

# One-to-One Teaching

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By "one-to-one teaching" we mean the instruction that takes place between one teacher and one student. Sometimes it happens in the context of an independent study or tutorial; more often it happens during office hours in those short intervals when the teacher tries to clarify a confusing concept, offers advice, or just listens. Listed below are some suggestions for maximizing the potential of this situation when certain student responses jeopardize its outcome.

## *The student just doesn't get it.*

- Back off - talk about something else for a couple of minutes. It's possible to overexplain an idea or process.
- Think of an example or ask the student for one to see if the concept is understood.
- Direct the student to a written description or solution.
- Involve someone else (maybe another student) who may be able to connect with the student more effectively than you
- Don't give up or attribute blame.

## *The student arrives unprepared.*

- Be certain the student has explicit instructions on what to prepare. e.g. reading, answers to study questions, preliminary problems to solve.
- Be honest and open in your assessment of the situation if it occurs.
- Don't chew out the student and then proceed to provide all the answers.
- If the situation repeats itself terminate the session and have the student reschedule after the necessary preparation.

## *The student has complaints within your jurisdiction.*

- Listen carefully.
- Avoid defensive responses.
- If you don't plan to change whatever the student finds objectionable, calmly explain why you've chosen a particular policy or practice and why you intend to continue using it.

## *The student has complaints not within your jurisdiction.*

- Offer suggestions of a person or place more appropriate for the complaint.
- Help put the complaint in perspective: "Is the fact that this course meets at 8 am. the only reason you're failing?"

*The student wishes to discuss a personal or emotional problem.*

- Make sure the student understands your qualifications: you're not a professional counselor.
- Know what psychological resources and services are available at your institution.
- If you decide to let the student proceed, curtail the conversation if the problem is beyond your experience. Don't give advice you're not qualified to offer.
- Remember: You're the student's teacher first, friend or counselor after that.

*The student finds the one-to-one contact with you intimidating.*

- Be friendly, smile.
- Meet with the student around a table or in some neutral location, rather than across your desk.
- Talk less and listen more.
- Ask questions, wait for answers, and respond when they're given. Offer criticism gently, especially in the beginning.

*The student arrives late or not at all.*

- Be sure you're present and on time at all scheduled meetings.
- End the meeting at the scheduled time: don't go overtime to compensate for a late arrival. If you need more time, schedule an additional meeting.
- Talk about why arriving late is troublesome.
- Reschedule missed meetings at your convenience.

*The student won 't leave.*

- End the meeting in an obvious manner: "We've covered all the topics I wanted to discuss."
- Set up meetings for a prescribed amount of time: "We'll meet once a week for an hour" - and stick to these times.
- Interrupt: "Sorry. I can give you five more minutes and then I've got to prepare for my next class."

*The student doesn't seem to be gaining new insights, but just keeps repeating the old ones.*

- Give material that presents alternative insights and seek student response to it.
- Pose hypothetical counterpoint: "I had a student once who believed... What would you say to that?"
- Occasionally invite others to join your discussions with the student.

*Meeting with students one-to-one can be very effective and rewarding - or frustrating and unproductive. Policies, preparation, and a positive attitude can make a big difference.*