

Josh Grimm
Teaching Philosophy Statement

Growing up with two parents who also happened to be English teachers, I remember youth as a series of impromptu grammar lessons. Yet, looking back, I also recall wonderful teaching moments woven into everyday activities. I continue to learn a lot from my parents and am consistently amazed at how much they know and how well they convey it. I've asked them how they do it, and Mom says their responsibility is to know the subject matter well, know where to find additional information, and creatively teach it. With those three basics, teaching becomes a natural act.

Knowledge of subject matter may seem an obvious requirement, but it can be neglected. An ignorant professor is rarely exposed, of course, in a showdown with a curious or suspicious student. Often, the truth never comes out and the façade is maintained. In the process, students are shortchanged. Students cannot move beyond the basics into areas of critical thinking and analysis unless the basics are imparted first. Without knowledge, they're forever stuck in a lower gear—like a Ferrari that never leaves the city limits.

In teaching journalism and mass communication, I've found that knowing material allows me to steer a clear course and prevent discussions from going to extremes—of ultra-abstract thinking on the one hand, or ultra-vocationalism on the other. In journalism skills courses in particular, it is important to bring our theory back to professional applications. I enjoy a spirited discussion about what news is or whether objectivity exists, but we can't debate those issues the entire semester. At some point I need to put down the theory book and pick up an AP Style Guide.

I don't know everything—just ask my girlfriend. But the ability to expand my own knowledge and knowledge of additional resources for the classroom are essential; otherwise, my lectures will grow stale and my own thinking will stagnate. Not everything I want to teach can come from my own journalism experience or a book. Sometimes this means inviting a reporter to talk to students about covering controversial issues or finding a job in the current market. As long as the guest speaker is part of the class plan and not a space-holder the day before Spring Break, the activity is likely to benefit the students, the teacher, and even the speaker.

Creatively conveying the material is important also, but can be difficult. Perhaps the most essential element is authentic communication, something so basic as to be often overlooked. Genuine communication moves the class beyond the PowerPoint lecture and other props into a discussion, or from an examination into a conversation.

Here attitude becomes key: enthusiasm and passion are important attributes for inspiring and motivating students. I care about what I do, and want students to feel the same way. Achieving this goal entails listening to them carefully and connecting with them by using pertinent, relevant examples, for instance, from current news events or TV shows.

Flexibility often proves an asset in the classroom. This does not mean casting aside significant deadlines or canceling exams, but it might mean discarding the lecture and examples I so carefully constructed for that day so students can cover a special meeting of the city council or an accident one block from campus. Such willingness to adapt not only helps instill this necessary instinct in the minds of budding journalists; it

also shows that I'm paying attention to the class instead of sticking to an arbitrary schedule created months earlier.

Lastly, just as I have to challenge my students, I must continue to challenge myself by staying updated on research in the field, learning new information, and constantly adapting my techniques.