



# MINI GUIDE

## Looking Ahead: Documenting your teaching & demonstrating effectiveness

### Overview

At the University of Toronto, a teaching dossier must be submitted as part of the tenure and continuing status review process. Beyond the information included in an academic CV, a teaching dossier describes and documents an instructor's teaching expertise and goals and priorities for teaching and learning. Compiling a dossier is a highly iterative and reflective process and this document can be difficult to produce if insufficient time is allotted for the tracking of teaching achievements and the collection of teaching materials.

The CTSI guide *Developing Your Teaching Dossier* is an in-depth resource on preparing your Teaching Philosophy statement and compiling your dossier. [View the guide online at the CTSI website.](#)

This mini-guide is intended to act as a reference in documenting your teaching for future incorporation into the teaching dossier document. It offers practical tips on how to produce, document, collect and reflect on the materials necessary for the compilation of the teaching dossier, including course evaluation data, teaching support materials, and evidence of professional development and educational leadership.



# Supporting Your Teaching Narrative

Generally speaking, the teaching dossier is made up of two parts: the narrative framework, which includes the statement of teaching philosophy/practice, narrative descriptions of teaching experiences and supporting documents, and critical reflection on teaching successes and challenges; and artifacts, or supporting evidence accompanied by brief explanatory notes.

The teaching philosophy statement is a reflective statement of your beliefs about and approaches to teaching that frames and supports all other elements of the teaching dossier. Some key components include: an overview of your core beliefs about teaching; an explanation of how you define effective teaching; a description of your teaching goals; and a contextualized discussion of some of your teaching strategies. This statement usually opens the dossier.

Throughout the rest of your dossier, there will also be significant pieces of writing that will introduce and explain the evidence and supporting materials you are including in the dossier to illustrate your teaching strengths.

The steps and documentation strategies below will assist you in developing this narrative through the effective documentation of your teaching experiences and collection of key teaching-related supporting materials.

## 7 Steps to Capturing Teaching Effectiveness

### 1. Clarify Your Context

Can you effectively articulate the context in which you are teaching? The following questions will help you contextualize your teaching and the experience of your students. This in turn will help ground the information in your dossier.

- What are the degree learning outcomes for your program/department?
- How do your courses fit within the overall program structure?
- What are the key “burning issues” in your disciplinary area right now? How are these affecting how the discipline is being taught?
- What are the key issues facing students in your discipline? In your department?

## 2. Track Contributions to Course and Curriculum Development

In addition to noting all the courses you have taught at the University of Toronto, collect information that highlights your specific contribution to the conceptualization and delivery of a given course. Keep sample syllabi for each course and for each iteration of a course, note what has changed over time. You can use the following questions to guide your reflections.

- What was your key contribution to each course offering?
- If you developed or will be developing courses from scratch...why? What need do these courses fill in your program or department?
- What information/data/resources do you use to build new courses?
- What information/data/resources do you use to refine existing courses?

## 3. Track and Annotate Your Teaching Practice

Keep a teaching journal that tracks your observations related to lecture outlines, in-class activities, plans for tutorials (including any instructions given to teaching assistants (TAs)), lab designs, assessment design, debriefs of your teaching sessions and significant student accomplishments. It is helpful to use milestones associated with different points in the academic cycle to help mark what needs to be tracked and when. Maintain an active file (by term or by course) that you contribute to regularly:

- After final week of classes in each term
- When you debrief course experiences with TAs and colleagues
- At the end of each full academic cycle – big picture overview
- Every time a student gets in to graduate school, goes on to a career in your field, defends, etc.
- Every time you have a breakthrough with a particular student/group of students or a particular concept

The following is a possible template for tracking your teaching practice. For example, at the end of teaching a particular course or at the end of an academic term/year, you could use a table to capture key observations and future goals:

What is working?	What needs to change and why?	New Ideas	New questions from students	Key blocks to students' learning	Significant student breakthroughs



## 4. Develop a Course Feedback Cycle

Incorporate student learning outcomes and student feedback into your course design and delivery process. Begin with your teaching and learning priorities and invite input from multiple sources throughout the iteration of the course to help you calibrate how the course is unfolding and what changes could possibly be implemented right away or in the longer term.



**SPECIAL NOTE:**

Consider one term being observed in the classroom by a peer. See the CTSI guide on the [“Peer Observation of Teaching”](#) or [request an in-class observation](#) by a CTSI staff member to get formative feedback on classroom teaching.

## 5. Collect Samples of Student Work

This is an optional practice, but the inclusion of student work can demonstrate:

- Your capacity to give useable and effective feedback
- Show the impact of feedback on student learning
- Provide an example of achieved or surpassed learning outcomes
- Show exceptional student work which demonstrates creativity, innovation, exceptionality in practice, etc.

If you intend to include student work, be careful. You must ask students for permission to include their work, and ensure their anonymity is kept, and that privacy regulations are followed. Do not include any personal identifying features with the work. At minimum, even if you do not include the actual student artifacts in your dossier, gathering examples of your feedback and your students’ outputs together will help you articulate/formulate your approach to providing feedback to students and your impact on their performance in the course/program.

