

Dave Howland

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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Legos, stolen from my children, play a big role in the classroom – helping students assemble and disassemble their story elements and ideas.

ideas. And I bring Legos to my classes – albeit a bigger version of them, pilfered from my kids – to help demonstrate how writers can assemble documents that will get off the ground and take them where they want to go.

In the few pages to follow, I hope to provide you a sense of my teaching philosophy and practice, and the ways it has benefited my students – for many years at the University of New Hampshire, and now at Rutgers. As a teacher, I draw heavily on a set of life experiences and try to share the best of what I have to offer from each:

- ✓ **Academic Writing** – I have leveraged my doctoral research experience in environmental studies to help scholars with their writing. I have helped run workshops for student across disciplines at the UNH Graduate School and for faculty at the Rutgers School of Social Work. I am looking forward next semester to applying my environmental experience and love of the outdoors to teaching a section of Writing as a Naturalist (Writing 352).
- ✓ **News Reporting** – I have tradecraft to share and tales to tell from covering crime, government, the environment, sports, and politics as a news reporter for papers in California, New York and New England – and The Associated Press in Boston.

When I was five or six, I would set out to build three-foot-long jumbo jets out of multi-colored LEGO blocks. Often, I ran short on pieces. The heavy, complicated planes – filled with seats and aisles and little LEGO passengers eating dinner – would fall apart under their own weight as I tried to lift them off the floor for their first flight. Eventually, after many tearful crashes, I learned that my creations had to be structurally sound if I wanted them to fly. A little more than 40 years on, and now a university writing teacher, I still rely on these early lessons in the value of persistence and sound design. I draw on my experiences – as a news reporter, doctoral researcher, town councilor, and musician – to demonstrate the power of writing to help students solve problems, network, advocate, debate, investigate, document, and create new

- ✓ **Local Policymaking** – My experiences in local government in New Hampshire – as a community organizer and Town Councilor – required a good deal of writing, research, problem solving, consensus building, and public speaking. Much of this is directly relevant to the lessons I teach in Technical Writing Essentials (Writing 202).
- ✓ **Song Writing & Performing** – This too, is right in the teaching roundhouse: In today's fragmented music business, most artists have to “do-it-yourself”. I just finished recording an album of original songs with a terrific band of musicians, and I can draw on my current experiences as a writer and performer to illustrate the challenges and rewards of writing, performing, promoting, booking shows, designing web pages, and collaborating with artists in a creative real-time endeavor.
- ✓ **Parenting** – This occupation, as any mom or dad knows, requires some serious collaboration and conflict resolution skills. I share stories every so often from the home front about balancing family and work. I demonstrate how journaling has helped our family savor experiences in a life that goes by all too quickly.

Teaching Tools/ Strategies

I think the best way to describe my teaching philosophy is with a description of what I have come to value most, in theory and practice, over my past 20 years in the classroom:

Lead by Example – I believe in practicing what I preach. That starts with showing up on time prepared for class, and sending (and expecting) e-mails in well-edited complete sentences. I frequently remind my students that they are closer than they know to the full-time working world and they will need to be sharp, and stay sharp, for the job market. I remind them they face a good deal of competition, domestically and internationally, for the best positions. I tell my students that I'll keep class interesting, but that they will get the most for their tuition dollars in my office hours, where we can thoroughly examine their work. In class exercises I offer up examples of my own writing.

Students relish a chance to poke holes in their professor's work.

DAVE HOWLAND

ABOUT ME

Hello, my name is Dave Howland and I'll be teaching your Essentials of Technical Writing course this semester. I just moved to New Jersey this summer with my family from New Hampshire, where I've worked for 12 years as an English lecturer at the University of New Hampshire. I earned a masters and doctorate at UNH in something completely different: environmental studies. Before that, I worked as a news reporter at papers in California and at The Associated Press in Boston. I like to hike, rock climb, and cook. I play saxophone and a little guitar.

HOPES FOR CLASS

I enjoy teaching English very much, and am excited about coming to Rutgers after nearly 20 years at the University of New Hampshire. I hope that you are embarking on a pretty exciting adventure. With teaching this class comes the responsibility of helping you out on the right foot – in terms of writing, organization, teamwork, and critical thinking skills – for the rest of your college career and also work beyond that. I take that mission very seriously, and though I might not show it, it makes me a little nervous. I am rooting for all of you to succeed!

