

Teaching Philosophy for Heather J. Stone
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When I started my career as a writing teacher, I thought my primary job was to teach students self-discipline. I wanted students to learn to do whatever needed to be done when it needed to be done. I intended to be strict about due dates and kind, but firm, about special circumstances. Twenty-three sections later, I have realized my goal for students is self-awareness rather than self-discipline.

Helping students learn more about themselves is why my classes include reflexive, transactional, and performative writing. When writing reflexively, students examine how and why they write, and to what effect, gaining greater self-awareness as they examine their places in the social and physical world. Transactional writing is aimed at accomplishing a practical task with another human being. When my students use transactional writing, they learn to better articulate their needs, wants, likes, and dislikes. Performative writing is the writing-to-specification usually done on classroom assignments. When students write performatively, they practice adapting their own communication style to the expectations and requirements of others.

I specialize in teaching genre-specific writing. I have taught technical communication to engineers, academic writing to college freshmen, professional writing to office workers, journalistic writing to reporters and public relations specialists, persuasive writing to marketers, and so on. I believe that mastery of a second genre—which for many students is academic writing—is when a student really begins to master the English language. I also want students to see that genre rules, including citation styles, are socially constructed by specific groups to meet specific needs; they do not represent “the one true way” to communicate.

Not only do I want students to believe that language has transformative power, but I want them to become comfortable wielding that power. I teach rules of grammar and style as removal of impedance rather than as pursuit of elegance. My onsite and online classrooms emphasize oral and written conversation, and students engage in frequent dialogue with me and with each other. Because I believe we all need to write much and often in order to seize hold of our best selves, I require my students to use such technology vehicles as online message boards. Such boards, if implemented well, encourage near-constant writing in reflexive, transactional, and performative modes. Message boards also provide a means to capture student writing for future use by the same student and others in the course. For example, students can revisit previous boards and extract certain posts for re-analysis. When students generate some of the course texts in this way, they further understand their own writing is important.

When I build a course, my first objective is clarity because I want to model for my students to see that words can make things easier in practical ways. Using technical writing skills, I design consistent course frameworks that guide rather than confuse; I strongly believe not having to wrestle with course structure frees students to focus on content and interaction. Because online environments often privilege writing and promote more intentionally-organized learning, I find online instruction to be an essential and valuable pedagogical medium. Whether a course is onsite, online, or blended, I seek for ways to leverage technology to keep students talking to themselves, each other, and me through writing.

As a writing teacher, my job is to give students techniques and tools for connecting people and words. I want students to become more aware of how language is received by those around them and to practice reaching out to others using language. My hope is that as students write to connect with others they will also connect with themselves.