Note how these statements make reference to the individual’s goals and preparation to teach and to his/her ongoing efforts to enhance personal teaching skills.

Example 1 for a personal statement in Essay form (2-page limit):

My overall goal is the development of the knowledge base and thinking skills of various levels of learners. In the clinical setting this means working within a variety of situations (such as the inpatient team setting or the outpatient clinic) and with variation in the time available for teaching about a given problem. I try to consider the essential learning objectives for the different learners in a setting, understand their backgrounds in the material at that point and then combine that with what I know about the patients and their problems.

An important goal for me as a teacher in all settings is creating an atmosphere of comfort for the learners so that they can safely ask questions and try out their thinking as it develops; as learning occurs, I try to help them see where they have gaps in their knowledge and how they can spot these and fill them as learning continues.

Preparation for teaching includes my own current medical knowledge base and learning about how students learn. Observing and inquiring while teaching at multiple levels is very helpful with this. Both learner and peer feedback are useful for improving teaching techniques.

I also keep abreast of new teaching ideas by:

- Attending The Medical Education Seminar Series (MESS)
- Participating in appropriate skill building workshops

I reflect on my personal teaching style based on this information and oral and written evaluations.
Example 2 for a personal statement in assay form (2-page limit):

I first began to teach because my department chair made it clear that I needed to “do some lecturing” in order to satisfy promotion requirements. I was focused on building my research career and thought little about education issues. To satisfy this apparent teaching requirement, I found a topic of personal interest that was not already being covered and organized an elective course. Teaching consisted of giving a few lectures and assigning published studies to critique and discuss. Looking back, I made lots of mistakes. Nevertheless, my interest in education was born.

From this simple start, I recognized that teaching is about learning and about taking each student where they are and challenging them to grow. While I continued to lecture, and even made conscious efforts to improve (e.g., read Whitman’s book, “There is no Gene for Good Teaching,” and experimented with several different teaching strategies) my greatest satisfaction as a teacher has come from working with students in my lab.

At first, I found it was easy to lose sight of my role as mentor-teacher in the press of planning and completing studies. Like most researchers, I had a tendency to see my students as lab assistants and to focus on what they could do for me. I had to constantly remind myself to consider their needs to learn and to acquire independence and the capacity to successfully pursue their own interests. Now it comes naturally; it’s ingrained in how I do business (e.g., how I conduct lab meetings to creating teaching opportunities while still moving the work forward).

As I look back over the past few years, I feel satisfied that I’ve struck the right balance. Through a process of trial and error and reflection and informal sharing of mentoring ideas with colleagues in and out of Baylor, I have developed an approach to mentoring that works well. I have a productive lab, I attract motivated and capable students and post docs, and I have helped my learners launch their careers.

A key, I believe, has been to let my learners, regardless of their level, have hands-on involvement in all aspects of research—even when it would have been easier to do many of the things myself. This includes how to pick a problem (recognize questions that need to be answered), select appropriate techniques to approach the problem (break a problem down into smaller questions and use appropriate controls), setup and run effective experiments, put the data together and to present them to people (communicate what you’re doing especially across disciplines), and write a publishable paper.

I remember, for example, helping an individual, already in her third post doc, finally gain the abilities she lacked to turn her research into quality publications. I did so by consciously creating opportunities for her to write and to receive constructive feedback. She is now an assistant professor at another institution and was recently awarded her first NIH R01 grant.

I believe that for a researcher, this is what teaching is all about. Having reached this insight, I find that I’m more open with colleagues about my teaching/mentoring strategies. Recently, a new faculty member confided in me that he was having a problem with his first student; the student wasn’t meeting the expectations of my colleague. I suggested he write down his expectations for the next 3 or 6 months of lab research for the student and review them with the student. I offered to mediate and meet with them. Later, my colleague said this had been helpful and that he didn’t need further mediation. This is an example, of how I compare notes in hall-way chats at Baylor or
in coffee-shop discussions at professional meetings, partly to see if I can learn from others, but also so that they can learn from me.
Example 3 for a personal statement in assay form (2-page limit):

I began my post-college career as a high school science teacher in Small Town, USA. My original motivation for teaching was financial survival. I taught all levels of learners in all areas of science. Watching the struggle for some of my students and seeing that “light bulb” turn on when they finally “got it” became its own reward. What I had begun as a source of income had become a passion that has continued to grow—even through the arduous years of becoming a physician and specialist. This explains why becoming a clinical educator has been a major focus of my academic career at Baylor College of Medicine.

