

As an editor, I often told reporters they needed to slap a sticky note on their computers, saying “Why Should I Care?” That, I told them, was the question they needed to answer for readers in every story. Without it, readers would tune out.

As a teacher, I believe that’s a question I need to answer every day for the students in my classroom. Without it, students will tune out.

I want to make my students think, help them learn and keep them engaged.

As you all know, that’s not easy.

This generation of digital natives has grown up multi-tasking and surrounded by technology. Studies have shown they’ve spent more hours playing video games than they have reading books. These students, accustomed to “Sesame Street,” expect learning to be fun and entertaining. For them, it also is fast-paced.

Today’s students demand to know the answer to “Why Should I Care?”

I work hard to provide answers on their terms.

I rely on these principles, the bedrock of my teaching philosophy, to answer that question:

- Every lesson must have a clearly defined point or objective. That’s Principle No. 1 - making sure both students and I know what that point is. As I create a syllabus, I ask myself “what should every student know by the end of this semester?” As I plan for class sessions, I ask myself “what do they really need to know about this topic?” As an example, each week in my editing class, I use front pages of newspapers from around the country (thanks to the Newseum website) in class discussion. As I’m compiling front pages, I zero in on the point I’m trying to make. It may be a comparison of story play during the NCAA tourney. Why did some editors choose to play the story bigger than others? Which headlines or pictures pulled you into the story? Why did the losing team’s newspaper downplay the story? I want students to know that the point of looking at pages goes beyond a discussion of the news. I want them to know editors make daily decisions based on news values. Knowing the objective of using particular pages in a discussion helps me stay on point. This year, I participated in a Peer Review of Teaching Project at the University of Nebraska. One lesson I learned is that too often we spend time in class on topics that have

nothing to do with our learning objectives and we sometimes don't teach concepts we say are essential for our students.

- Students must be able to relate to the lesson to understand it. Making it relevant is Principle No. 2: After all, this is the new "me generation." As a teacher, I need to make sure lessons hit home.

When I first taught a newsroom management class and lectured on editor and reporter collaboration, I was met with many blank, bored stares. I had used Roy Peter Clark's "editor as coach" model as the basis for the lesson, a successful technique when I taught editors in newsrooms. Suddenly, I realized many of these 20-somethings had never worked in a newsroom. Some had never held a job at all. For them, the concepts were difficult to grasp. I had to find a way to relate my lesson to their world. I assumed most, if not all, had worked with coaches. They had played softball, run track, participated in debate. So I changed the lesson to start with something that would help them understand it. I asked them to draw pictures of their best and worst coaches. After posting the pictures on the wall, I asked them to describe what made them good or bad coaches. As memories flooded back about loved or despised coaches it was easier for students to relate that to how an editor interacts with a reporter. The track coach who never said anything positive to his team members was an easy analogy for the grumbling editor who never praised a reporter's work. And the students remembered how that crappy coach made them feel or how inspired they were by a good coach.

- Using a variety of teaching methods is essential to reach a digital generation. That's Principle No. 3: Change it up often. After all, this generation is used to information coming at them from their phones, iPods and YouTube. They don't want to hear me talk for two hours straight. I use traditional teaching methods such as lecture, discussion and quizzes. But I also use games, role-playing, blogs, social media and short videos to reinforce my lessons. Take that lesson on editors as coaches. After students have drawn pictures, after we've discussed traits of good/bad coaches, after I've lectured on editors as coaches, I use other methods to reinforce the point. I ask a couple of students to role-play in front of the class. I've written a script of a reporter interacting first with a bad editor/coach and next with a good editor/coach. They see the results when Charlie, the reporter, is ignored by the editor who doesn't look up from his keyboard. They see a different reporter when a collaborative editor offers advice and undivided attention. And finally I show video clips of legendary coaches like John Wooden talking about leadership and coaching. I'm constantly looking for creative ways to reinforce traditional lessons. Last semester, I baked punctuation cookies and made a video of my editing students

talking about their favorite grammar rules. They loved the cookies and they liked watching the video. I'm guessing this may help more of them remember the difference between it's and its. In fact, one recently wrote this on my Facebook wall: "After years after years and years of English classes, it wasn't until this past semester in your class that I finally "got" whom vs. who."

