I have found that the most effective learning happens when students discover things for themselves. Because of this, I believe that the best teaching simply facilitates student discovery of important concepts and ideas. As a teacher of linguistics, of course I hope to instill in my students a love of language and an understanding of its complexities and of various theories and methodologies. More importantly, though, my main goal in teaching is to help students both at the graduate and undergraduate level become confident and independent thinkers and researchers that can engage with a wide-range of research and perspectives. I believe this goal can be best accomplished by promoting critical thinking, fostering interdisciplinarity, and creating a safe and supportive learning environment.

**Promoting critical thinking**— My main goal in teaching is to help students develop the ability to independently analyze data, form hypotheses, test the predictions and implications of those hypotheses, and to evaluate theories and methodologies. These skills are critical for any student, regardless of discipline or future career. In my teaching, I encourage students to think critically by working through problems that require them to use each of these skills. In introductory, and especially in more advanced syntax courses, for example, each new complication to the theory is introduced by first showing data that the current version of the theory is unable to handle. I then give students individual or group time to discuss why the previous theory makes incorrect predictions and to develop their own hypotheses of how to deal with the new data. Then as a class we evaluate the hypotheses and come to a conclusion. For graduate courses and more advanced undergraduate seminars, this will also include critical analysis of the hypotheses in primary literature.

This process was incorporated into problem sets and assessments in an introductory syntax class I was a TA for. As the semester progressed, I saw that students incorporated my feedback from the assignments, and that their ability to evaluate and understand the theoretical implications of various hypotheses improved. I believe that continuing to use this method for teaching and problem sets will prepare my students to engage with and participate in original research as independent, critical thinkers.

**Fostering interdisciplinarity**— As my students become more able to think critically about linguistic issues, I believe it is essential for them to learn about different perspectives and approaches to those questions. For this reason, I try to include interdisciplinary perspectives in my teaching. For example, when I taught an upper level undergraduate seminar on the syntax of control (the relation between the silent “PRO” subject of non-finite clauses and its antecedent, as in *Harry, managed [PRO, to win the tournament]*), in addition to discussing theoretical perspectives, we spent part of the semester talking about some of the sentence processing literature on control. Students responded well, stating that it was interesting to see different kinds of evidence used to address questions we were discussing in class. For students who had previously only had courses in formal linguistic theory, seeing the experimental evidence was useful and challenging, because it exposed them to new methodologies and different kinds of questions relating to our topic. Looking at both kinds of evidence was also useful in that students who felt more comfortable with one were able to answer questions from students who had more experience with the other, which led to a more engaged and interactive classroom and online discussion board.

Exposing students to multiple perspectives and methodologies not only increases interest and participation in the classroom, but I believe it also encourages students to focus on big-picture
concepts, rather than being bogged down in the technical details. This is especially important for graduate courses, in which students are more prone to lose sight of the broader implications and importance of their research. This approach can also foster creativity and an ability to collaborate effectively with people in other fields, which in turn leads to a more rich community both academically and as students move on to their various careers.

**Creating a safe and supportive learning environment**— In order to fully exercise these developing skills, students need a safe and supportive learning environment where they feel comfortable sharing ideas. In class and in individual meetings with students, I encourage this by reacting to every comment in a positive way. When students propose a hypothesis about some data, for example, I try to accept it as valid and discuss its strengths and theoretical implications, even if we conclude that it is not the best answer. In the future, I would also like to incorporate more small group discussions to give students who do not feel comfortable sharing in front of the whole class a chance to still share their ideas and receive feedback in a constructive environment.

A safe and supportive learning environment is important for all students. In order to promote diversity and inclusion in the classroom, I teach students to recognize the complexity, systematicity, and validity of all languages and dialects. Especially in introductory or generals courses, I teach about linguistic diversity to expose common biases and discrimination. This kind of discussion leads to greater appreciation of linguistic diversity, and it greatly benefits speakers of non-standard dialects. One student who often came to my office hours for introductory linguistics spoke a non-standard variety of English. After discussing these issues, she expressed how empowered she felt as she recognized the value, validity, and complexity of her language. This increased her desire to be an advocate for her community. I believe that creating this kind of safe and inclusive learning environment is crucial for students to feel confident in the classroom and in their learning. This became especially clear to me after one student commented in an evaluation that they would not want to come to office hours because they felt “othered.” After receiving this comment, I made additional efforts to be inclusive, and attended a workshop on stereotyping in the classroom to ensure that all my students feel safe and included.

These three aspects of teaching are not unrelated. Critical thinking is enhanced when it is informed by different perspectives, and practicing critical thinking skills is more likely to lead to success in a supportive environment. Each, then, is necessary in teaching if the goal is to train students to be independent, creative, contributing members of their community, whether that is in linguistics or in another field, so that they can continue to discover knowledge on their own after our time together in class has ended.