As a teacher, my overarching goal is to generate energy and enthusiasm for learning. I feel that enthusiasm for learning goes in tandem with enthusiasm for teaching. I try to always be willing to laugh at myself and have fun. I try to gauge the educational interaction from all perspectives. At the end of an interaction, if I don’t feel spent then I don’t feel like I have given it my best.

I believe that variation in teaching style and method encourages interest and addresses differing learner needs. There should be no such thing as a “canned lecture” which implies rote regurgitation of the facts without regard to the audience. I strive to identify and relate the relevance of new information and skills, to learners’ demographics, baseline knowledge, and level of interest so that I can personalize the experience and engage the learner. Using eye contact and trying to read the learner’s understanding and interest, I try to vary my style on the spot …a question, a pause, repetition, anecdotes, examples. My knowledge of the learner’s attitude, needs and concerns helps guide my educational approach.

I would like to be someone who helps produce learning, not simply a provider of information. In this respect, I strive to foster life-long learning skills, helping students acquire the tools necessary to explore and apply the information. Small group activities whether in the preclinical years, on the wards, or even one-on-one mentoring and discussion, have the advantage of allowing individuals to play an active and interactive role to achieve specific needs and interests.

We all have our favorite teaching method and style, but I want to stay abreast of “best teaching practices” through reading the literature and attending educational meetings such as the annual AAMC meeting. I also experiment with new techniques, even ones that take me out of my comfort zone, to best achieve my educational goals.

Whenever I teach, I make a point of reviewing learner evaluations and any performance data (i.e., test scores) that I can get my hands on. I pay special attention to such data, however, after trying something new. I use the evaluations to guide my reflections on what worked and what didn’t work.

Speaking of moving beyond my comfort zone, I recently requested feedback from a respected colleague who had participated in the Educational Scholars Fellowship Program. I asked my colleague to observe me as I taught in the clinical environment and at the patient’s bedside. My colleague made several important observations and I was able to use that information to make modifications in my teaching. This person was then able to return with me to the wards and make additional observations that verified the positive impact of the changes I made in my teaching strategies. (See Appendix D for letter from peer reviewer.) In addition, to ensure that my course materials were evidenced based, I submitted my power point slides and teaching notes to a nationally-recognized expert in the subject for review and comment. This person directed me to
some cutting edge scientific research that I could integrate into my lectures, particularly those for faculty and fellows.

In conclusion, the best rewards of a profession often come entirely from within. Why do I do what I do? When I teach, I learn, I grow, and I have fun.
Example 4 for a personal statement in assay form (2-page limit):

My teaching methods and goals have evolved over many years of teaching medical students at Baylor College of Medicine. I had no formal training in teaching techniques, philosophies, etc. before beginning my teaching here. My two most important prior experiences were observing how others teach and learning how to present a clear research seminar. Figuring out what it is that makes good teachers good was mainly an education in teaching style. There are nearly as many effective teaching styles as there are good teachers, so the problem reduced to identifying elements of style that would work for me: a process that required trial and error and the willingness to experiment…and fail. From preparing research seminars, I’ve learned the value of clear organization with careful attention to the knowledge and needs of the specific audience. What is an excellent presentation for one audience may be terrible for another. It was painful to discover in my first lectures to medical students that research-style lectures do not work; medical students have their own special needs, which are different from those of research scientists (or graduate students). Considerations of style and content form the basis of my own teaching goals.

• Organize presentations in an effective way that communicates the material in a relevant (audience-specific) context
• Engage the audience in a way (any way that works) that keeps their attention…and keeps it focused on the material at hand
• Use a variety of means to stimulate the audience to think actively about the material as it is being presented

To accomplish these goals, I focus on what I like to call the three P’s of presentation.

PREPARE: (You must be well prepared!)
• Know the material one level deeper than you intend to present it
• Prepare to present the material at the right level for your specific audience
• Be careful about the quantity of material—too much and nothing is retained
• Organize the material into an appropriate context for your audience
• Package the material into ‘cassettes’ linked by transitions and summaries
• Use simple pictures to illustrate—don’t rely too heavily on words alone

PERFORM: (Think of a lecture as a performance)
• Don’t read!
• Show passion, compassion, and enthusiasm: modulate voice and move around
• Present to the whole audience—not a single individual—and make eye contact
• Learn to read the audience and make adjustments as you go
• Use pauses, stories, and questions to break the flow and to stimulate thinking

PERFECT: (You will likely give the same lecture again)
• Ask colleagues (and students) for feedback…and listen
• Watch videotapes of your lectures and see yourself as the students do
• Review your own lecture immediately afterward and suggest future changes