

Teaching Philosophy for Suzanne M. Gut

I do not like change; I like progress. Communication, especially technical writing, should not be a product of words dumped onto a page to reach a word limit or empty an inbox, nor should modifications be made solely based on another's editing or recommendations. That is simply change. Instead, writing should be a progression of well-thought-out meaningful wording combined with ethical and audience-focused ideas that embrace the human element of communication. I teach my students to analyze each situation, incorporate theory and scholarship, and employ soft skills to advance a goal or address a need.

In my years of teaching writing and grammar to international and domestic students, my greatest challenge has been to help students find a balance of hard and soft skills in their communication activities. Many of my students believe if their grammar is perfect, their writing will be, too, and focus on that (or dread focusing on it), or they fail to make connections to their field of study. While educators should devote time to strengthening measurable skills~ vocabulary, grammar, syntax, an equal amount of time and effort must be spent finessing the human element of communication~ tone, approachability, and accessibility. My responsibility as an educator is to help students find and maintain this balance and expose them to opportunities where they can best use their language tools to better express themselves and think critically. In my writing classes, we spend a great deal of time on word choice, audience expectations, and appropriate genre conventions, and soft skills.

To hone these skills and encourage them to push their boundaries, students should be in a diverse learning atmosphere that enables them to explore new options while respecting others' learning. Therefore, I strive to have a balance of traditional teaching methods (lecture, testing, reports) and newer, innovative teaching methods (experiential and collaborative learning, simulations, multimodal assessment). I aim to increase access and participation through engagement in an experience, rather than explicit instruction. In my experience, these methods do not simply offer students different ways to learn but teach them to approach new ideas and situations with an open mind and readies them for a diverse, technology-saturated workplace.

In my technical writing courses, student teams participate in experiential learning by selecting a locally-owned, small business, analyzing its communication, working with owners, writing an effective, research-based analytical report, and presenting their findings and recommendations. The students and I have seen particular success with this project in that students often see immediate results of their communication efforts as many of the business owners implement the teams' ideas and/or hire team members for internships or full-time positions after the project's completion. Students' work involves technological influences on business decisions and has led to my current research interests involving technology and its role in communication amongst generations. Most recently I have been researching effects of digital humanities and multimodalities in scholarship and teaching in addition to discourse analysis on language and strategy use in email negotiation. This research has bolstered student discussions and shaped assignments on audience, rhetoric, and ethical processes.

To be competent communicators in any field or situation, students must possess and understand a myriad of tools. As a technical writing instructor, my ultimate goal is to empower students to use those tools and thoughtfully choose appropriate genres and rhetoric to *progress* and produce good, effective communication, not communication that is "good enough."