

When I began my teaching career, I was neither sure of my abilities nor convinced of my suitability for the profession. However, I discovered I loved three particular facets of teaching: teaching as performance, teaching as coaching, and teaching as sharing my own enthusiasm for intellectual exploration with students who each bring their own strengths and challenges to the encounter. By performance, I mean something akin to the group effort required to produce a play. Because I enjoy teaching as performance, I make every effort to prepare lesson plans and syllabi that are intellectually exciting. I encourage students to actively engage in the classroom environment, sometimes performing roles they have chosen for themselves, sometimes roles I have assigned to them for the purpose of moving them outside their comfort zone to help them gain new perspectives.

For teaching online, I have developed a style that animates my virtual presence enough so that students feel they “know” me. My performance of self in the online classroom is one that exudes warmth and concern, passion for the subject matter, and openness to questions and requests for assistance. Similarly, because I think of teaching as coaching, many of my classroom activities (both actual and virtual) are designed to help students find their own talents and interests and to build upon them on the way to developing confidence in their writing. The concept of teaching as coaching also grounds my use of individual conferences for writing assignment drafts and the use of extensive and detailed commentary on student work. Like many other teachers, I delight in learning and share the joy of discovery with my students. I cooperate with my students in the production of knowledge by keeping my own skills sharp and by staying abreast of relevant developments in pedagogy and in my subject areas, including readings in critical appraisals of the appropriate use of technology.

My approach to teaching creative writing in general, and poetry in particular, is grounded in my experience teaching workshops for students from elementary school age to senior citizens, and for at-risk populations such as students in reservation schools. I believe that to be a good writer, you must be a good reader; therefore, I prefer teaching creative writing courses that make room for reading craft and aesthetics essays, and most importantly, for reading in the genre. It has been my experience that creative writing students are often not aware of the aesthetic legacy, stylistic history, critical controversies, or current state of their craft. I prefer to design courses which develop writers who compose from an informed understanding of their genre. Finally, I believe that writers have ethical responsibilities to themselves, their communities, and the world. Therefore, readings for my creative writing courses include poems, stories, and essays that struggle with ethical dilemmas and work for social justice. I encourage my students to consider composing artistically excellent works that engage with contemporary issues as part of their writing practice.