

## Teaching Philosophy

My pedagogy is grounded in listening: listening to student voices and listening to language. I consistently work to improve my own listening skills because students come first, and it is a teacher's responsibility to be attentive and responsive to student needs at all times. Having struggled myself initially to find my place and my voice as an undergraduate student, my greatest strength as a teacher is my patience and readiness to listen. My attentiveness is both to needs for discussion and needs for drafting. I spend much of my time beyond regular office hours responding to student discussion posts and holding meetings with students to ensure that every student receives the attention they need in order to be as successful as possible, not just in my course but in general.

My teaching style is grounded in studies of aurality, affect, and attitude. Students are immersed in a world of listening, conscious of their exposure to multiple sonic rhetorics. I encourage students to hear the music in language and understand the rhetorical power of that music. In short, we investigate how sound influences attitude, which in turn determines action. Language is inherently musical, and my students and I view all course materials, discussions, and projects through a musical heuristic in addition to heuristics respective to the course and particular rhetorical situations. I also develop new and innovative ways each semester to allow music to pervade course activities, both in my own presentations to students and integrated into student projects. Building on the work of Drs. Leonard Meyer, David Huron, and Steven B. Katz in the theory of musical expectation, I focus on highlighting the persuasive rhythms in verbal language and the rhetoric of music.

I call this heuristic for teaching and learning Musical Listening. Musical Listening requires students to consider the aural elements of all course material, classroom discussions, and their own compositions. The goal of the integration of aural studies with a focus on the relationship between aurality, affect, and attitude is for students to come to understand the rhetoric of music in verbal language, and apply that knowledge to their own listening, reading, and writing. The link that I demonstrate between musical expectation in instrumental music and in verbal language establishes a basis upon which to discuss and interact with the rhetoric of music. In Technical Writing especially, discussion of the theory of musical expectation and the rhetoric of music highlights the necessity and function of genres, genre boundaries, and genre overlap.

Daily class interactions as well as student projects are designed to challenge students to consider issues of aurality including the musicality of language and actual integration of music into multimodal compositions. Most class meetings in a semester feature the presentation of course material, whether this be based on a video, reading, sound file, or some other learning artifact. Students present this material by first synthesizing, then using quotes, paraphrase, and summary in a multimodal presentation that focuses on the oral aspect while the text is presented via digital projector as a visual aid. Each student gets at least one opportunity in the semester to present a class lesson. The beauty of this exercise is that regardless of a student's level of preparation, they must interact with lesson material and must practice oral delivery in the form of performance rhetoric. I help students mitigate the difficulties that inevitably arise in these speaking situations by encouraging them to stop and breathe, to take a moment to gather their thoughts, to listen to their own rhythms and fall into those rhythms, to remain confident even when they are terribly nervous, and to reach out to their peers.

Project-based assignments require students to compose with sound alone and compose multimodal projects which include sound. When composing sound recordings, students utilize particular rhythmic delivery techniques while listening to their own internal rhythms (for they themselves are musical instruments, hence the term *Musical Listening*) to shape the rhetoric of their performance. My students in First-Year Composition have in the past used web-based software to create musical expressions of their major arguments within a series of project-based assignments, and the results were extremely rewarding. Students not only used music that appealed to them personally and reflected their individual cultural identities, but they created intricate combinations of sounds, usually with different instruments representing different voices and perspectives on a single issue, such as a bass line to represent the counterargument. Students' explanations of their musical arguments were impressively

complex, and it was evident that the challenge of designing an audio argument helped them immensely to identify, separate, and consider the interactions of conflicting strains in a well-rounded debate. In multimodal assignments, students apply their familiarity with cultural patterns in music by choosing or creating instrumental music to serve as background audio for their final multimodal projects. My students in First-Year Composition seek out and add instrumental music tracks to their Major Argument Video assignment, and my students in Technical Writing seek out and add instrumental tracks to their instructional videos. I am currently interested in the argument that adding music to instructional videos actually detracts from their power to teach effectively because of the competing voices of music and speaker. For this reason, I will soon be experimenting with a multimedia video final student project in which the instructions are to be delivered entirely in text or through visual demonstration, accompanied by instrumental music.

Key to listening and encouraging listening throughout all of these activities is genuine enthusiasm. I bring to the classroom a high degree of enthusiasm that my students appreciate and reflect. Teaching is a performance art, and I bring much of my experience with musical stage performance to the academic setting. When students are engaged and free to laugh as well as free to express their honest opinions and critical concerns – when they know they that they are listened to by a teacher who cares about their success and their future – there is no end to their potential for learning and growth. In turn, I get to grow too.