## 6. Gather Information from Others

Looking at the reflections of peers and students on your teaching can provide valuable insight. Again, be aware of privacy issues when including unsolicited communications. Be sure to check with your departmental leadership before including unsolicited communications in the teaching dossier, as different departments/divisions have different policies and procedures about what is appropriate to include. Think about incorporating:

- Unsolicited letters of thanks/support from colleagues – always check with Chair/Dean about what to include!
- Unsolicited communications from students – always check with Chair/Dean about what to include!
- Written feedback from a peer observation of your teaching
- Evidence that course materials you have designed have been taken up by others in their courses
- Evidence that your scholarship and/or teaching resources have been taken up in courses at other institutions



## 7. Triangulate and Process Your Teaching Data

Once you have collected materials, review them and try reading across the materials to consider:

- Key themes that emerge
  - use a key-word approach to analyzing the language that is used in your materials
  - colour code key ideas and identify isolated concepts and practices
- Key questions to answer
  - how do I know what I do works?
  - what kind of approach to teaching do the materials capture?
  - do I demonstrate leadership?
  - do I implement changes:
    - based on feedback from others?
    - based on shifts in the discipline?
    - based on new understandings of student needs?
    - based on a review of current scholarship?
  - can I provide evidence of impact on students?
- Teaching challenges and your response to these challenges. When identifying and discussing teaching challenges be sure to indicate to your reader that you have a plan for enhancing your teaching over time.

## Evidence for Other Components of the Dossier

You can also gather evidence for other components of the teaching dossier that do not directly relate to your classroom teaching practice. Educational leadership and professional development, for example, are two important indicators of teaching effectiveness which, when taken together, point to “future promise”.

### Identifying Educational Leadership – What is Leadership in this Context?

Developing new courses and/or reform of curricula, mentoring colleagues and students on teaching, coordinating program-level initiatives, offering advice and/or consulting on teaching outside of your home department, having your teaching expertise explicitly sought out by colleagues both within and beyond your department, and providing educational support on teaching both within and outside of your immediate departmental context can all be examples of educational leadership.



- When thinking about your own work and leadership, consider the following guiding questions: Have you helped mentor junior colleagues or graduate students (including TAs)?
- Have you sought out the guidance of a mentor yourself, and used the relationship to craft teaching goals/new teaching ideas?
- Have you helped colleagues, or the department, navigate changes to courses and curricula?
- Have you contributed to teaching and learning committees in a way that led to significant change?
- Have you contributed to the improvement of instruction in the department by sharing your own resources/techniques, or researching other resources and techniques and bringing these into the department?
- Have you investigated your teaching in any way?
- Have you disseminated information about your teaching successes?
- Have you engaged in community activities/outreach that have enriched/informed your teaching?

## Strategic Professional Development

There are several steps you can take to ensure that the professional development opportunities you pursue are encouraging your growth as a teacher. Start by reviewing your course evaluation data, notably your qualitative feedback from students. What key themes emerge? Possible areas for development that might emerge from your data include, for example, course organization, communication, assignment design, lecture pacing, currency of course content, etc.

Discuss teaching issues with colleagues to gain insight into what is important in your context, both within the discipline and departmentally. Review your teaching philosophy draft, and your first curated collection of teaching materials. Where are the gaps? What do you need to read/attend/view in order to find a different path or try something new? Finally, in reflecting on and writing about your professional development, identify what you learned and articulate how you have implemented what you learned in your teaching.

Some examples of professional development that you can include in your dossier are as follows:

- Participating in workshops, courses or trainings related to teaching and learning
- Participating in conferences, symposia related to teaching and learning
- Reading and review of teaching and learning scholarship
- Researching teaching and learning

- Mentoring related to teaching (as both mentor and mentee)
- Observing peers' teaching (within and outside your field)
- Participating in Communities of Practice, reading groups, brown bag lunch series
- Accessing the services at teaching support centres

## Resources

This guide offers first steps in collecting and documenting your teaching practice and effectiveness. We recommend you access the following resources for further information in developing your dossier and the narrative around your teaching.

### CTSI Resources

Developing & Assessing Teaching Dossiers: A guide for University of Toronto faculty, administrators and graduate students

<http://teaching.utoronto.ca/teaching-support/documenting-teaching/teaching-dossier/>

Gathering Formative Feedback with Mid-Course Evaluations

<http://teaching.utoronto.ca/teaching-support/gathering-formative-feedback/>

Peer Observation of Teaching: Effective Practices <http://teaching.utoronto.ca/teaching-support/peer-observation-of-teaching/>

Teaching dossier workshops and clinics, held approximately once per year (check the [CTSI Events](#) page for details).

Customized dossier workshops or clinics, on request, for your department or division.

Confidential individual consultation on your dossier at any stage of its completion. Complete the [online CTSI consultation request form](#) to set up an appointment.

Instructors wishing to receive a formative assessment of their classroom teaching can [request an in-class observation](#), followed by a confidential consultation. CTSI staff can provide you with written feedback based on this observation that can then be included in your dossier.

A CTSI Faculty Liaison can help you to develop an assessment plan for assessing particular elements of your course or instruction. This information can be included in your dossier. Complete the [online CTSI consultation request form](#) to set up an appointment.





## **Institutional Resources**

Policy & Procedures on Academic Appointments (2015)

[www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/phoct302003i.htm](http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/phoct302003i.htm)

Academic Administrative Procedures Manual – links to all divisional teaching guidelines

[aapm.utoronto.ca/academic-administrative-procedures-manual](http://aapm.utoronto.ca/academic-administrative-procedures-manual)

All divisions have guidelines on the assessment of teaching for the purposes of tenure and promotion. It is essential that these guidelines be consulted when first beginning to develop a teaching dossier. CTSI strongly suggests reaching out to your Chair or Dean's office for more information.

## **Further Reading**

Knapper, C.W., & Wright, W.A. (2001). Using portfolios to document good teaching: premises, purposes, practices. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 88, 19-29.

Seldin, P., Miller, J.E. & Seldin, C. (2010). *The teaching portfolio: A practical guide to improved performance and promotion/tenure decisions* (4th ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

