

## Teaching Philosophy

In all classes I teach, I work alongside students to (re)discover familiar and new ways to approach texts, engage in constructive conversation, and write for varied purposes and audiences, using various modalities and technologies. As I continue to write in familiar and new ways myself, I am reminded how rewarding and how frustrating writing can be. I feel it is very important for educators to work together—with colleagues, students, and the public—to continually discover the joys and challenges of engaging in the world through writing, even as our definitions of “writing” shift.

My teaching is driven by the questions: *What is “good” writing, and how can we tell/assess it?* (drawing especially on scholarship about inclusive pedagogy, antiracist pedagogy and assessment, and translingual literacy and language justice) *How can reading and writing help students respond to various demands in/on their lives?* and *How can I best assist students in consuming and producing texts (broadly defined) that enable learning and enhance their potential to contribute to society in ways they deem meaningful?* For the sake of space/time, I highlight three important goals that motivate and shape my teaching:

*(1) Engineering productive learning environments:* This requires careful planning, attention, negotiation, and flexibility. I begin, before the term begins, by choosing or creating texts and activities I believe will help students reach course learning outcomes, and I also leave space for students to identify additional texts and activities once class begins and recognize that I may need to change my plans once I better know the students in a particular class. I scaffold assignments to increasingly challenge students while also helping them learn to break large tasks into smaller, more manageable pieces. I prefer to challenge students with difficult texts and ideas rather than presume what they are—or aren’t—capable of; however, I remain attentive and responsive by building in opportunities for students to provide feedback that indicates whether they are over- or underwhelmed. Additionally, I periodically ask students to reflect on their progress achieving course goals and any additional desired outcomes they have set. I intend for this self-assessment to provide me with necessary feedback to redirect the course as needed and to build in time for student reflection, as I know it is easy to get swept up in the busyness of a semester.

Another critical step in this engineering process is considering how assessment can contribute to—and sometimes interfere with—achieving learning outcomes and equitable learning spaces for students. I weave multiple and varied opportunities for assessment, and reflection on that assessment, throughout each course, and I provide students ample feedback—from classmates and from me in oral and written forms—seeking to make connections across drafts, assignments, and discussions. An important part of the assessment ecologies I create is the recognition and investigation of power in relation to language and evaluations of how one writes and uses language. I use readings and conversations to spur this recognition and investigation, and I also sometimes engage in community-based assessment (à la Asao Inoue) where students and I discuss and negotiate what should be valued in an assignment. I have found community-based assessment to be especially effective in my Senior Seminar class, where the

WRC program leaves broad parameters to allow students to undertake final projects that range from short documentaries, to argumentative research papers, to websites. Because each project cannot be assessed according to the same criteria, I work collectively with students to create shared expectations of what all students will demonstrate in the defense of their final projects, and then, based on that collective work, students collaborate with me to create rubrics for their individual projects. Our negotiations over and revisions of assessment tools prompt students to consider how and why their work should be valued. Further, this assessment procedure demonstrates the complex and messy process of creating and evaluating written work yet gives students authority within these processes.

Overall, I believe helping students to become better writers and communicators means giving them freedom and responsibility to make calculated, rhetorically based choices about audience, purpose, technology, genre, and delivery. And this includes choices that are not always or entirely effective. Therefore, I believe the environment and assessment practices of writing classrooms must allow room for play and failure. By encouraging students to take risks in their writing while also improving their abilities to reflect on and assess their own choices, I hope to show students that “good writing” is neither fixed nor unattainable.

*(2) Respecting students in order to instill curiosity and confidence:* Students are talented humans who come to my classroom with different knowledge, skills, abilities, passions, fears, and wounds. Importantly, I remind myself that some students’ wounds come from previous educational experiences, and I endeavor to understand how those experiences shape students’ current understandings of themselves and work to avoid deepening wounds or creating additional ones. Therefore, I strive to create learning environments predicated on respect and inclusiveness. No matter the subject or how many times I have taught the course, I know students will always offer me new ways of approaching materials based on their unique identities and passions. Therefore, I strive to create environments in which we all feel comfortable sharing our knowledges, interests, and experiences to create a more supportive and beneficial learning experience for all.

