

The experiences I had as an undergraduate at Central Michigan University fuel the way I teach and interact with my students today.

I left CMU with valuable lessons from every class, but as a budding reporter, I learned the most from adjunct professors who dropped me into real-life situations and expected me to perform. Sometimes I succeeded; often times I fell flat on my face. Still, completing summer internships, job-shadowing reporters and scoring my own freelance contracts all shaped my viewpoint on teaching and learning.

In my eyes, learning happens when your mind draws conclusions and then assigns future behavior based on previous life experiences. In other words, touching a stove that burns your hand is a life experience. Your mind determines that stoves are hot, thus making you decide not to touch another stove unless it's turned off.

If learning is the practice of drawing conclusions from life experiences, then teaching is the art of creating specific scenarios that will elicit specific conclusions. More specifically, the professor's role is to bring the stove to class, turn it on, and then tell students to touch it. In a perfect world, every student will touch the stove, get burned and learn the lesson. However, an added role of the professor is to assess whether or not the student learned and, if not, determine what kept the student from drawing the correct conclusion.

I take the role of scenario-creator seriously. In my reporting courses, we spend ample time mastering tight writing, thorough research and insightful interviews. That's why my students spend an hour during every session writing and re-writing ledes. That's why we discuss what the average reader might wonder before a story is published. That's why we dissect excellent reporting at the beginning of every class. I want to make sure students are reading stellar work so they can start emulating greatness.

From there, I match promising students with opportunities to tell stories in professional venues. I use my network of journalists to introduce editors to students who want internships or freelance deals. My thinking behind this is simple. By performing the tasks of a professional journalist while still studying in college, students will graduate with a better understanding of what it takes to have a full-time newsroom position.

When the semester ends, I leave my students with three invaluable skills. First, they're able to explain complex ideas (in writing and orally) much better than when the class began. Second, I teach my students how to teach themselves new skills. Journalism is a field that's continually evolving, so my students will know how to add to their tool belt. Finally, I re-wire students' thinking so they're more comfortable with questioning processes or people. This is an essential skill if they want to become a journalist who looks after the public's best interest.

In fact, mastering all these skills is the difference between passing or failing my class. But perhaps more importantly, executing these skills in a real newsroom is the difference between a great career or unemployment. The truth is, editors expect lively and engaging writing at a moment's notice. The public expects deeply reported and deeply researched pieces that have nuance and complexity. Sources expect that their comments won't be used out of context or to further some larger agenda. We live in a time where deadlines are immediate and it's even more important for journalists to distinguish themselves from pundits and bloggers. I take pride in giving students the skills that build their credibility as accurate storytellers.