



**Trinity College Dublin**  
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath  
The University of Dublin

# WRITING A TEACHING PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT

**Dr. Ciara O'Farrell**

Academic Practice,  
University of Dublin  
Trinity College





Trinity College Dublin  
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath  
The University of Dublin



## GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A TEACHING PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT

### WHAT IS A TEACHING PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT?

A teaching philosophy is a statement of reflection and a philosophical framework of your personal approach to teaching and student learning. It explains the rationale behind what guides your practice, what factors impact on you as an educator and what values underlie your practice. It can be written for a variety of purposes:

- Summative (for promotion, job interviews, teaching awards, professional development credit)

Or

- Formative (pedagogical, personal, reflective).

A Teaching Philosophy Statement should:

- Evidence your sincerely-held beliefs
- Show your pedagogical thinking at a particular time
- Examine your teaching values and corresponding practices
- Monitor your development as a teacher

Your statement is not curriculum vitae; neither is it a vision statement. It is a sincere expression of your values and practices within the contextual reality in which you teach. Your teaching goals should be achievable and relevant. Give examples to illustrate your beliefs and if it forms part of a portfolio ensure it aligns to this.

### HOW LONG SHOULD IT BE?

This depends on the purpose of your statement but ideally no longer than two pages (750-1000 words)

## WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF MY STATEMENT AND WHO IS THE READER?

## WHAT CONTENT CAN I INCLUDE IN MY TEACHING PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT?

A Teaching Philosophy is a personal statement and should avoid cliché. It should focus on what you believe about teaching, and how you apply those beliefs. There are many areas that can be discussed in a teaching philosophy statement. Because of length restrictions, it is not advisable to squeeze too much information into your statement. However, reflecting on some questions below may help to articulate your approaches:

### SOME GUIDING QUESTIONS

- ✚ What do I believe about teaching?
- ✚ What do I believe about learning? Why? How is that played out in my classroom?
- ✚ What are my goals as a teacher?
- ✚ What do I expect to be the outcomes of my teaching?
- ✚ What is the student-teacher relationship I strive to achieve?
- ✚ How do I know when I have taught successfully?
- ✚ What habits, attitudes, or methods mark my most successful teaching achievements?
- ✚ What values do I impart to my students?
- ✚ Has my approach to teaching changed?
- ✚ What role do my students play in the classroom (listeners? Co-discoverers? Peer teachers?)
- ✚ What have I learned about myself as a teacher?
- ✚ What excites me about my discipline?
- ✚ How has my research influenced my teaching?
- ✚ What does teaching mean to me (coaching, leading, guiding, telling, showing, mentoring?)
- ✚ What teaching practices do I use and prefer (lecture, lead discussions, guide problem solving, provide demonstrations?)
- ✚ What are my plans for developing or improving my teaching? (learn new skills, try our new approaches?)

- ✚ How has the T&L literature, concepts, frameworks and models influenced my teaching?
- ✚ What demonstrates my desire to grow as a teacher?
- ✚ What do I still struggle with in terms of teaching and student learning?
- ✚ What motivates me to learn about this subject?
- ✚ What are the opportunities and constraints under which I learn and others learn?

## HOW DO I STRUCTURE MY STATEMENT?

Look at examples of statements to get some ideas. Typically, statements are focused on themes or form a simple narrative. See below for two examples of structure:

### A. CHISM'S FIVE COMPONENTS

Chism (1998), "Developing a Philosophy of Teaching Statement".

#### 1. CONCEPTUALIZATION OF LEARNING

Ask yourself such questions as "What do we mean by learning?" and "What happens in a learning situation?" Think of your answers to these questions based on your personal experience. Chism points out that some teachers have tried to express and explain their understanding of learning through the use of metaphor, because drawing comparisons with known entities can stimulate thinking, whether or not the metaphor is actually used in the statement. Or you can take a more direct approach to conceptualizing learning by describing what you think occurs during a learning episode, based on observation and experience.

#### 2. CONCEPTUALIZATION OF TEACHING

Ask yourself questions such as "What do we mean by teaching?" and "How do I facilitate this process as a teacher?" Again, the metaphor format can be used or a description of the role of the teacher in motivating and facilitating learning. You may also address such issues as how to challenge students intellectually and support them academically, how to respond to different

learning styles, help students who are frustrated, and accommodate different abilities.

### 3. GOALS FOR STUDENTS

This section should describe what skills the teacher expects her/his students to obtain as the result of learning. It can address what goals you set for your classes and what the rationale behind them is; what kind of activities you try to implement in class in order to reach these goals; and how these goals have changed over time as you learn more about teaching and learning.

