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Teaching Philosophy

Since becoming an English language instructor nearly 20 years ago, my teaching style and my materials have evolved, but my core philosophy has stayed the same: Students carry a world of knowledge and experience, and my role in the classroom is to provide direct instruction and opportunities for practice, to engage students in complex applications of the language and skills, and to help them transfer their skills autonomously so they can share their ideas in English and meet the high standards of a university classroom. My motto in my English language class is "your head is full of information; I want to help you be able to talk and write about it with ease in English."

I carry out this role in the classroom by giving the students a variety of tools to help them organize and develop their ideas. The tools and instruction depend on the class. In Listening Speaking (LS) classes, where formal academic speaking is one of the course goals, we work on more structured speaking, like presentations. I provide students with tools such as outlines, sentence stems, and grammar exercises, but the key is always the students' knowledge, especially at lower levels. I assign topics that students can easily speak about in their L1s, such as an event in their lives that taught them a life lesson (LS30: intermediate), a comparison of two familiar yet challenging topics (LS40: high-intermediate), or the connections between their future majors, their home countries, and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (LS60: advanced). They start in a place they know and together we add structural, syntactical, and lexical complexity.

The same is true in Reading Writing (RW) classes. Students choose topics that they know and can write about without research in their L1s. In RW40, a high-intermediate level, the students choose a problem that they are familiar with, explain the problem by explaining its causes and effects, and propose some possible solutions. Recently, one student described gentrification for the benefit of tourists in her coastal town in Colombia, another wrote about wage theft that she and her friends experienced in South Korea, and yet another wrote about nepotism in the Saudi Arabian job market. We start with handwritten drafts so they can avoid the temptation of using machine translation or chatbots and instead rely on their knowledge and current skills in English. Then we revise through gallery walks, peer reviews, discussions, and individual conferences. By choosing topics that they have experienced themselves, they start a strong foundation of knowledge and examples. Then by discussing it with their peers who don't share their L1s nor their cultures, they gain a deeper understanding of the kind of background information that their audience needs. Even in RW60, an advanced level, where research writing is a learning outcome, students choose a topic that they know well and are passionate about before we even start researching. I provide instructional strategies such as outlines and mentor texts that I have written for the students to analyze. Once the students have had a chance to fully explain their own understanding of the topic, we then discuss ways in which they can add support from outside research. I suggest areas for growth and further tools to help in their growth, but I always return to the strengths in their knowledge, their existing skills set, and their improvements throughout the semester.

When creating courses and my own materials, I use UDL and accessibility standards to keep in mind the needs of learners who come from diverse cultures, languages, learning preferences, and

overall experiences. After taking workshops on Instructional Design, learning differences and accessibility, I have paid more attention to user-centered design. I am now designing for mobile first, since most students are likely to open the LMS or other materials on their cellphones. I add alt text to each of the images I include on Canvas, I add captions to the videos I create for class, such as one on [finding resources using the UF libraries](#), and I am now using *italics* and **bold** on PowerPoints instead of only using red as a contrast, in case I have students with color vision deficiency or color blindness.

In addition, my courses and assessments have built-in flexibility and choice. In my (Un)common Reads courses, which are one-credit courses for the UF Honors Program centered around a book and class discussions, the students create a final group project centered around the book that we read in the semester. The students can choose any medium and any focus. After reading Hank Green's *A Beautifully Foolish Endeavor*, one group created a video using visuals and narration in the style described in the book. Another group created a podcast with characters from the book while yet another group's podcast consisted of professionals discussing the events of the book from an academic lens. Each of the groups met the expectations set out on the final project rubric, but having the students choose how to meet those expectations lends itself to a wide range of creativity in which the students demonstrate their strengths and their understanding of the text and its themes. This built-in flexibility across my courses also helps students develop their communication and collaboration skills with their peers, 21st century skills that they need in their other courses in institutes of higher learning and as they join the workforce.

I value the process of learning because I believe that learning is fun, especially when students can see how their strengths serve as a foundation for their learning. My instruction and my materials are thoughtfully created to show the students that their vast knowledge set is an asset for us to build upon. My role in the classroom is to help learners build their confidence, develop their language proficiency, and tap into a variety of skill sets, so that they can autonomously apply the lessons that we have done together to assignments in other courses and to contexts outside of the classroom. In this way, they continue to be life-long learners in charge of their own learning.

> *"Learning is stronger when it matters, when the abstract is made concrete and personal."*
> *– Peter C Brown, Henry L Roediger III, and Mark A. McDaniel in* Make it Stick