Job-Search Portfolio
Philosophy of Teaching
Peggy O’Neill

My approach to teaching writing has been influenced by a number of different experiences: my experience as a student, teaching English in public schools, teaching college writing, swapping stories with veteran teachers, and my experiences as a writer. More recently, working with colleagues to prepare new teachers has been one of the most influential experiences that I have had in developing my philosophy of teaching writing. Preparing new instructors to develop their own course syllabi, assignments, and classroom approaches has made me reflect and articulate my own beliefs and assumptions about language and writing and how that plays out in my classroom practice.

First and foremost, I see my students as sophisticated language users who have something to communicate. My job as a writing teacher is to help them communicate that through writing. One of my goals is for students to see themselves in this way, as writers who have something worth saying. We focus on being a writer—reading, writing and talking about texts. I emphasize the rhetorical aspect of texts—topic, audience, purpose, and context—as guiding principles. I want students to develop as writers who have a sense of authority and control over their writing, so I emphasize reflection and self-assessment as critical parts of the writing process. In class we do meta-writing, such as self-assessments of a draft in progress and an introductory letter for the portfolio, which gets students to examine and make explicit their thinking processes. I use a portfolio system to evaluate the students’ writing because it fosters the writer role and encourages reflection and self-assessment through collection, selection, and self-evaluation.

I also believe that students need to be engaged and involved in what they are doing to develop as writers. If writers have something to say that is important to them, they will be open to learning how to communicate that effectively. Writing only to fulfill an assignment is much less likely to produce the engagement necessary for real learning. Building in choices and safe spaces, through my portfolio pedagogy that encourages students to generate topics and take risks without fear of penalty, helps me see the students as individuals and to treat them that way. I allow students lots of options in my classes because it allows them to take ownership of the writing and their learning. Each student makes different choices, has different issues, and different needs. My role as the teacher is to provide activities, strategies, and resources to meet these needs.