



Teaching one-to-one

Ingrid Wisniewska offers some practical advice

One-to-one teaching is something that most teachers usually try at some point in their careers, whether as a side-job, or as a full-time alternative to group teaching. In this article, I will look at the differences between one-to-one teaching and group teaching and discuss some of the advantages and challenges for teachers.

What are the different settings for one-to-one teaching?

In contrast to group teaching, which is usually in a school setting or in the workplace, one-to-one teaching can often be done in your own home, in your student's home, or in another type of informal setting, such as a café or a library. One-to-one teaching is also popular in the workplace as it allows more flexibility for workers who don't have time to go to school or can't attend regular classes due to work and travel commitments.

Some language travel companies offer one-to-one teaching to students as part of a homestay or host family programme. Students stay with the host (usually a qualified teacher), attend group classes in the mornings, and have extra one-to-one language lessons in the afternoons or evenings.

One-to-one teaching is also popular online, whether through online language schools, or on an individual basis, and there are many websites where you can offer one-to-one online English lessons using Skype, or other video chat software.

What are the advantages?

One practical advantage (for both students and teachers) is flexibility. Dates and times of lessons can be adjusted to suit individual schedules. The informality of one-to-one lessons is also an advantage as it can be less stressful than group teaching and often less time-consuming with regard to lesson planning and homework marking.

In terms of teaching methodology, you have the opportunity to get to know your student and create lessons that are suited to their individual needs and preferences. You can collaborate more, encouraging the student to take an active role in their learning and become more self-directed. You can also be more flexible by responding to language points as they come up, even though they weren't necessarily in your lesson plan. It's also fun and easy to arrange *field trip* lessons by going shopping together, or visiting a museum or library or in the case of online teaching, visiting a website.

In these kinds of settings, students can build their confidence quite quickly, often resulting in rapid progress over the first few meetings. One of the most enjoyable aspects of one-to-one teaching is seeing how quickly language progress can be made through natural communication in an informal setting.

What are the disadvantages?

One practical disadvantage is that you may have to travel a lot from one lesson to another. In addition, some investment of time may be needed (especially at first) in advertising and finding students. Another practical problem can be when students cancel lessons unexpectedly, or don't show up. Access to print materials may also be restricted (a Smartphone or a laptop with Internet access is a big plus). In addition, one-to-one teachers usually work on their own and this means that they aren't able to exchange ideas with other teachers or engage in reflective professional talk that is such an important aspect of teacher development.



Group teaching offers many opportunities to vary the interaction style, such as pair work and group work. However, in one-to-one teaching, it is more of a challenge to find ways of keeping the lessons varied and interesting. In addition, many teachers say that one-to-one lessons are exhausting because you are constantly interacting with your student. Another challenge is maintaining motivation. After initial progress over the first few lessons, students may feel that they have reached a plateau. Their progress is less obvious to them because they don't have other students to compare themselves with.

Learner expectations are another important factor. Some students are reluctant to talk, while others love talking, but hate being corrected! The one-to-one teacher needs to draw out shy students and handle feedback sensitively. It can be difficult to establish realistic goals and there are sometimes personality clashes too.

Setting up as a private one-to-one teacher

If you are thinking of teaching one-to-one for the first time, it may be helpful to seek the advice of another experienced teacher and if possible, ask if you can observe one of their lessons. This will help to give you an idea of how to adapt your teaching style to this new context.

Next, think about how you are going to advertise and find students. Research suitable places to advertise, for example: notice boards in universities, language schools, libraries, cultural centres or on the Internet. You may want to design a flyer, a poster or a bookmark; create a webpage and post testimonials from students you have worked with; post a video on YouTube where you talk about yourself and your style of teaching or post part of an example lesson that you can reference in your advertising materials.

If possible, assemble a collection of easily portable cards, dice, pictures, photos, realia (such as maps, timetables, menus) and useful websites on your laptop or phone that can help to provide variety to your lessons. Create a system for keeping records of your lessons. Keeping records of students' interests, goals and personal information will also help you choose appropriate materials and plan lessons.

Is one-to-one right for you?

When thinking about whether one-to-one teaching is right for you, you may want to consider some of these questions:

- Do you have access to a number of ways to market/advertise your lessons and find students?
- Do you have a meeting place that is easily accessible and where you can teach quietly and without interruption?
- Do you have a variety of tools for evaluating your students' needs and goals so that you can create a personal learning plan with them?
- Do you have the flexibility to adjust your teaching style to suit the needs and expectations of your learner?
- Do you have a range of teaching aids and activities to vary the pace and provide variety to lessons?
- Are you organized enough to keep careful records of your lessons and of each student's progress to help students stay motivated?

Conclusion

One-to-one teaching has many advantages for both teacher and student. It does, however, require a slightly different mindset compared with group teaching. In the next article, I will discuss some practical tips for making sure your one-to-one lessons are a success.