

Pre-reading 2 for coaches

This is the second of two pre-readings ahead of the introductory training session for coaches on [date]. It aims to explain how the coaching approach works in a little more detail.

How long? Allow 20-30 minutes for this pre-reading.

1. What is the aim of the coaching?

The aim of the coaching is to help the learner become a more effective self-directed language learner, able to take more effective advantage of the language-learning opportunities available to them.

What are these 'language-learning opportunities'?

Certainly these opportunities include any formal language instruction available to the learner. Perhaps more importantly, though, they also include all the informal language-learning opportunities that living in an English-speaking environment affords. These informal opportunities cover everything from free newspapers to shopping, from accessing public services to interactions at work – in other words, all the communicative opportunities arising from the activities of daily life.

To take advantage of these opportunities, the learner needs first to recognise them as learning opportunities and then to make constructive use of them. This requires

- Some basic understanding of how language learning works in general
- Confidence
- Effective personal learning strategies.

How language learning works

We benefit from recognising that, as language learners, we need

- Exposure to how that language is really used, in both its spoken and its written forms
- Opportunity to interact in the language (orally and in writing)
- To notice (i.e. pay attention to) the form of the language, including pronunciation forms
- Effective personal learning strategies
- Persistence (because language learning takes years)

Confidence

Confidence is widely acknowledged as an important factor in all learning. In relation to language learning, this obviously includes having the confidence to interact with other people in English, particularly when you are likely to make mistakes and look/feel foolish. Less obviously, but quite as importantly, it also includes having the confidence to take responsibility for your own learning (rather than shifting that responsibility onto e.g. a teacher) and having the confidence to persist, especially in the face of difficulty.

Effective personal learning strategies

Most effective language learners are effective partly because they have an aptitude for language learning – i.e. they enjoy interacting and they have a 'good ear' – and partly because they develop effective personal learning strategies, e.g. finding opportunities to interact in English, creating studying routines, identifying useful resources and sources of help.

VIP* – Be careful not to confuse teaching with learning

Language teaching and language learning are two very different things, as are language teaching strategies and language learning strategies.

Language teaching offers instruction, i.e. it aims to transmit understanding of how the language works (knowledge) and the ability to use the language (skills) from the teacher to the learner. Language coaching aims to help learners develop their own ability to learn the language.

In short, teaching is about instruction, coaching is about learning – two very different things!

**Very important point!*

Three coaching objectives

As a language coach you have three basic objectives:

1. Build the learner's confidence
2. Help the learner reflect (i.e. become more aware) in order to recognise learning opportunities and resources, and to develop (more) effective personal learning strategies
3. Help the learner take full responsibility for their learning.

2. How does the coaching work?

The coaching combines a well-known and very straightforward coaching approach known as the GROW model with the concept of a time-limited, self-directed learning project.

The coach uses the GROW model to support the learner undertake a 12-week, self-directed learning project. (Note that the learner carries out this learning project outside of the coaching sessions.) The learning project provides a vehicle for coach and learner to focus on the coaching objectives (building confidence, developing personal learning strategies and learner responsibility).

What is the GROW model of coaching?

GROW stands for Goal, Reality, Obstacles and/or Options, Way forward or Will. The GROW model (or process) was developed in the UK and used extensively in corporate coaching in the late 1980s and 90s. The table (adapted from Wikipedia) below presents one view of the stages.

G	<i>Goal</i>	The <i>Goal</i> is the end point, where the client wants to be. The goal has to be defined in such a way that it is very clear to the client when they have achieved it.
R	<i>Reality</i>	The current <i>Reality</i> is where the client is now. What are the issues, the challenges, how far are they away from their goal?
O	<i>Obstacles</i>	What <i>Obstacles</i> are stopping the client getting to where they want to go?
	<i>Options</i>	Once <i>Obstacles</i> have been identified, the client needs to find ways of dealing with them if they are to make progress. These are the <i>Options</i> .
W	<i>Way forward / Will</i>	The options then need to be converted into action steps which will take the client to their goal. These are the <i>Way forward</i> . Will = commitment, i.e. taking responsibility

For more about the GROW model, see Whitmore, J. (2002), *Coaching for performance (Third edition)*. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

Also, watch this short video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6f3X2PEsV-Q>

Coaching

to support self-directed learning

The diagrams in the *Coach handbook* show you how we have adapted the GROW model to support language learning.

