

Introduction

Learning One-to-One is for anyone involved in teaching English or another language to individual students. Teaching an individual student offers many exciting opportunities and challenges, and this book sets out to explore how to make the most of the benefits and suggest some creative ways of meeting the challenges.

What is learning one-to-one?

There are as many types of one-to-one lessons as there are different teachers and learners, so it is difficult, if not impossible, to describe a typical one-to-one lesson. The one-to-one lesson is a unique combination of the expectations and ambitions of a teacher and a student who meet for the joint purpose of facilitating the student's language learning.

One-to-one lessons can take place in a wide variety of settings – at work, at home, in a café or restaurant, a public library, a park – and at any time of day. In fact, it is the flexibility of one-to-one learning that makes it an attractive option for people who have non-routine schedules or who are unable to commit to classes at the same time each week. Distance learning via the internet makes this flexibility even more attractive – students can log on whenever they have an hour or so of free time and talk to their teacher online.

The nature of the one-to-one relationship can also vary considerably. You might teach for a language school that offers one-to-one lessons, either in the school or in the student's workplace. You may be giving private lessons in addition to your normal teaching job. You may be tutoring school students after school, or helping adult students with work or study skills.

The content of your lessons will also depend on the context and the needs of your student. Your lessons might focus on English for conversation, for business, for travel or for exams. They may concentrate mainly on language skills, or on grammar or pronunciation. Alternatively, they may be designed to help with a very specific task such as passing an interview exam, or giving a presentation.

Whatever your teaching context, working with individual students can be a very rewarding experience, offering many learning opportunities for both you and your student.

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What are the advantages of one-to-one?

Why do students choose one-to-one?

- ‘Learning one-to-one gives me the opportunity to learn at my own pace.’
- ‘I know that I learn best by participating actively in a conversation with someone who speaks the language really well.’
- ‘I was nervous about speaking in front of a class of students, and learning one-to-one gives me a chance to gain more confidence.’
- ‘I’m too busy to go to classes every week. And when you miss one lesson, you can’t catch up. I need to schedule lessons whenever I have free time.’

For the student, there are many perceived advantages to one-to-one learning. They are in a relaxed and usually informal environment, where they have to interact and communicate in the target language and where they can develop a friendly and positive personal relationship with the teacher. This can help to reduce anxiety about making mistakes. They can receive immediate feedback on their language performance, which can be very motivating. Not only do they have the undivided attention of the teacher, they can also select the materials and topics they are interested in, studying at their own level and pace. They can also learn to direct their own learning path and become more skilled at independent learning strategies.

For the teacher, there are also numerous advantages to one-to-one. There is a more natural flow of communication as you engage in authentic conversation or carry out real-life tasks together. The friendly and informal relationship can be less demanding than managing a group of students in a classroom. You can get to know your student better and build up a clearer profile of their language needs. As you learn more about your student, you can weave more of their personal information into language practice activities to make them more meaningful. You can closely monitor your student’s responses during the lesson, which will help you fine-tune your lessons to their language level. Lessons can be more collaborative as you choose topics and materials together, and there are many opportunities to learn from your student’s knowledge and experience.


Box Introduction 1: Summary of advantages

(Please add more of your own.)

Advantages for the student	Advantages for the teacher
There is a relaxed and informal learning environment, which may be less stressful than learning in a group.	There is a more natural flow of communication.
You can develop a positive personal relationship with your teacher.	You can get to know your student better and understand their language needs.
You can get immediate feedback from your teacher.	You can monitor your student's understanding more closely.
You can select materials and topics that are relevant to you.	You can personalize your language materials to make them more meaningful for your student.
You can study at your own level and pace.	You can tailor your lessons to the language level of your student.
You can direct your own learning path and become more independent.	You can collaborate with your student on designing lessons and choosing materials.

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What are the challenges of one-to-one?

What problems do students have with one-to-one?

- 'My teacher corrects every sentence I say and it makes me nervous.'
- 'I don't always understand the grammar explanations.'
- 'I'm not good at speaking . . .'
- 'My teacher always asks me to think of next week's topic, but I think she can decide, I don't mind what we study.'