### 4. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PHILOSOPHY

Your teaching philosophy statement should illustrate how your concepts about teaching and learning, and goals for your students are transformed into classroom activities. Ask yourself, “How do I operationalize my teaching philosophy in the classroom?” To answer these questions, you may reflect on how you present yourself and course materials, what activities, assignments, and projects you implement in the teaching-learning process and how you interact with students both in and outside the classroom.

### 5. PROFESSIONAL GROWTH PLAN

It is important for teachers to continue professional growth, and to do so, teachers need to set clear goals and means to accomplish these goals. Think about questions such as “What goals have I set for myself as a teacher?” and “How do I accomplish these goals?” For instance, you can illustrate how you have professionally grown over the years, what challenges exist at the present, what long-term development goals you have projected, and what you will do to reach these goals. Chism suggests that writing this section can help you think about how your perspectives and actions have changed over time.

In summary, these are the main questions Chism suggests to consider in a statement:

- ✚ How do people learn?
- ✚ How do I facilitate that learning?
- ✚ What goals do I have for my students?
- ✚ Why do I teach the way that I do?

- ✚ What do I do to implement these ideas about teaching and learning in the classroom?
- ✚ Are these things working/Do my students meet the goals I set for them?
- ✚ What are my future goals for growth as a teacher?

<http://ucat.osu.edu/read/teaching-portfolio/philosophy/guidance>

(extracted from Ohio State University)

## B. GOODYEAR AND ALLCHIN (1998)

### 1. INTEGRATION OF RESPONSIBILITIES

Teaching, research, and public service are the main missions of university faculty. Each teacher therefore should explicitly describe what they do in carrying out these three missions in their teaching philosophy statement.

### 2. EXPERTISE

It is important for faculty to link their special knowledge or expertise in the field to ways of helping their students learn that knowledge and communicate with students effectively during this teaching-learning process.

### 3. RELATIONSHIPS

A healthy relationship between the teacher and students is “essential to successful teaching.” Ways in which a teacher establishes such a relationship, such as getting to know students, specific ways of building rapport with students, and special teaching techniques used, can be described in a teaching philosophy statement.

### 4. LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

These teachers can illustrate what they have done to create a supportive learning environment in their classes socially, psychologically, and physically.

### 5. METHODS, STRATEGIES, AND INNOVATION

Teaching philosophy statements can be used to reflect on one’s teaching practice, both past and present, as well as to illustrate how special teaching methods are aligned to their teaching philosophy.

### 6. OUTCOMES

Teachers can demonstrate here how their teaching has produced anticipated

outcomes. For example, how students have learned the subject matter and able to use the knowledge learned in class to solve real-world problems.

<http://ucat.osu.edu/read/teaching-portfolio/philosophy/guidance>

(extracted from Ohio State University)

#### WHEN EDITING YOUR DOCUMENT

Circle those words that reveal your teaching values and gauge:

-  Are these the concepts really important to you?
-  Have you measured their effectiveness?
-  Should you work for greater clarity, by giving examples?

#### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

-  Have you articulated and clarified your teaching and learning beliefs and values?
-  Have you given appropriate examples and reflections on experiences that demonstrate alignment between your beliefs and your practice?
-  Is the statement demonstrably grounded in a knowledge of the teaching & learning literature?
-  Are relevant concepts, models and/or frameworks from the teaching & learning literature considered in ways that conclusively add value?

A final exercise is to think about what a reader will remember the most about this teaching philosophy statement. Is this what you want them to remember?

#### AND WHEN IT'S FINISHED?

Finally, remember teaching philosophy statement is a dynamic document, and one that will change and grow as your academic development does.

## FURTHER READING

- ✚ Chism, 1998), “Developing a Philosophy of Teaching Statement,” *Essays on Teaching Excellence* 9 (3), 1-2. Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education.
- ✚ Goodyear, G. E. & Allchin, D. (1998) Statement of teaching philosophy. *To Improve the Academy* 17, 103-22. Stillwater, OK: New Forums Press.
- ✚ Schonwetter, D.J. Sokal, L., Friesen, M. and Taylor, K.L. (2002). Teaching philosophies reconsidered: A conceptual model for the development and evaluation of teaching philosophy statements. *The International Journal for Academic Development*, 7(1), 83-97.
- ✚ ‘Writing a Teaching Philosophy Statement.’ Iowa State University  
<http://www.celt.iastate.edu/teaching-resources/document-your-teaching/teaching-philosophy/>

---

CAPSL  
Trinity College Dublin  
3-4 Foster Place  
Dublin 2  
Tel: +353 1 896 3601

Email: [capsl@tcd.ie](mailto:capsl@tcd.ie)

© CAPSL Trinity College