

Teaching Philosophy

Judgment Rather Than Compliance

I teach writing as a process of making consequential rhetorical decisions. Students do not become stronger writers simply by following directions, eliminating errors, or reproducing forms that look academic. They develop when they understand how purpose, audience, genre, evidence, language, and medium interact—and when they can explain why they made one choice rather than another. My teaching therefore emphasizes judgment rather than compliance.

This principle begins with scaffolded course design. Large writing projects can conceal the intellectual work required to complete them, particularly for students who have not previously been taught how writers develop questions, test possibilities, locate evidence, revise structures, or respond to uncertainty. I divide major assignments into visible stages that ask students to perform different kinds of rhetorical work. A proposal may require students to define a problem and audience. A conflict map may help them identify competing motives and perspectives. A source evaluation asks them to distinguish authority, relevance, context, and usefulness. Reflection then asks students to name what changed, why it changed, and what they may carry into another writing situation.

Scaffolding is not merely a sequence of smaller due dates. Each checkpoint should represent a meaningful intellectual decision. In my composition courses, creative and analytical work often reinforce one another. Students may construct characters, worlds, conflicts, or public artifacts before examining how their choices produce particular effects. Creative work can make rhetorical concepts tangible, while analysis gives students language for understanding what they have created. This approach opens additional pathways into audience awareness, research, argument, interpretation, and revision.

My courses also treat accessibility and transparency as pedagogical responsibilities. Students should not need to infer the hidden rules by which their work will be judged. I aim to make expectations, assignment purposes, evaluation criteria, and pathways for revision explicit without pretending that good writing can be reduced to a universal formula. Transparent instruction is especially important for multilingual, first-generation, disabled, and returning students who may encounter academic expectations that institutions often leave unstated.

Generative AI has made the relationship between transparency and judgment even more urgent. I do not treat AI use as a simple choice between unrestricted adoption and absolute prohibition. Instead, I distinguish among possible roles such as brainstorming, coaching, option generation, editing, revision, and ghostwriting. Students need opportunities to examine what intellectual work a system is performing, what decisions remain theirs, and what should be documented or attributed. An AI policy should teach students how to reason about technology rather than merely warn them that they may be punished for using it.

My developing Rhetorically Governed Co-Authoring (RGC) framework translates this position into three phases: Anchor, Field, and Filter. Students first anchor a writing task by identifying its rhetorical situation, criteria, boundaries, and purpose. They may then use AI within a bounded role to generate multiple options or perspectives. Finally, they filter those options through comparison, selection, rejection, revision, attribution, and reflection. The aim is not to certify AI-generated prose as good or bad. It is to preserve the writer's responsibility for judgment.

Feedback in my courses similarly prioritizes decisions and revision over correction alone. I want students to understand what their writing is currently doing, where readers may experience uncertainty, and which possibilities are available for revision. Effective feedback should not replace the writer's problem-solving process. It should help the writer see that process more clearly.

Ultimately, I want students to leave my courses with more than a collection of completed assignments. I want them to recognize writing situations, formulate questions, evaluate options, make defensible choices, and adapt what they have learned to unfamiliar contexts. Writing instruction is successful not when students become compliant producers of academic prose, but when they become more deliberate, reflective, and responsible participants in the rhetorical situations they will encounter beyond the course.