

Teaching Portfolio

JACKSON SIDES

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Teaching Philosophy – Jackson Sides – 2026

My composition teaching approach is one that places conveyance of individuality through language foremost. I come from a background is in the visual arts, and just like in those disciplines, I believe that composition students succeed when they're best able to effectively communicate their ideas through the subject media of the class. This is the success metric. It's what's important to me, and so I'm sure to convey to students that this is what should be important to them: not the structure of their essays, not their capacity for test taking, certainly not the ease with which each of them might fill an academic niche, but the communicability of their ideas. This is where composition, in my view, shares its most similar DNA with visual arts, thus this is where I begin.

Students must be shown that the goals they have in mind for their craft's messaging can and should take precedence over what they've been taught is technically 'proper' or 'correct.' This isn't to say there's no room in composition pedagogy for practice with a traditional skillset. Indeed effective communication through the subject media *does* require a certain amount of craft learning—that's grammar and construction for composition, or draftsmanship for visual art. However, an instructor must reinforce such practice while also maintaining the aforementioned philosophy regarding communication. Students should not be made to confuse their priorities; their composition class's goal is to help them compose their arguments, not to help them become perfect spell-check machines.

My solution is to open these concepts to student discussion, and host honest dialogues about what it means for writing to be comprehensible, and how to tell when to follow rules versus when to break them. Such lessons also require classroom understanding of context, of situational awareness in composing writing, and of the importance of experiencing wide varieties of textual communication. All of this is ultimately in service to a pedagogical strategy that puts the *purpose* of a piece of composition before its *structure*.

Origins of these ideas

These philosophies emerge directly from my history and experience as an artist and art educator, which necessitates the balancing of several contradictory priorities to be performed effectively. Good visual arts education demands constant practice from students; it seeks passionate, determination, and consistent drive for self-improvement and craft mastery. Yet simultaneously it also requires the preservation of individuality and personal voice. When well-taught, arts students are encouraged to fine-tune their skills via regular exercise, while also holding-fast to their own notions about what art means to them. Those notions can emerge from instructors, but far more often they come from students' interactions with their own backgrounds, with peers, with outside media, or with artistic practices from beyond the classroom.

All of this is necessary because, to put things bluntly, art is hard. Creating visual art that plays as intended on its audience's minds is so difficult that teaching it can often feel Sisyphean. I believe writing is hard in the same way, and so it only follows that some amount of pedagogy between the two disciplines must be transferable.

But then there are also differences between my two pedagogical disciplines for which I must account. The relevant one here is *passion*. It can be expected of most art students that they exhibit openly some

amount of interest in the subject, where the same cannot always be said for the average freshman composition class attendee. However just because a measure of passionate engagement isn't immediately obvious in a student, that doesn't mean it's nonexistent. This is another benefit to favoring creative expression in a composition pedagogy environment: even an outwardly apathetic student is going to care about ideas that are personally relevant to their experiences, and so care about a class when that class prioritizes those ideas. Once again, the key here is frank openness about the pursuits of the course. Students should come away from these exercises understanding *why* this learning is happening in this way, and what they can expect to personally gain by engaging with it.

Why this works

Overall, I believe conceptualizing composition pedagogy in direct comparison to illustration pedagogy works well, and works well for a specific reason. Those of us who spend a lot of time writing and thinking about writing can often be blind to the fact that others don't see the craft in the same way. Writing feels so fundamental to us that we may fail to think of it like our students do. It is, to them, a bit more like drawing: something tertiary, a nice skill to have, but not one to be extensively practiced.

Writing *is* more important than drawing though; a population with better rhetorical skills is one that communicates within itself more effectively, and is more resistant to manipulation. Composition lies at the base of most academic disciplines, and is often crucial for achieving full understanding of those fields. I see it as my job to help my students recognize this about their craft, and then help them achieve their goals bolstered by this newfound priority.

Curriculum Vitae

JACKSON SIDES

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EDUCATION

M.F.A in Creative Writing; degree expected May 2027

San Jose State University, presently enrolled

B.F.A in Animation / Illustration, Cum Laude

San Jose State University, 2022

A.A. in Liberal Arts

Cabrillo College, 2017

AWARDS & ACHIEVEMENTS

James Phelan Award in Fiction, Second Place – Spring 2026

I received nominations from two different University professors for two different literary pieces for this award.

Graduate Student Steinbeck Fellow, Fall 2025 – Spring 2026

As a Graduate Fellow for the Martha Heasley Cox Center for Steinbeck Studies I received a tuition stipend, and attended all campus literary readings sponsored by the Center for Literary Arts as well as the biannual readings from the post-graduate Steinbeck Fellows.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Cabrillo College Extension, 2025 – present

Instructor, Drawing Skills - Gesture, Construction, and Perspective. In this course, I adapt and implement curriculum from a college-level illustration fundamentals program intended for improving students' core drawing and draftsmanship skill set.

