The following samples are written by winners of the [Graduate Associate Teaching Award(link is external)](http://www.gradsch.osu.edu/graduate-associate-teaching-award.html) at Ohio State, and are examples of various formats you may choose to use.

Glené Mynhardt – Department of Biology

**Philosophy of Teaching Statement**  
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I spent the first thirteen years of my life in South Africa. Growing up in one of the most beautiful and species diverse countries stimulated a natural desire for me to want to study biology. When my family moved to the States, I remember having to make several cultural adjustments. Many were changes on a personal level but becoming familiar with new ways of learning was especially challenging. High school was relatively easy for me but being a college student required much more effort. Despite a strong desire to learn, and a passion for biology, the typical lecture setting at the very populous institutions where I gained most of my educational experiences was not ideal. During my sophomore year in college, I sought something outside of coursework to test whether I was really cut out for biology. I began volunteering as an undergraduate research assistant in an insect systematics laboratory,and began sorting through large jars of insects that were stored in ethanol. The amazing diversity of insects found in one jar was so fascinating that I would spend around eight hours sorting through these samples. My time in the lab allowed me to get involved in field work, learn different sampling techniques, and become familiar with how data were processed. I finally got to *experience* the dynamic, fun nature of science! Learning had become so much more, because science wasn’t just an isolated subject in a textbook – it meant using real processes to study real phenomena.

I have established two primary philosophies as a teacher: to get students to think about science as a process, and to individualize their learning experiences, the former of which I learned as a student myself, and the latter of which became evident as an effective teaching strategy.

Progressing through graduate school allowed me to define learning as a personal process of growth. Being able to ask questions and actually attempt to answer those questions was extremely motivating. The same ideas flowed into my classrooms, where I urge my students to think about very basic questions they have, and to begin questioning all those “facts” in the textbook. It was only after I had begun teaching at The Ohio State University that I became acutely aware of my initial failures as an undergraduate student. I realized the interactive, intellectually stimulating classroom environment was lacking in most of the courses I took. I learned about my own potential, but only after I had already experienced years of education! Because of this, I have made an effort to be not only a mentor, but a teacher in learning, by providing my students with opportunities to learn in ways they are most likely to benefit from. Since the first moments as a teacher, I realized how precious the time was with my students, and how I wished to help them find their love for biology, just as I did, by being involved and invested in more hands-on methods of learning. Just like me, most of my students already know that they like biology, but I want them to begin understanding the *process* of scientific thinking rather than learning definitions without context to real data. In order to achieve this, I continually aim to involve students by using a variety of methods in all of the classes I teach.

Involving and motivating students presents its challenges, but my goal of *individualizing*learning creates an open and comfortable classroom environment where students can feel free to ask questions, make mistakes, and challenge themselves. It is by breaking down the barriers to learning that students can face their own misconceptions. My background as a struggling undergraduate has given me a great measure of sensitivity to each student’s learning process. I firmly believe that students enter the classroom with expectations to learn and advance their knowledge, which I assessed in my own classroom one term by asking two of my 30-student honors labs to write down their personal definition of “learning.” I was not surprised to see that all of them carried the same underlying message, that learning is *the process of gaining new knowledge or perspectives that change the way we think about the world*. In order to keep students motivated, I have found that it becomes imperative to be a creative teacher, by utilizing various active learning methods like group discussions, peer teaching or presentations, and “muddy points” cards, the latter of which allows students to write down what they think they don’t clearly understand. Students rarely admit that they don’t know anything, so using methods that allow them to bring their misconceptions or misunderstandings to light provides an opportunity for me to determine whether my teaching is effective. Another tool that I find equally effective in the classroom is to establish rapport with my students by making it a point to get to know my students, not just by name, but by asking them to think about their personal goals as potential future scientists. I also ask them to rate biology on a scale from one to ten to gauge the level of enthusiasm and perception students have for science. Based on this information, I am able to get to know my students and approach them in different ways to personalize their learning. This is reflected positively in my evaluations, where students always feel that they can approach me, ask questions, or even challenge their own thinking. In addition, several of my previous students loved my biology courses so much that they now teach as undergraduate teaching assistants, and several have pursued graduate school to further explore their interests.

Getting students involved in learning often means being inventive with one’s teaching methods and has encouraged me to use various active learning techniques in the classroom, and presents another way to individualize my students’ learning experiences. Each class session includes the presentation of a basic concept, a real example of why the topic is relevant, and some challenging questions about how the topic applies to students’ lives. If students are learning about the structure and relative location of arteries and veins, I usually ask them why western societies wear wedding bands on the left ring finger. They are amazed to learn that some societies do so because the aorta branches directly to the left arm, which directly connects the left ring finger to the heart. They are able to make connections between structure and function, and make ties between science and culture. I have found that when students are presented with these linkages between science and “real life” they are able to question their personal beliefs in a scientific context. In other words, students are thinking like scientists and are being engaged on a personal level. In the example of the ring finger they are also able to think about anatomy and function as the underlying process, rather than memorizing the end-products of science. My goal is to have students leave the classroom with an attitude of inquiry, something I think is necessary to be a good scientist and a good citizen. Encouraging students to question what they know results in fruitful and revealing classroom discussions and has allowed me to identify common misconceptions. For example, most students know about the process of electron transport within the energy-providing mitochondria in a cell. I ask students to think about bacteria, which do not have mitochondria. How do bacterial cells achieve this process without mitochondria? By deconstructing larger concepts into smaller pieces, students become really successful in understanding how universal or unique biological “facts” are in different systems. Given my background as a struggling undergraduate, the way I teach has made me a more successful teacher, because I finally understand what it means to learn meaningfully.

The personal journey that I have taken as a teacher has extended beyond the classroom, into areas that I never imagined. I have had humbling opportunities to help other TAs with their teaching, which has been remarkably insightful and informative. My roles as a teaching fellow, orientation facilitator for the University Center for the Advancement of Teaching (UCAT), and as graduate UCAT consultant, have brought teaching to the forefront of my graduate career. The same qualities, which are meaningful to me as a teacher – making the classroom *process-driven and individualized* – are echoed in my role as a mentor to other teachers. The classroom is a dynamic space, where each teacher can do the things he or she wishes to do. It is the place where another undergraduate student can struggle, fail, and learn how to excel.  It is the place where I started as a student, the place that could have taught me so much more than what I learned. Years after struggling as that student, I am a teacher, a mentor, and a researcher, but only because I found something meaningful that taught me something about biology and science. That is what I aim to create for my students.