and learning strategies do I use? How do these strategies align with my beliefs? When have I felt most engaged and affirmed as an instructor? What are my key strengths and skills as an instructor? What am I most proud of? What sets me apart? What are some of my accomplishments as a post-secondary educator?
Impact	What difference have I made, and how do I know? What has been the impact of my approaches to teaching and learning (on me, on students, on colleagues)? What have others learned from my teaching and learning approaches? What methods do I use to evaluate my impact?
Future Goals	How will I continue to develop, grow, and improve as an educator? What interests me most about teaching in post-secondary education? What are my future goals and aspirations as an instructor in post-secondary education?

*Table 1: Key components of a teaching philosophy statement with guiding questions for reflection.*  
 Questions adapted from: Kearns, K.D. & Sullivan, C.S. (2011); Stavros & Hinrichs (2011); Schonwetter et al. (2002); Seldin, P., Miller, J. E., & Seldin, C. A. (2010).

In the end, there is no one way to create and/or present a teaching philosophy statement. However, a teaching philosophy statement should provide a sense of clarity, meaning, and resonance related to why you do what you do to support student learning. It provides an authentic representation of your educational beliefs, approaches, and impact, and will continue to evolve as your teaching experiences progress.

## Teaching Philosophy Statement Basics

- 1-2 pages in length
- Written in the first-person – narrative, reflective, authentic voice
- Grounded in discipline, clear and concise (avoids jargon)
- Sometimes uses a metaphor or critical incident as an introduction
- Links to scholarly literature and personal experience (speaks to the why?)
- Demonstrates humility and commitment to on-going growth
- Paints “your” picture, illuminating your unique strengths, beliefs and approaches
- Shows evolving work in progress

## Teaching Philosophy Sample Statements

Sample philosophy statements from past University of Calgary Teaching Award recipients, show the diverse ways that people have expressed their teaching and educational leadership beliefs. Available at: <http://ucalgary.ca/taylorinstitute/edu/node/564>

## Get Ready to Write Your Teaching Philosophy Statement

- Identify why you are writing a teaching philosophy statement – what is your purpose?
- Check and follow any specific guidelines, if provided (e.g. word limit, etc, if submitting a proposal or application).
- Examine some examples of teaching philosophy statements – select the statements that resonate with you.
- Allow enough time to reflect (see guiding questions, Table 1), write, get feedback from a colleague, and revise as needed.

## References

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