

My Ten Commandments of Teaching
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In summary, my teaching philosophy is to practice *holistic education* and foster *active learning* in a context of *academic excellence*.

I. HOLISTIC EDUCATION

1. **Apply philosophy to everyday life.** I want to recover the classical conception of philosophy as “a way of life” (see the work of Pierre Hadot). On this conception, the purpose of philosophy is to “make sense of one’s life as a whole” (Julia Annas). When Socrates went around asking difficult questions, he was not simply doing conceptual analysis for its own sake – he was trying to learn how to live “the good life”, the life of an objectively flourishing human being. For Socrates philosophy was identical to ethics. I believe it is primarily in this Socratic pursuit that logic, metaphysics, and epistemology are important – with the caveat that pursuit of knowledge for its own sake is part of human flourishing. In light of this view of philosophy, it is a core part of my philosophy of teaching that *I try to apply abstract metaphysics and epistemology to practical issues in ethics and the meaning of life*.
2. **Connect to students’ personal experience.** In an attempt to show students how philosophy is relevant to their lives, *I use movies and popular music in my courses*. Today’s students relate to visual media better than written media, but they don’t necessarily know how to engage critically with visual media. By the end of the course, they will have learned how to engage with pop culture more critically and they will have been exposed to movies they might not otherwise have seen (classics, art films, and foreign films).
3. **Bring philosophy into dialogue with other disciplines.** I take philosophy to be a second-order discipline which helps us examine the foundations of the other disciplines. Hence I see philosophy as inherently interdisciplinary. It is impossible to examine the foundations of science, society, cinema (for example), if you don’t know anything about physics, families, or film. Therefore, *in my courses I try to assign and discuss reading in areas (such as, for example, literature and literary criticism, sociology, history, political science, theology, etc.) which fall outside of philosophy as typically conceived*.

II. ACTIVE LEARNING

4. **Require synthesis and application from students.** In my assignments, I try to provide opportunity for *students to construct their own synthesis of the course material and to apply it to their own previous knowledge and experience*.
5. **Make the course syllabus interactive.** In order to give students a feeling of ownership in their education and to allow them to focus on their own interests, *I try to give students a choice between several assignment options*.

6. **Model good philosophical techniques.** In my lectures, I not only summarize the important arguments in the texts, *I read aloud specific passages in order to model philosophical reading techniques*, showing students what sort of questions they should be asking about a text, how to raise objections and how to charitably defend a text against objections.
7. **Encourage discussion.** I encourage questions, comments, and objections, often pausing in the middle of my lecture for class response. One effective strategy I have found is to *ask questions and call upon individual students to answer them, rather than waiting for volunteers*. This way I can get everyone involved in the discussion, not just the out-going students. I have found that as a result of this methodology, by the end of the course many more students are volunteering questions and comments.
8. **Learn through writing.** As important as I know discussion is to learning philosophy, I think philosophy is learned first through writing. It is only after one has done the hard work of thinking involved in writing that one is prepared to engage in discussion. Therefore, *I always assign a term paper (often more than one) and I also try to give several short writing assignments*.

III. ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

9. **Do not sacrifice rigorous scholarship.** The attempt to make philosophy relevant to everyday lives, especially when using popular culture and everyday language, can easily lead to diminished academic standards. Yet *I think it is important to maintain high standards of scholarly rigor*. I have found that, with proper encouragement and expectations from instructors, students are capable of more than they realize.
10. **Read primary literature.** I have a strong commitment to assigning primary literature, rather than introductory texts which summarize and comment on the primary literature. Often the history of philosophy is taught by isolating particular arguments and evaluating them as if they had been written three days ago instead of three centuries ago. I believe this leads to a distortion of the actual views in question. In contrast to this methodology, *I try to emphasize the variety of ways philosophy has been done throughout history*. I realize that primary literature in philosophy can be very difficult, but I believe that one major purpose of general education courses such as introduction to philosophy is to stretch students, forcing them to become better readers. My goal is that, by the end of the course, students are able to understand more of the reading than they did at first. Moreover I hope that, even if they are not philosophy majors, my students are able fruitfully return to classic philosophical texts later in life.