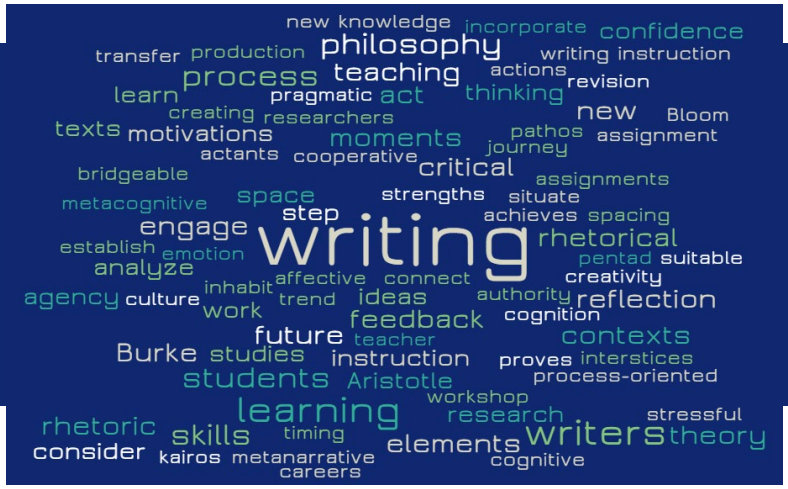

Philosophy of Teaching Writing

By Matthew Bodie

By way of introduction to the subject, I wish to be clear that the act of writing, simply put, is complex. It is inescapable from requiring its agents and actants to inhabit—and sometimes suspend within the interstices of—the cognitive, social, and affective domains; it can be equally inspiring and enervating—and often both simultaneously. As such, no single theory, trend, or exercise is particularly solutional in writing instruction; rather, I have borrowed widely from my many years of studies and experience, as both a learner and teacher of the subject, to form the short philosophy seen here today. Saving the goal of being comprehensive or significantly researched for a piece that is more publishable, this text provides broad brushstrokes of key characteristics of my teaching and theory concerning writing and includes a few references to aid in situating my ideas and actions in the classroom.

Writing Is Generative

Writing is about generating new knowledge, and such production relies heavily on invention, a word derived from the Latin, *invenire*, meaning “to find” (Invention, 2015). As such, writing not only includes the act of coming up with ideas—coupling cognition with creativity—but also operates as an act of discovery (Hairston, 1982), a heuristic for writers to uncover personal and collective identities, beliefs, and motivations. Writing can remove old prejudices and lead to new places. It is, at once, a tool for exploration and a pathway to discovery.

To create generative moments in the classroom, I encourage textual and visual tactics for brainstorming; teach exploratory, inquiry-based research; incorporate critical thinking concepts; engage in cooperative learning exercises; and assign multimodal projects. Ensuring that students learn that better thinking makes better writing—and vice versa—is fundamental to my instruction and, likewise, develops and hones their skills needed to generate new knowledge and make new meanings.

Writing Is Rhetorical

While it has earned equivocal status due to its association with passive politics, rhetoric offers a rich history from which writers can learn to situate and assess the impact of their work. Chief elements from Aristotle's *Rhetoric* include *logos* or reason*, ethos* or credibility*,* and *pathos* or emotion (Kennedy, 1991). In addition to these elements, Kinneavy (1994) reinvigorated study of another ancient Greek ideal: *kairos* or right timing and due measure. Moreover, expanding on Aristotle and other classical rhetoricians, Burke devised a pentad comprised of act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose for discovering motivations (Burke, 1945/1969), and he adopted a theory of identification for rhetoric, which aims to bridge the natural division between one another through effective communication (Burke, 1950/1969). Altogether, teaching an understanding of these rhetorical terms allows writers to consider and analyze purpose, context, and audience in creating content, so that, as Aristotle proposed, it achieves the most available means of persuasion.

To create rhetorical moments in the classroom, I encourage critique of literary and cultural texts and mediated communication, taking into account multiple dimensions of the artifact's ability to define its purpose, demonstrate authority, establish agency, and connect with different audiences across various contexts. Likewise, I ask writers to analyze their own creations for these types of elements, so they, in turn, can engage in logical, credible, bridgeable, suitable, and purposeful discourse within future coursework and careers.

Writing Is Process Oriented

From prewriting and drafting to feedback, revision, and reflection, several processes are critical to writing. As far back as the late 19th century, psychological studies have shown the importance that spacing has on memory and learning (Ebbinghaus, 1885/1964). For this reason, teaching writing as a process—and allowing space to practice each step along the way—helps students become better researchers and writers (Elbow, 1981; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Kent, 1999). What is more, providing frequent feedback, from both instructor and peers, proves critical to learning, particularly in a culture where immediacy is expected (Bloom, 1968; Frey & Fisher, 2013). Finally, reflection builds a metanarrative for writers to see their strengths and weaknesses and transfer skills and learning to future curricula and contexts (Yancey, Robertson, & Taczak, 2014).

To create moments for process learning in the classroom, I distribute longer writing assignments over the course of a few weeks, requiring due dates that give space for both composition and feedback, so that work toward mastery of each step along the way can be accomplished. I also transform the physical classroom into a workshop setting, so I can conference with them on their progress; they can engage in peer reviews and discussions of their texts; and ultimately, they can move forward with greater confidence in their writing. Additionally, I often require reflection pieces when the assignment is complete, in order that students can take note of what they learned through the writing process, consider what they would do differently in the future, and gain the metacognitive skills to investigate and improve writing on their own.

Overall, my philosophy on writing instruction aims to be pragmatic when put into action. It provides essential functions of the craft, introduces writing within a variety of contexts, and delivers just-in-time encouragement and support to build skills and confidence. When applied, this philosophy aims to be instructive, constructive, interactive, and transformative. While writing may be messy, iterative, and stressful, I aim to bring a philosophy of hope to students who join me on this journey of learning.

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