The challenges of learning one-to-one for the student are the mirror image of its advantages. Despite the friendly and informal atmosphere, the student is constantly required to participate, which can be stressful for some students. There is no opportunity to follow along by seeing what others are doing or to compare progress with other students, which can result in loss of motivation. There is also less variety in the interaction. Some students might


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feel more self-conscious about making mistakes as their errors may seem to be under the spotlight. Although they are getting more attention from the teacher, overemphasis on correcting errors can be discouraging. In addition, students who choose one-to-one lessons often do so because of busy schedules and work commitments. This means that lessons can sometimes occur at irregular intervals of time and this can make it difficult to feel a sense of progress.

For the teacher, the challenges are also significant. As mentioned above, interacting one-to-one with the same person for an hour or more can be very tiring. You cannot take advantage of group or pair work to stop talking for a while and reflect on how to proceed next. Materials may seem to get covered more quickly as a result. It can be difficult to provide variety in the lessons. In a classroom, you might alternate speaking activities with reading or writing, but feel more reluctant to do so in a one-to-one setting. Differences between teacher and student expectations can also become magnified. There may be a tendency to feel you have to converse all the time, for example, or that you are expected to correct all of your student's errors.

From a practical point of view, it can be a problem when lessons are cancelled by the student at the last minute. It can also be difficult, if you are travelling from place to place, to take all the materials that you might have to hand in a classroom setting. Finally, one-to-one teachers often work alone and may therefore not have the opportunity to seek advice from, or share experiences with, their colleagues.

The organization of this book

The book is divided into two parts: the first gives an overview of the areas of methodology that are most relevant to one-to-one teaching, and the second consists of activities for you to use in your lessons. A symbol  appears alongside all photocopyable materials that are available as PDFs on the CD-ROM accompanying this book.

Part 1 has five chapters. *Chapter 1* discusses the choices available with regard to teaching tools, the physical location and set-up, and the use of non-verbal communication. *Chapter 2* outlines the roles you can emphasize in your interaction with the learner. In *Chapter 3*, there are some suggestions for designing your course and planning your lessons. *Chapter 4* offers some ideas for selecting and adapting published materials. *Chapter 5* suggests some ways to facilitate your own professional development.



Box Introduction 2: Summary of challenges

(Please add more of your own.)

Challenges for the student	Challenges for the teacher
You have to participate constantly, which can be tiring and stressful.	There is no 'down' time to plan the next step of your lesson.
You cannot compare your progress with other students.	Materials can seem to get covered more quickly.
There is less variety of interaction.	It is more difficult to provide variety and can be difficult to maintain motivation.
You may feel more self-conscious about making mistakes.	You can feel pressured to teach according to your student's expectations.
Your expectations of the lesson may be very different from your teacher's.	Differences in expectations can become magnified.
Lessons can be at irregular intervals due to outside demands.	Lessons can be cancelled at short notice.
	You do not always have access to the materials you need.
	You do not always have the opportunity to talk with colleagues.

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Part 2 also has five chapters. These are organized according to the five teacher roles described in *Chapter 2*: conversation partner, observer and listener, feedback provider, mentor and guide, and learner. Each chapter contains activities that illustrate how you can choose to emphasize each respective role and how that role can be integrated into your lessons so that they are enjoyable and rewarding for you and your student.

PART I Basic principles

1 Getting started

Reflection

Think back to your last experience of teaching one-to-one. Visualize the setting: the room, the furniture, the window, the light, the background, the chair you were sitting in, any background noises. How were you sitting? In a relaxed or a formal way, facing your student or sitting at an angle? Take a moment to close your eyes and visualize the scene. Keep it in your mind's eye as you read the following sections.

Before starting to think about the content of your lessons, it is a good idea to consider some very general aspects of one-to-one teaching. These general aspects include an awareness of the location and physical set-up of your study area, what kinds of teaching tools to select, the importance of establishing some basic ground rules and how to use non-verbal communication to maximum benefit. This chapter looks at each of these general aspects and their potential impact on your lessons, and suggests some ways to help you facilitate a positive learning atmosphere in your lessons.

Setting up a study area

If you are teaching in your own home, you can set up a study area that is a welcoming and pleasant learning environment. You may consider introducing materials and displays to create an engaging backdrop to learning. Posters, a simple noticeboard with frequently changing items, such as postcards, newspaper articles, photos and other realia, on the wall can all help to create an atmosphere that stimulates, motivates and supports the learning of English.