I view teaching as a relational process that endeavors to maintain a balance between faithfully presenting the course material and encouraging the personal development of my students. In other words, the successful instructor is one who both facilitates the acquisition of knowledge and promotes wisdom, or the critical analysis and practical application of that knowledge. The demands of this process require that I create an atmosphere both inside and outside of the classroom that encourages my students to develop the capacity to think critically, engage in constructive dialogue, and acquire the necessary tools to be successful researchers and writers.

Through much trial and error I have found success in achieving these goals by means of a number of strategies. For example, I frequently introduce my students to primary evidence and require that they participate in small group and classroom discussions as they try to make sense of it. While class lectures and secondary literature are important elements of the educational process on which I rely, they can alienate the individual from this process. Often, students rely too much on how experts in the field have interpreted the material, preventing them from engaging it in a critical way. Through the process of analyzing the raw data, I have seen my students develop readings, both individually and corporately, that have proven to be more faithful to the evidence than some of the interpretations offered in the secondary literature.

The emphasis I place on writing also contributes to these goals. I have found that regular writing assignments provide my students with a formal venue in which they can practice integrating new ideas and articulating them in a clear, critical, and constructive manner. They also provide me with the opportunity to regularly interact with them on a personal level. Aided by the feedback that I provide on every paper, I have witnessed my students become better writers and thinkers as the semester unfolds. At the same time, they give me the chance to evaluate my own effectiveness in meeting my objectives. By highlighting points that were misunderstood or that I failed to sufficiently explain during class, I am able to return to and clarify them in the individual paper comments and in future classes.

The enthusiasm for the material that has resulted from my teaching methods has afforded me the opportunity to work independently with several students. At the conclusion of my Early History of God course held in the Spring of 2009, two of my students expressed their desire to learn biblical Hebrew. Since it is not offered at NYU, I developed an independent study in which both of them participated. One of them has continued his study of the critical tools used to analyze biblical texts with me for a second year. We are also currently working together to create two additional courses that will contribute directly to his senior thesis, which revolves around the development of monotheism, a topic that is central to my Early History of God course.