

Philosophy of Teaching

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English Composition/Writing

Teaching Philosophy

Next to math, English is one of the most difficult subjects to teach to those not interested or a non-traditional learner. Students approach the classroom with preconceived notions that are often negative regarding English courses, so it is important to find ways to inspiring better writing and, more importantly, critical thinking. These creative ways include discussing various current events, and viewing modern-day and classic films (sometimes with controversial subject matter) for analysis and interpretation in relation to the assigned reading.

For example, for a online Advanced Composition lecture regarding Clive Staples Lewis' philosophy/essay "The Inner Ring" and his book *Mere Christianity*, I assigned for reading and viewing the *New York Times* article on the Santa Barbara shooter Elliott Rodger and his video "manifesto," and required students to discuss in an online forum how Lewis' philosophy can be applied to Rodger's motivation behind his deadly actions. Additionally, students were required to complete a journal entry on whether they have ever violated the law of human nature (as discussed in Lewis' *Mere Christianity*) in order to be included inside an "inner ring."

At the heart of my creative approach in the classroom is this: the key to successful teaching is to create an atmosphere in which students learn from each other with the instructor as facilitator and mentor. Creating a safe atmosphere that allows students to engage in open and honest dialogue in a symposium setting immediately following the concept taught and playing devil's advocate to every idea discussed, I encourage students to take ideas one step further. As the facilitator, I guide the conversation in a way that helps students to stay on task and on topic, and reintroduce the concept for emphasis to guide the student to make connections correctly.

My teaching pedagogy includes Student-Centered Learning (SCL), and the elimination of addressing learning styles (visual/auditory/kinesthetic) by focusing on how to convey the *meaning* of the concepts/theories taught. Using Bloom's taxonomies, I created goals and objectives for my writing assignments *independent of course goals and objectives as established by the department* to address higher order thinking, as well as to challenge students to incorporate important components of academic papers such as critical thinking, details and elaboration, and proper organization of ideas. I also instruct on the reading comprehension technique the SQR4 reading method in conjunction with The Cornell Note-Taking System as tools students can use to assist with academic success.

In keeping with the student centered approach, I have also rethought my grading process. I found that students were only performing to get a grade and weren't really interested in learning the art and skill of writing. Taking a page from the Evergreen College and colleagues of mine at the University of Saint Joseph, I initiated a proving ground grading system as opposed to the current stick-and-carrot grading system. With this grading method students will submit work repeatedly within a three week period for instructor and peer feedback until they decide to stop. Upon submission of the final product, they must also submit a self evaluation of their work and the process along with the grade that they would give themselves based on the work completed.

If I don't agree with the grade, they have the option to negotiate and present evidence to support their position.

Many students have commented favorably on the originality of my course content and how they have enjoyed my "out of the box" approach. These students now view English courses differently, as not some dreary course with constant reading of ancient text and analysis. Through my teaching creativity, not only are students tasked with looking at the world and reporting on their observations in written form, they are also tasked with looking inward by challenging them to perform a self analysis and shedding light on how they engage with their surroundings and, perhaps, how they can change that engagement for the better.