

Teaching is a sacred trust. The educator must possess both great learning and great sensitivity to effectively help students learn the profound lessons that can come with the deep study of peoples, places and time periods very different from our own. In addition, the wide range of student abilities and backgrounds requires the educator be flexible and place the primary focus upon student goals. Having taught language, literature and history courses on three different continents, undergraduates to adult learners, each group of students has brought a distinctive range of experiences and posed unique challenges. Whether it's a basic introduction, a general course or an advanced seminar, in my teaching I employ three main techniques to foster independent research and promote critical thinking.

First, to help bring remote events, people and places to life and develop research skills, I encourage my students to make full use of both cutting-edge digital technologies and *prima facie* archaeological and historical materials. Database-centered lexicography, digital texts and digital images, music and film and the liberal application of classical historiography, philology, archaeology, botany and astronomy have all played significant roles in our evaluations of source materials. When we use a range of resources in concert to unpack the layers of meaning and nuance in particularly difficult material (ancient excavated manuscripts, for example, or oblique references to long-forgotten people, places and events), as we unwind the textual spaghetti strand by strand, students learn to find order and clarity even in works which seem inscrutable at first glance. Prime examples of the use of cutting-edge technology include a student who I helped find online databases of Pravda and other Russian periodicals she used to compare with official Chinese reports on 20th-century Chinese-Soviet relations. Another exemplary student uncovered a wealth of newly-digitized classical texts, Chinese schematics and digital imagery related to East Asian shipbuilding to support his work on the development of Chinese technology.

Second, I emphasize training in argument-based writing. Students are assigned a series of low-stakes writing tasks designed to help flesh out preliminary ideas and arguments and to support in-class discussions. These help me both gain valuable feedback about student interests and assess individual writing and critical thinking skills. For advanced students, these short assignments are designed to help build the foundations for larger research projects. As instructor, my goal is to teach students how to support original arguments with in-depth research and traditional hermeneutics. Combining persuasive writing with cultural and temporal sensitivity, we seek to produce work which is both innovative and well grounded. Topics have included social networking among Chinese netizens, Tang dynasty cross-cultural communication, language and identity in the modern Japanese gay rights movement and close readings of texts informed by modern linguistics and traditional and modern literary critical methodologies.

Third, I push my students to gradually take on more difficult work following their own initiative and interests. For example, in language courses a good deal of memorization is required, but this is most effective when coupled with stimulating cultural and literary content. When a course is closely aligned with student interests, gauged through regular student feedback and evaluations, students gradually feel empowered to help take ownership of the direction of the course. My tactic is to provide the occasional lecture to help establish and support the intellectual foundation for the work, plus regular discussions in small groups and short student-directed research projects. Placing students at the fore and the educator as facilitator creates a relaxed environment and free-flowing pace to the class. We treat the classroom as an open laboratory and encourage student risk-taking by frank and open discussion of our sources (candid evaluations of perceived strengths and weaknesses

in particular), constantly looking to destabilize and reevaluate traditional points of view. I would like to think that it was partly due to my emphasis on self-determination that several of my students subsequently changed their major to East Asian Studies, finding it extremely productive to be able to combine an extensive background in another field with its expressions within East Asian historical and intellectual frameworks.

Finally, to borrow an insight from my parents, both professional educators, one never “finishes” becoming a teacher: it is a process of continuous change, as the instructor, the students and even the source materials (and certainly our understanding of them) are constantly in flux. An effective educator must grow and evolve, constantly reassessing pedagogical methods and tactics, adapting to the demands of the present while maintaining and passing on the golden threads of tradition and history. As I strive to improve my teaching abilities, I continually explore new sources, methods and techniques, gaining new insights and original perspectives and adjusting my tactics to adapt to the unique backgrounds and range of interests each new group of students will bring. I’ve also pursued advanced training in pedagogical techniques from our Center for Teaching and Learning and gained valuable insights and personalized advice on how I can continue to improve as an educator. Underneath it all, I attempt to impart the lessons of my own history, that one should not just mechanistically follow prescribed and prototypical paths; it is often when one combines a relatively unorthodox background with rigorous training within a separate discipline that a broader perspective may be gained, a perspective which can foster innovation and help sustain lasting success.