

# TEACHING STATEMENT

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## Teaching Experience

My first teaching experience actually came in high school. My AP French teacher knew about my interest in language education, so she recruited me to teach an accelerated version of French 1 to two sophomores whose schedules kept them from taking the normal year-long course. To ensure that they were held to the usual standard, they took the same tests as all the other students, but at twice the normal pace. After some hard work, both students received an A on every test.

I also gained some teaching experience during my undergrad. As a small liberal arts institution, Hampshire College doesn't have any graduate students. Part of what this means is that senior students are often asked to serve as teaching assistants for introductory classes. My advisor, Joanna Morris, asked me in my fourth year to serve as her TA for Introduction to Experimental Psychology and Psychology of Language (incidentally, the first course I took with her). Working with these first- and second-year students, I was surprised to learn that the things they struggled with were not always the same things that I struggled with. This was when I started to really understand that good teaching has to be idiosyncratic. Every student comes to the material with their own set of strengths and weaknesses, so I learned to pay close attention to every student individually, so I could try to figure out what kind of examples work for each of them.

Most recently, I've twice served as a teaching assistant for Statistics for the Behavioral Sciences here at NYU. This has driven home the point about student idiosyncrasy with even greater force. When explaining a concept, I find that there is no single example or perspective that works for every student. I often have to try three, four, or five examples before it seems like things click with the majority of the room. To be the best teacher I can be, I have to figure out how each student sees the material, how they approach the ideas, and what sorts of arguments and examples work for them. Every student is different, so I am always looking for new ways to describe the material.

It would be a mistake, of course, to pretend that teaching begins and ends in the classroom. Taking on research assistants, I am deeply responsible for their training, in statistics, methodology, and even theory. There are elements of teaching in my writing, in the presentations I give, and when I explain the work that I do to friends and family.

## Teaching Philosophy

Styles of writing are distinguished by what they aim to do and the methods they employ to make it happen. *Classic style* is an approach where the writer imagines that they are engaged in conversation with a friend who is as competent as they are, but who happens not to know some things the author knows. The metaphor is visual. Having noticed something that the audience has not, you direct their gaze so that they can see it for themselves. Classic writing assumes equality, and when done correctly, makes the reader feel like a genius. Bad writing makes the reader feel like an idiot.

*"Education is learning what you didn't even know you didn't know."* – Daniel Boorstin

We can apply the tenets of classic style to teaching. The fundamental assumption is equality. As a teacher, I happen to be aware of some things my students haven't noticed yet. But not so long ago, I was in the position they are in now. This means that one of the most important things I can do for my students is simply expose them to ideas they might not have encountered otherwise.

The purpose of education, then, is presentation. The aim is to show the student something in the world that they can see for themselves. The proof of my success lies in clarity and in simplicity, when students feel that they have mastered the material, when they tell me that they can see it too. Just like good writing, good teaching makes the student feel like a genius. No comment on how bad teaching makes them feel!

You can't force someone to learn. You can give them tests and quizzes, and see whether they have learned or not. But examinations don't teach students, they just measure what students know. The actual learning is always done by the students themselves. You can force them to jump through hoops, but students can always tell when you are doing this, and they will hate you for it. Probably they will come to hate the subject too.

The only thing to be done is to talk to them directly, as equals, and make it as easy as possible for them to learn the material. We want to set them up for success and then get out of their way. We can't carry them over the finish line. What we can do is can cut down on the cruft and distractions, and provide good resources, so they can spend their time actually learning the material.