

## Anne O'Meara – Notes on Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Statements of Teaching Philosophy are often part of a teaching portfolio, a collection of information sometimes used by teaching applicants to demonstrate their teaching effectiveness and also used by teachers already in positions for purposes of achieving tenure and promotion. In either case, the statement serves as an introduction to the portfolio, which may also include such items as a list of courses, workshops, and other educational activities undertaken to improve teaching, a list of courses taught, sample syllabi, sample assignments and class handouts, graded papers in response to the assignments together with the instructor's reflection on them and the assignment, student course evaluations and the instructor's written reflection on them, and so on. If a prospective employer asks for teaching portfolio, this may be what is intended; it is not yet universally required.

Many employers, however, may ask for the statement of teaching philosophy in writing or at interviews; others may ask prospective teachers to answer specific essay questions as part of the application process.

What I'd be looking for if I were hiring at a community college:

- Evidence of teaching experience
- Evidence of coursework and other preparation for teaching writing and literature
- Evidence that the applicant could handle a full teaching load (four or five classes, generally, with 25-30 students of varying abilities, some of them ESL, some of them "basic" writers)
- Congruence of teaching philosophy and the teaching situation at that college
- Evidence of ability to analyze a teaching situation and address observed problems thoughtfully (i.e., adaptability and teaching with one's eyes open)

Suggested Writerly Tactics for the Statement:

- Make it brief (2-3 pages), absolutely error-free, and accurate, precise, and concrete as you can make it (alternative generalities and specifics – both necessary).
- Get feedback from a variety of real readers, and revise.
- Make it clear that your philosophy is evolving and (if this is true) that it grows out of your experience teaching the students you have so far encountered. You are not expected to have the final word. Your readers are well aware of the problems that never are solved in composition teaching and are probably more interested in how you think about them than in your current solution. From time to time, picture a real teacher reading your statement.
- Mention your predominant teaching methods in relation to your philosophy, demonstrating how your practice is grounded.
- Mention changes in response to problem encountered.
- Mention current desirables to the extent that they figure in your teaching: computer-assisted instruction, collaborative learning, critical thinking and reading, assessment of your teaching, diversity (in students, in course readings, in alternative styles), "basic" concerns (conventions of standard written English). Be prepared to talk about those you don't mention.
- Pay attention to the voice that comes across (and make sure one does).