

Statement on Teaching Philosophy

Teaching is a distinct passion of mine and an endeavor I find equally fulfilling to creative pursuits. Each and every experience I've had while teaching at the university level has shaped my methodology, and I am a vastly different and more effective educator than when I first began. Although I intend to grow and refine my pedagogy over the course of my career, I have already developed a robust philosophy that has been well-tested in a variety of classroom and private settings.

I do not consider it my role as a teacher to simply impart knowledge from a place of authority. I have personally found this mode of instruction to be mechanical, one-sided, and remarkably empty. Rather, I endeavor toward an atmosphere of dialogue, prioritizing critical thinking that leads to those all-important questions of "how" and "why." This ideal, I readily admit, is not easily achieved, nor is it maintained without inconsistency across all class sessions. Indeed, the difficulty is often compounded by particular circumstances of a course offering: I know firsthand the unique challenges that accompany teaching a large lecture-hall section of undergraduate theory at 8 a.m. to a bleary-eyed crowd. But if experience has shown me anything, it is that students will rise to the occasion when the instructor expects a certain level of classroom engagement and continually fosters such an environment. I am especially proud of the vigorous discussions I am able to stimulate in seminar settings; I've never felt more effective than when a pointed question regarding an assigned musical work or reading prompts a portion of the class to lock horns in debate.

I have also come to understand that not all students receive and process information in the same way, much less at the same pace. Accordingly, my teaching style seeks to engage students on multiple fronts, incorporating handouts (printed and digital), projected visuals (which run the gamut from annotated score excerpts to custom-made memes), frequent listening examples, technology-driven demonstrations using spectral analyzers and Max/MSP, jokes (hit-or-miss), and group singing. Whenever possible, I provide students with more than one viable way to approach a difficult concept. In one lesson on augmented sixth chords, for example, I walked my class step-by-step through several different but equally valid procedures for building and resolving these harmonies. I then enlisted several students to complete exercises at the board, each using one of the several methods covered and allowing classmates to assist. As always, I insisted that those students suggesting a "next step" explain their thought process to the rest of the class. This laboratory-type environment not only promoted critical inquiry but served as a reminder that music is something we actively *do*, a reality I continually emphasize in all courses.

In my role as instructor of private composition lessons, I do not teach from my own compositional aesthetic, nor do I privilege particular "schools" or artistic creeds. Instead, I strive to serve as a faithful mirror of artistic self-reflection, providing an informed and insightful perspective intended to guide each student toward an increasingly more satisfactory realization of his or her compositional aims. When a student begins a new piece, we typically spend an entire lesson in dialogue so that I may determine his or her intent. Once the student confirms that I accurately grasp the fundamental nature of the piece, I am able to base subsequent comments entirely around whether or not I perceive his or her compositional decisions as effectively serving stated intentions. When I suspect that a particular moment or facet of the piece requires a different approach, I pose probing questions, compelling the student to evaluate the issue at hand and either convincingly defend his or her decision or instead articulate a perceived problem we can then seek to solve together. Likewise, I frequently highlight compositional choices I view as particularly fruitful. I strive to get students *truly excited* about their own ideas, pointing out intriguing possibilities inherent in what is already written. These possibilities the student may then further explore or reject entirely. I feel an imperative to create a space for students to freely experiment with unfamiliar techniques and ideas, much like my former teachers did for me. And when a pupil finds him or herself at an apparent impasse, I suggest workflow modifications: the adoption of limitations, the arbitrary imposition of a process or method, or the breaking of such strictures toward a more improvisatory process. I am especially proud of my results with one student who has never been satisfied with his working method nor level of productivity. I enforced a handful of limitations on his chosen project and required that he experiment with a few alternative methods for sketching materials. In our final meeting that semester, the student told me that he was more pleased with his progress (as well as the resulting music) than ever before.