

Statement of Teaching Philosophy George Guthridge, Ph.D.

My classes are models of content and cognition diversity: I stress interdisciplinary content and meld Western culture's sequential, syllogistic thinking with the nonlinear, holistic thinking of various non-Western cultures. The result strengthens analytical abilities by giving students additional cognitions they can consciously access. The process fits today's global economy, produces superior critical thinking skills, and stresses that creative and critical thinking should identify and analyze problems rather than rush into solutions. It enables students to identify and objectively assess the variables involved in raw experience and to determine how best to transform those variables into written discourse that most effectively meets audience needs and expectations.



My teaching is based on minimizing the exclusionary notion that writing requires innate ability. My pedagogy thus is designed to give *all* students marketable writing skills and equal access to inculcating creative/critical thinking. I stress a supple structure in pedagogy and in what I want students primarily to gain throughout the instruction: I use the enthymeme, which Aristotle called the heart of communication, to teach that the ability to be precise is the common denominator among all successful people regardless of endeavor, that *subject* is the most important element of discourse, and that writing should be pathos-driven rather than ethos-driven.

I first engage students by having them compete in small groups to identify problems in hypothetical interdisciplinary situations inside and outside various cultures and subcultures. The situations include business, science, social science, and humanities considerations. Unlike others' similar instruction, which usually is open-ended, for me the process has a precise goal: to identify and isolate problems, or variables, the situations involve, an emphasis I learned from my years living with Eskimos. They are trained from infancy to think before acting; willy-nilly creativity can mean death. I feel it essential that students inculcate such thinking. In today's world, we must train them to ameliorate potential mistakes. We are *all* on thin ice.

Each student selects two of the situation's variables he or she feels will impress readers who lead hectic lives. That audience usually is academicians but sometimes is customers or clients in hypothetical enterprises. Rather than wrestle with a nebulous notion of *focus*, students determine the two variables' relationship and state it as a binary assertion, or Communications Barbell. They analyze each variable according to its being New (what is likely to be new *and* interesting to the audience) or Old (what the audience probably knows *or* probably would not find interesting). If both variables are Old, the subject is usually best discarded or remolded. If at least one variable (or their interdependence) is New, the subject probably is worth pursuing. The process, which results in a powerful, precise tool that takes the guesswork out of subject selection while marrying it to task analysis, transfers across assignments and disciplines.

Next, students use a brainstorming and idea-selection process (too detailed to explain here) that enables them to determine a Why Statement – a causation they add to the barbell. The result is an enthymeme, the grandfather of the thesis statement. The enthymeme is unfamiliar to many educators, because Byzantine monks changed Aristotle's manuscript, but it is much more powerful and more objective than its grandchild. I further strengthened the enthymeme by having students analyze its variables independently and then inter-dependently rather than as a tandem, as Aristotle suggested.

Once students develop the enthymeme, they turn the barbell vertically to create the document's structure, with the Old or more general variable expressed first. Because the enthymeme gives a precise summary, students can use it to identify areas and emphases of substantiation, what logic and rhetorical techniques to employ, and what fallacies to identify and avoid. We use that pattern throughout the semester, which moves not through the traditional discourse modes of exposition-description-narration-argumentation, but rather through inquiries and analyses based on structure: nonfiction with narrator, nonfiction without narrator, polite argumentation (i.e., research papers), and emphatic (i.e. traditional) argumentation.