

Philosophy – Jami Rhodes, DMA
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The most honest way I can begin to describe my philosophy of teaching is to acknowledge that it is ever evolving as I learn from my students and my own continued growth as a voice scientist/pedagogue, singer, musician, and artist. Pursuing the mastery of a subject and breaking down its complexities into separate parts is a fascinating cycle of learning. Two of the first things I say to my graduate vocal pedagogy students is that “there is no one right way to teach something,” and “you can never know too much about your subject matter.” Even amid constant evolution, I do not foresee a future in which these two statements are not at the core of my own teaching.

Students are people and people are individuals who learn and respond differently. A most fulfilling aspect of my work at ECU is the variability of the instruction necessitated by the courses I teach. I teach lecture courses, one-on-one applied voice, and I conduct an ensemble. These are three completely different educational environments that require very different approaches to the subject matter at hand. In a one-on-one lesson, it is easy to specifically craft instruction to the student in my office. However, when I am in front of an ensemble of 50-70 singers of various skillsets and vocal backgrounds, I am no less responsible for the individuality of the students in front of me. It is my job to make the information accessible and applicable to whatever students are in my charge, which often means being flexible. In my experience this is aided by two things: 1. You must pay attention to your students. If they are not responding to the material, change something! That is the job. 2. The more you know about your subject matter and the students in your charge, the more flexible (and thereby, successful!) you can be in your methodology.

The process of teaching singers, whether individually or in a group setting, is complicated and can be incredibly personal. At the base level, these students are training muscle coordination through a process not unlike that of a professional athlete. Most of the muscles involved in phonation are not visible or immediately accessible to the student and, depending on the voice type in question, it can take years of training, diligence, and patience to develop the efficient muscular coordination necessary to produce a free and balanced timbre. This task of building technique can be daunting to the young singer who is also