

Teaching philosophy

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I have never subscribed to the philosophy espoused in the oft-used T-shirt quip - “Those who can, do. Those who can’t, teach.”

But I have most certainly adopted Aristotle’s original take - **“Those who know, do. Those who understand, teach.”**

Knowing facts, knowing how to do something, and knowing processes, formulas and definitions are important levels of mastery along the learning curve.

THOSE WHO KNOW,
DO.
THOSE THAT UNDERSTAND,
TEACH.
Aristotle

But understanding *why* a fact is important in the larger context, understanding the implications of processes, understanding the derivations of formulas, understanding the best ways to show a learner a better method - and doing it to the point of being able to explain it - is the ultimate form of mastery.

It is the ultimate because it keeps the learning alive. It passes knowledge to others who can make new discoveries, extend new boundaries, develop their craft beyond even that of those who showed them the way.

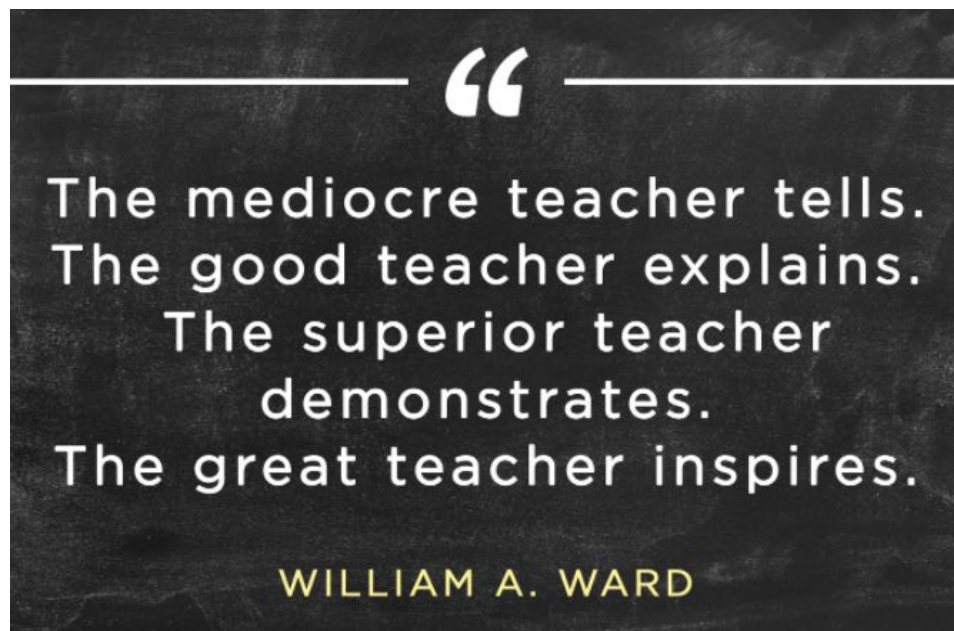
As a communication professor, I have taught everything from basic journalistic writing to advanced PR campaigns to broadcast journalism to media law and ethics - and no matter the course, I always tell students three things:

- “Loving to write” doesn’t make you a good writer ... yet.
- Good writing is the basis for all good communication - whether it is spoken, published, filmed ... or even texted.
- Before you can be a good writer/speaker/reporter/producer, you must be a good critical thinker.

In a Department of Communication like that at CofC, students often come to my “Message Design and Influence” course with a general interest in the field - and usually a penchant for writing - but have little experience with the type of writing and communicating they will actually be doing on the job.

My goal is to introduce them to the most common types of media writing/communication they will encounter and steer them on the right path toward doing it well. Undoubtedly this is uncomfortable for them as most have become adept at writing five-paragraph essays or 10-page research papers in which the ideas are developed and explained over thousands of words.

And when students are told to write informative yet interesting and succinct pieces, the sudden change in writing priorities is often met with much resistance. But I thrive on this resistance. Because now I have something new to teach and can show a different perspective on thinking about and communicating information.

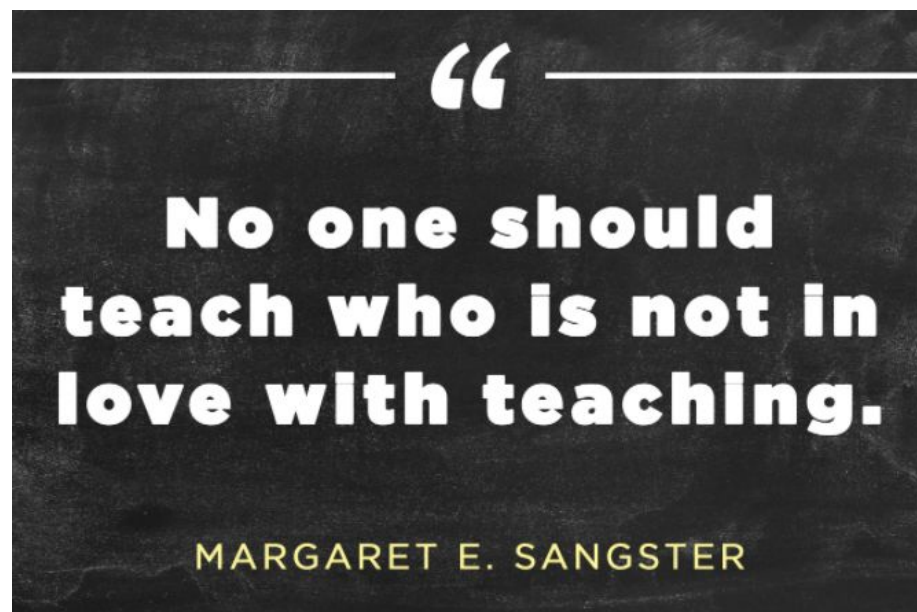


Invariably, most eventually recognize the benefit of thinking through the questions of their audience and writing to answer the most important ones first. If I can get them to realize this is actually how they prefer to receive messages, there is usually an epiphany that translates into great improvement in their own writing.

Though few students will “master” both this journalistic thinking/writing technique as well as a comfort level with doing it, mastery is never my goal. Instead I consider my teaching a success if I convince students of the benefits to this approach - in thinking about information and presenting it in a concise, informative and interesting way - and then convincing them that it takes doing it over and over and over to be good at it.

With any course I teach, there is always a practical component in which students must create/publish/present professional work in addition to class assignments. I have a blog site for student work as well as class social media networks that they must contribute to and manage throughout the semester. Students must also create a social media campaign for a cause/organization of their choice and implement it. When it comes to communication, the “theory” of it only goes so far. Practicing it, doing it, dealing with the public reaction to it are all major contributors to becoming better communicators. We learn by doing, and I insist on considerable “doing,” no matter the course.

One of the main reasons I like to stay involved as a writer/editor is that while it inevitably provides great examples in class to show students the thinking/writing process on various stories, it gives me a great platform for emphasizing that writing is a continual improvement



process. Every writer needs an editor, no matter his/her level of experience. I use my own stories and rewrites and suggested edits to prove that “mastery” is more about constant improvement on the way to excellence rather than a finite pinnacle of accomplishment.

I consider my philosophy of teaching

an extension of my philosophy on learning - everyone is capable of excellence, but all of us generally need to be motivated by the passion and expertise of a teacher.

And that teacher must also be passionate if students are going to be inspired to pursue such excellence. I am not only passionate about communication and its crucial role in our current culture, but I am also passionate about inspiring students to recognize that role so they will be driven toward improving their world through good writing.

That may seem far too idealistic and quixotic for our cynical society, but I believe empowering students to see beyond that cynicism and to recognize the power to communicate well are some of the most important things we can teach them while in college.