

## Teaching Statements

A teaching statement—also called a teaching philosophy—succinctly articulates how your teaching embodies a few key principles of student learning valued in your field. It shows a hiring committee that you satisfy the teaching needs for their department, and it also showcases your writing ability.

### General Guidelines:

**Keep it short:** If you are a new academic professional (ABD or newly PhD), try to limit your teaching statement to no more than one page. If you have more experience (e.g. adjunct or teacher-mentor positions), you can reasonably add a half a page more. This length will keep you focused on essentials, and hiring committees will appreciate that you value their time. Format it as single-spaced, 12-point-font, one-inch margins. Avoid technical jargon, use short sentences, and write in first person (“I”).

**Show. Don’t tell:** The teaching statement is a snapshot of your classroom experiences, a rationale for creating these experiences, and a summary of the positive outcomes of these experiences. It does not *tell* why you teach; it *shows* how you teach and why you are effective. Support all key claims with evidence, and stay away from vague statements. Foreground solid content that reflects the principles of learning valued in your field *and* specific examples of how your teaching embodies these principles.

**Organize according to the values of your discipline, not when and where you taught:** Rather than re-iterating your CV, think about core values in your discipline and how you instill those in your students through your teaching. Consider opening with a brief teaching story to frame your narrative and establish a central theme. Use examples to illustrate your teaching outcomes and effectiveness. Student learning outcomes may include: ensuring content knowledge, developing critical thinking and problem solving skills, cultivating a spirit of cooperative learning, and developing independent thinking.

**Tailor to the institution:** Hiring committees want to know that you can share knowledge in effective and creative ways, fill seats, and excel as a teacher. However, since different types of institutions have very different concerns, prepare at least two versions of your statement: one for “research institutions” and another for “teaching institutions.” For **research institutions**, it is critical that you clearly communicate the deep connections between your research and your teaching; provide a clear framework and concrete details about how your life as a researcher informs the work you do in the classroom. For **teaching-focused liberal arts or community college jobs**, deemphasize your research—if you discuss it at all—in favor of providing more evidence of teaching excellence.

**Avoid sentimentality:** Instead of: “I am delighted when students tell me...” simply state, “Students frequently comment that [enter awesome teaching exercise here] has proven integral to their learning.” Also avoid excessive humility. Rather than: “I was fortunate to be selected for the x award...” simply state, “I was selected for the x award.”

**Have a conclusion:** Wrap up with a summary reminder of your strengths and/or reiterate your central theme. Try something like this: “In sum, all of my pedagogical strategies are dedicated to teaching the principles of humanistic research in dynamic, hands-on ways that will remain with

the student long after he or she leaves my classroom.” Not this: “And I received positive feedback for that class.”

**Revise, revise, revise!** Since both the quality *and* content of your writing will be assessed, plan on working through 3-4 drafts. Make sure your writing is organized, well developed, focused, and grammatically sound. At the same time, make sure that your entire statement coheres around a few key values. Finally, be sure you include concrete examples and vivid details that demonstrate how these values inform your teaching and produce student learning outcomes in line with those values.

### GETTING STARTED & DRAFTING

**Brainstorming:** Reflect upon your experiences by asking yourself the following questions:

- Values: What does your field *do*? What does your field value in terms of student learning and teaching? How do your classrooms reflect these values?
- Experiences: What kinds of course assignments and activities have you created? What kinds of courses have you taught? What kinds of mentoring or teaching-focused service activities have you done? To help you be as concrete as possible, you may find it helpful to review your old teaching materials, lesson plans, and teaching evaluations. Especially look for examples consistent with the values you’re discussing, and those that epitomize your approach to teaching as a whole.
- Effectiveness: How do you measure your effectiveness? What teaching practices best reflect your successes as a teacher? How do you measure student learning outcomes? What are your 2-3 most rewarding classroom experiences that demonstrate your successes and those of your students?
- Research Expertise: How does your research shape your understanding of your field and help you decide *what* and *how* to teach? What research areas, both general and specific, do your experiences qualify you to teach? How do you integrate your teaching, research, and service to meet the educational missions of your current department and institution?

**Drafting:** After you’ve answered the brainstorming questions, begin your teaching statement by:

- Taking Stock: Go through your responses and ask yourself: What highlights your teaching strengths and your field’s values? What kinds of examples do you have? About what do you have the most to say?
- Generating a Rough Draft: Begin by jotting down a working outline of your teaching statement. Keep in mind that the best teaching statements:
  - Begin with a very brief story that functions as the document’s thematic backbone.
  - Are organized according to values and themes, not when and where you taught.
  - Use concrete examples to illustrate your teaching values, outcomes, and strengths.
  - Start where you feel most comfortable. Have a story in mind for the introduction? Start there. Feel more comfortable starting with a specific body paragraph? Start there. You can always re-arrange these early pieces and create transitions between them later

**Revising:** Focus on the ideas in your paper, not the punctuation. Revision can include reconsidering your arguments, reviewing your evidence, refining your purpose, and/or reorganizing your presentation. Ask yourself the following:

- What is my main point? Every piece of writing has a main point. Find the sentence that summarizes the point of your teaching. Is this point clear? Don’t make hiring committees hunt for or assume your main point.

- Am I persuasive? Is my evidence compelling? The goal of a teaching statement is to persuade a hiring committee that you are a strong candidate for the position. Do you adequately connect your expertise to the values and needs of the institution? Do your examples incorporate concrete details to illustrate your teaching ability and effectiveness?
- What needs to stay? What should go? Do all of the ideas relate back to your thesis? Is there anything that doesn't seem to fit? If so, you should cut it.
- Switch from writer-centered to reader-centered. Imagine yourself as the hiring committee. What is the most successful part of your teaching statement? Why? How could it be made better? What is the least successful part? Why? How could it be improved?
- Is my writing tight and clean? Eliminate repetition, break down long, overly complex sentences, and examine the transitions between sentences and paragraphs. Do the ideas in your teaching statement flow well? Is there anything that is unclear or confusing? Cut extra words, jargon, and misused words.