STRENGTHS

Since I started making my own "local newspaper" at age 5, I have been writing and editing stories and essays in one capacity or another throughout my life. Long before I entered into academia (the family business) I produced local, national and international news stories under intense deadline pressure. Reporting exposed me to experiences exciting, wonderful, and tragic – and this has helped me understand and write about people and their experiences more thoughtfully. Reporting, along with academic research and writing, has served me well in teaching.

INSPIRATIONAL TEACHER

I have a couple: My seventh-grade English teacher, Mrs. Hauk, recognized my ability to write and edit and asked me to be her editor. She fought to remove me from an unfair course track for students deemed unlikely to succeed, and she told me I could. I have tried to help others in the same way. More recently, my guitar teacher, Jason Crigler, has inspired me with his example to push myself. He survived a brain injury and had to fight to recover his musical skills. So there's no room for me to complain that learning my instrument is too hard. Jason's example keeps me practicing and growing.

SELF IMPROVEMENT

Just as I hope to help you improve your writing and editing skills, I too seek to improve my teaching each semester. I learn a great deal from my students every year. We have many moving parts in this class, and I am always working to make it run more smoothly. I'm bringing to Rutgers the lessons that have served my students well at UNH and will work to share and adapt these to help you do your best work – in college and beyond.

I have my students make a “Course Driver’s License” to help me adjust to their needs and learning styles.

Get to Know My Students – For their first homework assignment, I have the students assemble their own “course driver's license”, complete with a well-sized and recognizable photo, and some remarks on the following: their hopes concerns/fears about class, strengths they bring to

the class, skills they want to work on, and a description of a favorite teacher/learning experience from their past. I use these as a handy reference; to learn my students' names quickly and to help adapt my teaching style to their interests, abilities and goals.

Connect Students to the Outside World – I seek opportunities for my students to interact with professionals and colleagues who are putting into practice the skills we're working on in a variety of contexts. I have been proud to bring to Rutgers and my Writing 202 class, a service-learning project adapted from the Professional and Technical Writing course I taught for many years at UNH. The seven-week project requires students (in teams of three) to recruit and develop useful products for a professional or student community non-profit organization. This

work varies depending on the needs of the clients and skills on the team: from websites and promotional videos to research reports and collections of informational material such as flyers, posters and brochures. The students conduct needs analyses and create a proposal for their clients, and they keep them apprised each step of the way – through research and development, usability testing and editing final drafts. This past fall, my students worked with nearly a dozen local non-profits, including CASA, Meals on Wheels, Rutgers UNICEF, and Youth Empowerment Services. I am looking forward this semester to working with Amy Michael and Claudio Mir at the



My Writing 202 students engaged with some wonderful nonprofit organizations this past Fall, including the Rutgers Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services.

Collaborative Center for Community-Based Research and Service, who have offered to create a recitation for a future section. Some of my former students have returned years later to share their workplace writing experiences with my new students, and their proud professor.

Meta Teach – Perhaps more than some teachers, I explain the learning goals for each exercise and how they relate to the overall arc of our course. I learned the value of this early on from seasoned instructors at the UNH Teaching Excellence Program. It is especially important in my technical writing classes, where each skill set – for example, library research, the use of multiple document formats, persuasion, interviewing, and detailed note taking – builds firmly on the next. This is not always obvious at first, and it pays to reflect on it with the students.

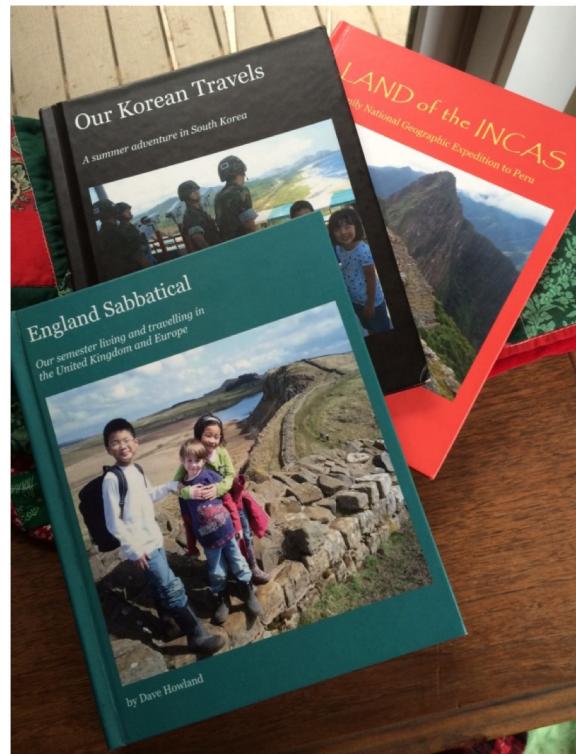
Build a Learning Community – In each of my classes, in ways big and small, I work to create a sense of a shared learning community. On many assignments, I have the students brainstorm ideas and strategies – first in small groups and then as an entire class. I post evolving lists generated from class discussions on our class website, such as best and worst practices for public speaking and group collaboration. Students regularly workshop each other's drafts, and I often

share examples of good work with the entire class. This is not only affirming for the hard-working student, but often an inspiration for their peers.

