

## STEP 2

# Building an academic career

What you need to know about teaching philosophies

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### WHAT IS A TEACHING PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT?

Developing a teaching philosophy statement (TPS) is a way of articulating your approach to learning and teaching by describing, analysing and justifying your methods and goals.

A key part of developing a TPS is drawing on the scholarship of learning and teaching to reflect more meaningfully on your own practice.<sup>[1]</sup> One of the simplest definitions of a TPS is:

*“a written statement of why teachers do what they do—their beliefs and theories about teaching, about students and about learning, all of which underpin what and how they teach”<sup>[2]</sup>*

### WHY SHOULD I DEVELOP A TEACHING PHILOSOPHY?

- Articulating your teaching philosophy is a way of reflecting on and developing your practice so that you become more effective in supporting student learning.
- Writing your teaching philosophy can help expose gaps between your beliefs and your practice.<sup>[3]</sup>
- A TPS can be used as a framing device for developing your teaching portfolio.<sup>[4]</sup>
- You are likely to be asked to articulate your teaching philosophy in academic job applications and in interviews. Research reveals that more than half of academic job applicants in the United States were asked to submit a statement of teaching philosophy.<sup>[5]</sup>
- Some established and budding academics have never thought about developing a TPS and are unable to articulate their teaching philosophy and goals.<sup>[6]</sup> By creating a TPS you will build your capacity to develop a career in which teaching will play a major role.<sup>[7]</sup>

### WHAT IS REFLECTIVE WRITING?

- There is a huge amount of literature on developing reflective writing skills and this is framed by varying disciplines and contexts. Ryan and Ryan adopt a broad definition of academic reflection as incorporating two key elements: 1) making sense of experience and 2) reimagining future experience.<sup>[9]</sup>
- Your TPS can be seen as your reflections about [what makes learning happen](#) and what the implications of those beliefs are for your role as a university teacher.
- Your TPS can be the basis for a series of reflective accounts of practice that ultimately make up your teaching portfolio.

### HOW DO I STRUCTURE A TEACHING PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT?

There are a number of different structures available and you should spend some time exploring which model might be most suitable for your intended purpose.

The following suggestions, adapted from O’Neal et al.<sup>[1]</sup> are made to get you started:

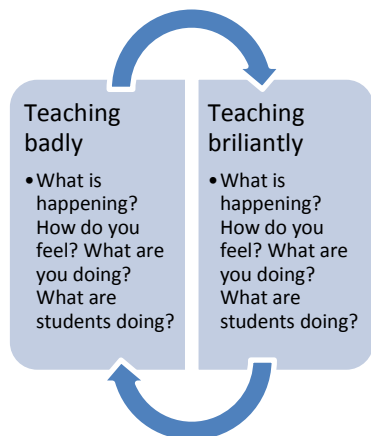
- Keep it brief. Most TPS are 1-2 pages.
- Write in the first person.
- Write reflectively.
- Articulate your goals for your students, the methods you use to achieve them, the approach to assessment you use to measure learning, the evaluation strategies you use to develop your practice. Demonstrate how these are constructively aligned.
- Outline your disciplinary context.
- Showcase your strengths and achievements.
- Tailor the TPS to its purpose (link to institutional or national frameworks on learning and teaching).

Your TPS is something that you should revisit regularly and reflect on whether it still captures your beliefs about learning and teaching. As your career develops and your experiences broaden, it is likely that your philosophies of learning and teaching will also evolve.



## HOW CAN I CREATE A TEACHING PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT?

There are many different ways of writing a TPS. Beatty et al. (2009).<sup>[8]</sup> have developed an exercise that you may find helpful. It starts with guided imagery where you are asked to imagine yourself in two very different situations:



Reflect on the gap between these two pictures – what is the difference? These differences should help you think about what effective teaching looks like, and what you believe the teacher and learner needs to do in order to achieve it.

The following phrases might help:

- 'I believe that learners need...'
- 'The values that underpin my own beliefs about learning and teaching are ...'
- 'I believe that the purpose of teaching is ...'
- 'I think that students learn best when ...'
- 'Becoming an effective teacher is important to me because ...'
- 'I believe that learning is driven by ...'

One model that QUT's PhD students have found helpful is to construct their TPS using WHAT? WHY? HOW? Questions:

- WHAT you believe to be important
- WHY it is relevant
- HOW you will teach to that philosophy

For example:

'I believe that assessment drives learning. Assessment shows students what is important and articulates how they can pass a subject. I use assessment to shape my teaching and to drive learning in ways that deepen the student experience. I build formative assessment into classes to help scaffold learning '

## WHAT CAN GO WRONG WITH TEACHING PHILOSOPHY STATEMENTS?

TPS can be powerful and useful – or pointless and a waste of time. Here is a brief reminder of what can go wrong so that you know what pitfalls to avoid:

- There is a danger that by writing down your philosophy it somehow becomes rigid and set in stone. The TPS becomes a static document rather than a continuously developing strategy.
- TPS can be too generic, impersonal and bland.<sup>[6]</sup>
- Some TPSs over-use the current learning and teaching buzzwords and fashions. 'Weasel words' is a phrase that has been given to "intentionally evasive or misleading speech" (Collins English Dictionary) where all meaning has been sucked out of the statement made. TPSs that rely too heavily on jargon can be rendered meaningless and impenetrable.<sup>[8]</sup>

### References

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