On the first day of every class I teach, we take time to create community guidelines that will guide our behavior throughout the term. I provide students with a starting place, a list of recommendations that has been built over time in previous classes I have taught. This list includes guidelines such as “Differentiate between impact and intent: Understand that your words have effects on others. Speak with care. If you learn that something you’ve said was experienced as disrespectful or marginalizing—even if accidental—acknowledge that and apologize. Listen carefully and try to understand that perspective, and learn how you can do better in the future.”

An additional way I work to encourage students to feel comfortable sharing knowledges, interests, and experiences is by creating a shared digital space, such as a Google Doc or Canvas discussion board, where any student can share things they find or are familiar with that they feel relate to class somehow. I then incorporate these materials into class by asking the student who shared them to talk about them and foster larger class conversation, and I

sometimes assign the readings as required texts the next time I teach the course. When I do that, I let students know the reading came from previous students to encourage them to similarly share. I find this collaborative approach gives students some control over the class, allows me to see how students are making sense of class content, gives me new ways to understand the content and my students, and often helps to make courses feel more relevant for students.

The list of things I do to try and make students feel respected is long and grows longer as I continue teaching and learning more about what causes students to feel respected and disrespected, seen and unseen, valued and devalued. In classes that focus on writing, it is especially important that I help students to interrogate what we think of as Standard English and also help them to understand that while other dialects, languages, and versions of English may have different rules, that does not mean they are less valid or valuable. It is also important that I dispel myths of a writer as someone who has inherent talent and instead persuade students there are many ways to become better writers; my students have often been told by previous teachers that they are “not writers,” and it takes time to teach techniques, build confidence, and convince them otherwise.

### *(3) Helping students become more thoughtful, engaged members of their communities:*

Ultimately, I want students to have experiences and gain skills that will make them more thoughtful, critical thinkers, readers, and writers who are able to participate in the world in ways they find important. This requires helping them to develop their abilities to read and write in a range of genres and with a range of technologies; it also means helping them to develop their abilities to consider and weigh multiple perspectives so they can engage in dialogue and debate effectively in various communities. One way I've done this is to ask students to write about their literacy development from various angles. We begin by reading, critiquing, and responding to a variety of published texts about literacy or examples of others' literacy narratives. This provides a wide scope of perspectives for us to consider, during which time I encourage students to grapple with differences across communities. They use various analog and digital tools to compose and share their own drafts and respond to others' drafts.

For students at TU who, as the saying goes, live in “the Transy bubble,” I know I often need to push students to recognize they are part of larger Lexington and global communities. Therefore, I involve students in various types of community engagement, ranging from smaller, one-time events such as attending potlucks held near campus (e.g., the Carnegie Center's annual International Eating and Reading Night) to larger, longer-term involvement such as semester-long partnerships with local nonprofit organizations, as I have done multiple times in my Business Writing and Writing for/with Nonprofits classes. One partner I have worked with since 2014 is the Community Action Council for Lexington-Fayette, Bourbon, Harrison and Nicholas Counties, Inc. (CAC). My students have learned about the CAC's work, the people who work there, and the people and communities they serve. Students have created a range of projects the CAC requested such as infographics, training videos, and social media analyses and plans. These partnerships ask students to learn about and possibly become part of another community and offer them opportunities to create genres that are of use outside of academia so students are not only aware of the types of genres they may encounter but also have practice

viewing and creating them. Additionally, these opportunities are important because they allow students to collaborate not only with one another (as these are group projects) but also with members of the partner organization. At TU, students often know the other students in their courses, so the stakes for collaborating feel relatively low; however, communicating with someone they do not know who is a professional outside of TU provides higher stakes, and it requires students to consider others' schedules and expectations. Importantly, we spend time preparing for and reflecting on this type of community-engaged work. We often begin with questions about what the term "community" means and discuss the ideas of insider and outsider, interrogating what rules exist in certain communities, who makes those rules, and who has to follow or gets to break or change them. While I think it is important for my students to consider their role in various communities, I do not pretend that the idea of community engagement is uncomplicated.