Embrace Diversity – Over the years, I have made an effort to explore issues of race, gender and culture with my students, and to invite colleagues with experience in these areas to visit my classes to discuss their work. Last year, I participated with UNH colleagues in a series of discussions and a workshop with Howard University Professor Teresa Redd, who advised us on best practices for incorporating diverse voices and perspectives in our first-year writing curriculum. In New Hampshire, one of the least diverse states in the union, this is urgently needed. In 2008, when members of the UNH Black Student Union received a torrent of criticism and threats for starting Black Family Weekend (a long-established tradition at other universities), I scrapped the lesson plans in my three newswriting sections and invited students from the BSU (at once courageous and frightened) to discuss their experience with the class and a fellow faculty member. Many of my students (most of them white) said they had never had such a conversation and were moved to discuss it with family over break.

Stress the Fundamentals – Though we may wish it weren't so at the college level, the fundamentals of sentence structure, grammar, and punctuation bedevil many students – and their instructors. I address this by intervening early and often, diagnosing for my students their most common mistakes (we all have a list) and providing references to help. I take care to identify mistakes and provide thorough feedback in conferences, and in writing, to my students on key early papers. For students with chronic problems, I make a deal: If they work hard and visit the Writing Center to work on their specific challenges, I will spend as much time as needed in office hours going over their work. We work on writing straight forwardly and in active voice, with clear subjects and verbs. It's not easy, but most everyone pulls through.

Employ the Writer's Palate – In my first-year writing classes, I draw upon a handy collection of elements essential to telling good story: a hook, characters, description, dialogue, scenes, context, metaphor, cadence, and mood. We arrange and rearrange these elements in class and conferences into a cohesive narrative arc. I ask students to “show” us, not “tell” us, their stories. I remind them that “less is more”. And I pester them, constantly, to proofread. I have a growing a



When traveling with family, I keep a family photo and story blog and write books. I encourage my students to write not only for work but fun as well.

library of beautiful student essays – about adventures in faraway lands, family tragedies, and hard life lessons learned – that demonstrate these concepts in good form.

Community Engagement and Outreach

Finally, I believe that being an active member of my campus and community is also an important part of being a teacher. Here are some examples of the collaborations I've established:

- ✓ **Graduate and Faculty Writing Instruction** – As noted briefly above, I have been proud to help faculty in the Rutgers School of Social Work with their writing this semester. And I continue to work with graduate students at UNH as part of the annual week-long Writers Boot Camp, sharing advice on writing, research design, and navigating committee politics.
- ✓ **NH Suicide Prevention Council** – Over the last nine years at UNH, I collaborated with members of the NH Suicide Prevention Council – advising them on their work with local news media around the coverage of suicide as a public health problem. And each semester a team of NHSPC leaders came to my classes to discuss their work and best practices around suicide prevention and awareness.
- ✓ **Local Governance** – As a Town Councilor in Durham, I participated in many discussions at Thompson Hall and Town Hall: about the development of the shared downtown, the handling of “celebratory” riots, and the accessibility of town elections to UNH students. Most importantly, I fought for sound policy on our shared public drinking water system (including an emergency drought ordinance) to make sure that everyone, students and town residents, had an adequate and safe water supply.
- ✓ **Grant Reviewing** – I served as a grant reviewer for UNH’s Coastal Research Response Center, evaluating proposals to research the communication of risk to the public in wake of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.
- ✓ **Guest Speaking** – Whether speaking as a former news reporter, writer, environmental researcher, or parent in a multi-cultural family, I have taken on many opportunities to share my knowledge and experiences with audiences on and off campus and abroad.



I have enjoyed sharing my research on climate change policy, including a talk in South Korea, at Seoul's Kyonggi University.

Settling into our new life in New Jersey, I see so many opportunities to share my experiences and to keep learning and growing. Rutgers is a welcoming and vibrant university, and I am eager engage more fully with the community in the exciting semesters ahead!