Writing a Philosophy Paper
Primer for Reading/Writing, English Education Master's Programs

Your philosophy is an attempt to characterize your understanding of teaching and learning in a personally meaningful way. It will also reflect your understanding of the major issues and concepts examined in the coursework. The philosophy should describe those aspects of education which are most important to you. Your beliefs about education should be grounded in the professional literature of the field and include citations of that literature (approximately 8) and a reference list, which follows APA 5th edition style, at the end of the paper. This is a narrative document (not lists or bullets).

Following is a guide to helping you develop a philosophy paper.

1. Do not try to do this all in one sitting. A philosophy should be developed over time, revisited, revised, expanded and improved throughout your time in the master’s program.

2. Connect with at least two other people and get together once or twice a semester to exchange and discuss your philosophy papers. Help each other clarify, expand upon, and proofread.

3. A good way to begin is to list 5* aspects of literacy teaching and learning that are important to you, not because they are in the curriculum, but because they are essential for student learning. These may be specifics such as small group instruction, or more general such as the importance of using assessment to inform instruction.

4. Your philosophy may include beliefs about teaching and learning that are not directly related to literacy, such as working with second language learners or including multiculturalism in your curriculum. We encourage you to think outside of a strict literacy perspective, however, it should be clear from reading the whole document that you have completed a master’s in literacy education.

5. Once you have your set of beliefs, write a statement such as, “I feel that ___ is essential because...” and finish the statement by writing a paragraph about why you feel this is important to you and to your students’ learning.
6. Take these paragraphs and find the professional literature to back up your beliefs. You have been reading this literature and it has been influencing your thinking, now you need to put the two together. You need to show in the philosophy that you believe a practice is good for students because theorists and researchers have demonstrated its benefits and you have seen the effect it has on your own students.

7. You can use the professional literature in three ways:
   a. state an idea in your own words and use a simple citation to refer to the literature which discusses this idea: …flexible grouping (Taberski, 2000).
   b. state an idea and use a short quote to back up your idea: Taberski (2000) says, “… (pg. 32).”
   c. state an idea and use a passage from a piece of literature (4 lines or longer) which is indented. The citation for these passages requires author name, date and page number. Use these passages infrequently, we want to know what you have to say.

8. Once you have your paragraphs and your professional literature citations, go back and rewrite the entire piece putting it into a narrative form which flows logically from one topic to the next. Enhance the narrative with specific examples (one or two per topic) from your own teaching experiences.

9. Subheadings help the reader transition from one topic to the next.

10. As you share your philosophies with your colleagues, ask each other questions which will help to explain and clarify the ideas. Help each other use language which reflects your own voices, make sure the ideas are grounded in professional theory and research. Also, be severe with each other about grammar and punctuation, this is an academic document from an educator, it should be well written.

* Five is an arbitrary number of beliefs. You may end up with more or less, this is an individual decision.