- Good teaching takes plenty of preparation and requires loads of enthusiasm. Principle No. 4 means plan ahead - no winging it allowed. It's difficult to engage students and get them thinking if you're faking it. I believe planning is critical. Take the way I approach headlines in an editing class. I introduce headline writing by looking at real world examples. We might look at the headlines from a dozen papers on the House passage of health care reform. We compare and contrast, discussing what works and what didn't. I want them to understand that headlines can determine if a reader reads their stories. Next, I give groups of students stories and turn headline writing into a competition. When they report back, their headlines go on the board. We discuss similarities and differences. Ultimately, the class votes on the best headlines. Winners get Smarties, a sign of my enthusiasm for good headlines. To reinforce what we've discovered about headlines, I show a video I've made of Jane Hirt, the managing editor of the Chicago Tribune, talking about why some headlines work and others don't. Hirt began her career as a copy editor after graduating from UNL. She has walked in their shoes, and they can relate to her. Now she is one of the nation's top editors. I've made a series of similar short videos of professionals sharing their expertise. I want my lessons to be current, so I use a class blog that allows me to post up-to-date articles on whatever we're discussing. For example, one semester I linked to a newspaper editor's column apologizing for a misleading headline. I ask students to post headlines they like and explain why on our class blog. They can see each other's comments and often will comment on each other's choices. My headline writing lessons still include a traditional PowerPoint with examples and tips on headline writing. And students write headlines as graded exercises. But I also use lecture to explain how SEO affects Web headlines. I show a video I've made of an online editor talking about the differences between print and Web headlines. And I make students create Twitter accounts and post tweets to showcase how microblogging mimics headline writing. All of this takes planning. But the variety keeps the class moving and makes learning fun. I admire teachers who can adlib and cast a spell on a class, but that doesn't work for me.
- Effective teachers are good role models. For me, Principle No. 5 means practicing what I preach. As someone who spent 30 years as a reporter and editor in a newsroom, it would be easy to spend all of my time talking about the good old days

and lamenting the changes in the industry. Instead, I've embraced multimedia storytelling methods and am enthusiastic about the possibilities. I am trying to model behavior by using tools they need to learn to succeed in today's environment. I use a blog as a way to provide information and as writing and headline practice. It also demonstrates the lessons of engaging with your readers as students react to my posts and to each other's comments. I use a Flip camera to create videos of professionals offering advice on journalism and post the videos on YouTube. I use Twitter to follow people who write about changes in the industry and to have quick access to breaking news. When I teach a lesson on Twitter as headline practice, I make students follow journalists who use it well. I'm trying to answer that "why should I care" question. I show them new ways that news is being delivered. I still value the basics – students lose points if their writing is sloppy or they ignore AP style. But they also need to understand how journalism is changing. That means I do too. I can be a role model in many ways, including letting them know that I'm learning every day. Sometimes even from them.

I hope following the five principles that make up my teaching philosophy answers the "why should I care" question for my students.

And finally, what's the answer to that question for me? Why do I teach? Why do I care? Because I love the moments when I know a lesson has clicked. A student sent me this note last semester after a headline lesson:

"Headlines aren't really what I look at when I'm reading a newspaper.... After this week's class, I have been paying a lot more attention to headlines. I almost feel like a 5-year-old on a sugar rush when I open the newspaper. 'Oh that looks interesting!' 'That looks cool!'"

When I incorporated Twitter into my editing class, many students were initially skeptical. But this summer, one e-mailed me:

"I just wanted to let you know that at my internship this summer at the Jewish Press I was asked to make a Twitter account .... So I just wanted to say thank you for assigning us the Twitter homework and helping us learn Twitter because it really did help with my job. "

Last summer, a student e-mailed me from her internship to tell me this:

"Your editing class has made me a crazy woman! I scrutinize the paper and the mistakes are making me insane.... I've started reading grammar blogs."

For me, that's a student who knows the answer to "why should I care." And it's why I care too.

