

Teaching Philosophy for M. Griffin

My first experiences with teaching were during my year abroad in Madrid where I taught a class on conversational English to high school students. Because many of the students learned their target language through grammar and written exercises, I had to find interactive ways to teach and get my students to speak English. Learning had to be fun. Several years later, I still believe learning should be enjoyable and I incorporate many of the teaching techniques learned in Spain into my college courses. For example, students often learn best through interaction. I encourage interpersonal communication by creating activities that require my students to speak with one another. During listening comprehension exercises, my students have responded well to authentic materials such as clips from television shows and music. Not only are these learning techniques fun, they keep students on their toes, and they help create a sense of community among the class participants.

Fun does not necessarily mean easy. My goal in the classroom is for students to gain real understanding of complex material, which can be challenging for many of them. Throughout my own schooling, I have had the most respect and admiration for instructors that pushed me. Moreover, I remember the material that required more effort on my part to understand and truly acquire. For this reason, I test my students in ways that require more than memorization. The assessments I create incorporate at least three of the four basic language skills. In addition, I utilize real-world texts in the reading portion and audio snippets from podcasts or online newcasts on the listening section of my exams in order to further expose students to authentic language usage.

Finally, I believe learning should be practical. While I would hope that each of my students would continue studying Spanish after my course, I understand that many of them will not do so. Therefore, in addition to the language, I teach about Hispanic culture. In my class, not only do we study the structure of the Spanish language but we also discuss social and global topics within the target language. Having conversations within the language of study helps to reinforce grammatical structures and vocabulary because students are able to experiment with the language and make it their own. Language is not only about grammar and reciting but it is also about the culture and society in which we find a language used.

As second-language instructors, we must present our languages in a social context. I always start the semester with an assignment that gets students to think about Spanish. I present misconceptions of the language believed to be factual. For example, many Americans believe that English is the official language of the United States or that English has had a longer presence in the country than Spanish. Nonetheless, when students discover that these long-held beliefs are false, they will start to view Spanish not as a foreign language but as a language that has helped to shape this country and our variety of English.

I feel my passion for teaching, my background in Linguistics and Spanish, and my experience teaching at University of Wisconsin-Madison, Pitt Community College, and East Carolina University have prepared me to be an effective instructor for all levels of Spanish from first-semester Spanish to Spanish Phonetics and Structure of the Spanish Language.