Being non-directive

The less directive you are, the more likely the learner is to take responsibility for their own learning.

Helping someone to solve their own problems

Non-directive

Listening to understand

Reflecting

Paraphrasing

Summarising

Asking for information

Asking for clarification

Challenging the learner

Making suggestions

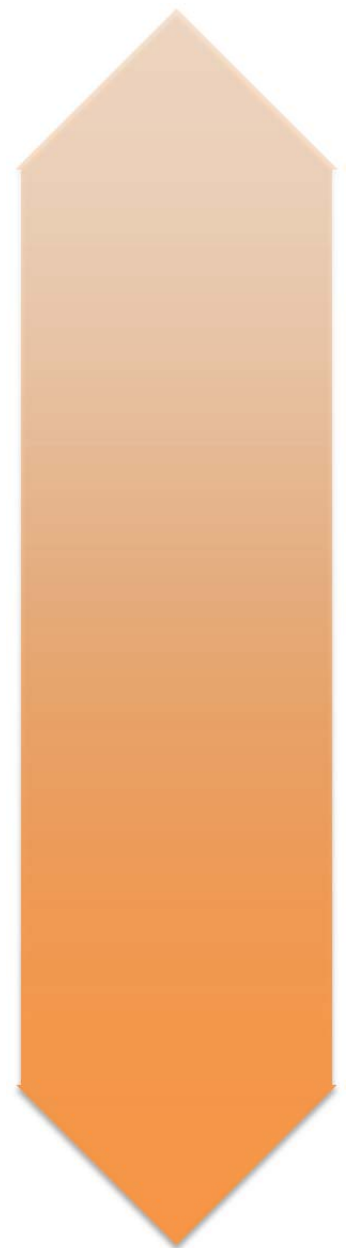
Giving feedback

Offering guidance

Giving advice

Instructing

Directing



Directive

Solving someone's problems for them

Diagram adapted from
Introduction to Coaching Learning
and Skills Improvement Service
(LSIS) 2009

For more on the mechanics of coaching, see the *Coach handbook*.

From 'My plan' to a learning project

The coach starts by finding out

- What the learner's life plan is / current life goals are
- Why they want to improve their English
- How they think improving their English will help them achieve their life plan / goals

From the learner's larger 'life plan', the coach helps them develop a self-directed English language 'learning project' that is realistically achievable with the lifetime of the learner's coaching programme.

The coach does this by helping the learner to identify an achievable goal for their learning project and then a series of actions to achieve their learning project goal.

Alongside this action-planning, the coach encourages the learner to identify resources (human and material) and strategies; also potential problems and possible solutions.

The learner then goes off and undertakes their planned actions outside of the coaching sessions.

Each session, the coach helps the learner to reflect on the progress of their learning project – revising their goal and their action plan accordingly.

In this way, the coach provides encouragement and (non-directive) feedback, helping to motivate the learner, build the learner's confidence, develop their own strategies, persist in the face of difficulty and so become better able to take responsibility for their own language learning.

Tip

Your aim is to help the learner develop effective personal learning strategies. It is worth encouraging the learner to tell you as much as possible about their experience as a learner, generally and specific to learning languages (English and any other languages). By discussing what has worked well for the learner in the past, and what has not worked well, you and your learner will develop a better sense of what strategies are likely to work well for the learner going forward.

Remember: Your aim is help the learner develop their own strategies. Resist the temptation to give them your strategies!

Your learning project too

Treat the coaching as a learning project for yourself as well. Coaching is simple enough in theory, less so in practice. Like anything worth doing, it takes a while to get the hang of it!

Be reassured though, learners in our previous pilots really valued their coaching – even when their coaches felt they (the coaches) were floundering.