Instruction Assistant, Write and Draw Your Own Comics. I assist with instruction and classroom management, and provide additional instruction for advanced students.

San Francisco State University, Sierra Nevada Field Campus, 2023 – present

Instruction Assistant, Play of Light and Shadows: Oil Painting in the Sierra. In this course, I adapt and implement curriculum from a college-level illustration fundamentals program

intended for improving students' observational drawing and painting skills in *plein air* scenarios.

Caroline Davis Intermediate School, 2024 – 2025

Instruction Assistant, Sixth, Seventh, Eight Grade Classroom Art. I assisted with instruction and classroom management, and provided additional instruction for advanced students.

San Jose State University, 2019 – 2020

Undergraduate Assistant, ANI 21 - Color Principals for Screen Arts. In this course, I implemented illustration fundamentals program curriculum intended for improving comprehension and utilization of color theory, value range distribution, composition, and pigment quality in order to help students meet expected skill levels.

Undergraduate Assistant, ANI 121 - Illustration Fundamentals II. In this course, I implemented illustration fundamentals program curriculum intended for improving comprehension and utilization of color theory, value range distribution, composition, and pigment quality in order to help students meet expected skill levels.

SERVICE

Academic Service

Presenter, Independent Game Thesis Direction Panel, SJSU Game Dev Club, SJSU (2024)
Volunteer Organizer, Student Thesis Gallery, Shrunkheadman Club, SJSU (2022)
Project Director, Summer Games Workshop, SJSU Game Dev Club, SJSU (2020 – 2021)
Activity Director, “Party Banter,” Shrunkheadman Club, SJSU (2018 – 2020)
Panelist, Illustration Time Management Panel, Shrunkheadman Club, SJSU (2019)

Sample Lesson Plan – First Year Writing

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Schedule: The following agenda applies to a 75 minute-long class period, consisting of 50 minutes of scheduled course activities, 10 minutes of class maintenance time (attendance, agendas, student questions, etc.), and 15 minutes of buffer time to account for unforeseen classroom stalls.

It is expected that the entire 75 minute period be exhausted by this material, but if some time remains, it may be used for additional maintenance, or free-writing/homework time for the students.

Classroom Materials: Overhead projector to be accessed via instructor's laptop, daily handouts (PDFs in handout catalog), daily slides (PDFs in slide catalog).

Student Materials: Laptops to be used to access Canvas discussion boards and take notes.

Class Agenda

Minutes **00-05:** Welcome and Attendance.

Minutes **05-20:** Activity Introduction Lecture and Q&A:

- Lecture progresses through the daily slides until the first Q&A slide, at which point instructor will stop and take questions about the upcoming activity. Questions from students during the lecture are also expected and answered as long as they're tangentially related to the lecture topic.
- This lecture should concern the controversial University of Oklahoma psych paper, its background and the background of its student author, the outcome of that situation, and the two graders' reasoning behind their decision. Two links to news stories are embedded directly in the slides; depending on time, the instructor may choose to skim these sites with the students.
- Following the lecture and Q&A the instructor will introduce the activity (outlined in the relevant activities catalog and also explained in the slides), and direct students to begin reading.

Minutes **20-35:** Activity Part I:

- Students engage with the first half of the activity, which will include reading the relevant handouts in their pre-assigned groups and responding to the topic question from the slides in their Canvas 'Hypothesis' discussion boards.
- During this time, the instructor can use their own Canvas 'Hypothesis' portal to monitor students' responses. Student responses are expected to move the conversation forward

and add constructively to their peers' dialogue (no 'I agree' or 'I don't know' responses). The instructor may wish to prompt greater engagement from students when necessary by adding comments in their discussion boards.

- Students should be given a five-minute warning before this first part of the discussion ends.

Minutes **35-45**: Activity Part II:

- Instructor will change slides to the activity followup question and go over a brief explanation. One or two questions on the nature of the followup discussion topic may come up from students.
- Students are then instructed to engage with this followup discussion on the same discussion boards as before, and in the same groups. Once again, the instructor may monitor students' responses for adequate engagement.

Minutes **45-55**: Activity Conclusion Lecture and Next Homework Introduction:

- Lecture progresses through a conclusion to the activity, emphasizing its relevance to the students' own projects. During this lecture students will also be prompted to share some of their group discussion conclusions with the rest of the class. If the instructor saw an especially relevant point from the activity discussion boards, they may prompt the student to share that point.
- This lecture should concern the importance of routine citation work in good argumentation and rhetoric, and wrap back around to the larger topic of why citations are so important in collegiate composition, with which the students will already be familiar from previous classes.
- The slides should also contain references to how important good citation practice will be in the course's next major project due date.

Minutes **55-60**: Class wrap-up, due date reminders.

Remaining 15 Minute Buffer period: This time will likely have been exhausted over the course of the class already, but any remaining time may be used to provide additional support to students in need of it, answer remaining questions, and discuss any upcoming project or classroom work with students who wish to prepare ahead of time.