

TEACHER CREATURE PRESENTS

THE COFFEE MEETING

WHAT TO DO AND SAY WHEN YOU MEET
POTENTIAL NEW STUDENTS TO SHOW THAT
YOU'RE THE RIGHT TEACHER FOR THEM



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INTRO

Being a freelancer means you have two jobs

“



When you work for a language school and you walk into a new class you've only got one job: teach.

When a student emails you and you meet for the first time in a cafe, you have another job: sell.

And your second job doesn't end after the student starts buying lessons from you. He could, at any time, become too “busy” and decide to email another teacher.

In this guide you'll learn what I do and say during my first meeting – what I call “the coffee meeting” – with a new potential private student.

It's certainly not the only way to go about it; it's just what I do.

However, when I meet a student and go through these steps, he usually decides to buy 5, 10, or 20 lessons, he pays in advance, and then continues buying more.

So try things out, experiment, and share if you find something that works better.

Good luck getting more privates,

-Ryan

”

In Their Shoes

Let's start by thinking about the coffee meeting from your potential student's perspective.

Here are some emotions they're probably feeling:

- nervous about making mistakes in front of you
- nervous about not being able to understand you
- nervous about meeting someone new (especially someone from the internet)
- cautious/skeptical about you because of a bad previous teacher

And some thoughts they're probably thinking:

- Is this person a real teacher?
- Will he be like my last teacher?
- Will I make progress with him?
- Will I have to manage him or will he come on time and not cancel?

A lot of negative emotions and thoughts.

One of the reasons I think my plan for the coffee meeting works is because it eliminates these fears and answers these questions correctly.

It does this by showing the student:

1. You have a plan
2. You're organized
3. You're responsible and don't need to be managed
4. You know what he wants and how he feels
5. You can teach

THE COFFEE MEETING

Step-by-step

1-5 min.	EASY START <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “How are you?” • “Did you have any problems finding the café/my apartment/etc?” • “Where do you live in Prague?”
	Signal transition/beginning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Ok, let’s begin.” • Take out the New Student Questionnaire template
30 sec	OVERVIEW <p>“When I meet a new student I have some questions I need to ask. Then I’ll make a recommendation for the first month. Then you can ask me questions. Then we’ll have a short lesson. Then we’ll talk about my prices and schedule.”</p>
5-15 min	Questionnaire / needs analysis <p>“First, let’s talk about your English background. How long have you been studying?”</p>
1 min	Read it back <p>“Now I’m going to read you what I’ve written. Tell me if I forgot something or if something is wrong. So, you studied English in school, but now you feel like you’re forgetting it. Although you don’t need to speak at work, you’d like to keep practicing because you might need a job in the future where you’ll need English. You want to focus on...”</p>
1-5 min	Their turn <p>“Do you have any questions for me?”</p>
20+min	Sample lesson <p>“Ok, now let’s have a short lesson.”</p>
5-10 min	Business time <p>“And finally, let’s talk about our schedules and my prices.”</p>

THE COFFEE MEETING

Explaining the Sections

EASY START

Because the student is most likely feeling nervous and anxious, you can help him feel better by giving him the thoughts 'Maybe I *can* speak English' and 'This isn't so bad'.

You can do this at the very beginning by:

- Speaking slowly
- Never correcting
- Being relaxed (emotions are contagious)

OVERVIEW

Tell the student what's going to happen, how long it's going to take, and the purpose behind what you're doing. One reason is, it shows that you have a plan.

Another reason is that some people just like to know where things are going.

Questionnaire

Can you remember when a salesman (and I don't mean the kind of salesman in a shoe store) asked you what? And then shut up and listened? When everyone else is so busy talking about themselves and their own needs, when someone genuinely wants to know what you need, it has a tremendous effect on building trust and rapport.

Read it back

It's even rarer for a person to listen to you, which you demonstrate by repeating their words back to them. I also tell the student to interrupt me if something is incorrect or if there's something they'd like to add.

Their turn

A lot of times students say they don't have any questions. I think usually they want to know more, but culturally maybe it's seen as a little too forward. So to get them started you could ask them questions about yourself. For example, "Can you guess where I'm from by my accent?"

I don't know if there's a business advantage to this, but maybe it'll make them feel a little more comfortable with you if they feel they know you a little better.

Sample lesson

Showing is always better than telling. And if you can show your potential student that you can teach, then you don't need to talk about your degrees, method, experience, certificates, or lack of them.

Imagine you meet a student you'd really like to teach. During the coffee meeting you say you can teach and you tell him about your lessons. He then has another coffee meeting with another teacher who does what you only told him. Which teacher do you think he'll choose.

It's a little more time and effort that you won't be paid for, but there's a reason why free samples exist-they work.

An alternative is to just turn the interview into a lesson. Maybe there's not time for a full lesson or you feel you don't know the student's level or needs well enough to know what to prepare.

Even if I offer a sample lesson and they explicitly tell me they don't want one, I still turn the interview into a mini lesson so they can have a taste of what a lesson with me would be like.

A good time to start is after you're done asking your questions. In the "Their turn" section, when you ask them if they have any questions, also say that you're now going to start correcting them.

Don't jump on every mistake. But pick out something every minute or two or three and write it down and ask them to correct it themselves. Then as a bonus, right before they leave, review the corrections and new vocab.

Business time/set expectations

Discussing the business details at the end is the best because hopefully at this point you've communicated a lot of things to them, hopefully all good, and they're most likely to be agreeable to your outrageous terms and conditions.

Business details include your cancelation policy, your price, and if you choose set lessons, then the dates. The most important thing here is to put it in writing. This is not the time to get lazy. Type it up, explain it to them, ask if they have any questions, then give them a copy or email it to them, then make a note that you discussed it with them (or better, tick it off the check list). Almost inevitably, whenever I didn't do this, a situation came up where the student wanted to cancel late and I wanted to charge. The student had an excuse, which he claimed was an exception but which we discussed. But since I had no record I couldn't stick by it and ended up letting the late cancelation slide and not getting paid.

1. Cancellations policy
2. Payment
3. Days and times

Notebook

Homework: Review daily

Typical lesson structure

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| a) warm-up conversation | d) main lesson (reading, text book, or whatever) |
| b) Review | e) wrap up: homework for next time, time for next lesson |
| c) checking homework | f) review: new words and grammar from the lesson |

SAMPLE LESSONS

Any of the lessons below can also be used as a first, second, or third lesson.

SAMPLE LESSON 1

The Interview

This is the sample lesson I use the most.

Why I like it:

- **It's flexible.** Running out of time? Skip a few of the questions and make it shorter
- **It's a sampler.** The student sees you can correct his pronunciation, teach some vocab, and correct their grammar.
- **Make it unique.** Take a few minutes to cut and paste some of the questions and answers from the links below, print it out, and you'll be.... This is better than just making a photo copy from a book because you look like you're the original source of the material, rather than just another teacher who uses the same text book. Your material is unique, and your value is higher.

Overview	"First, you're going to..."
Reading	They read, you correct their pronunciation
Vocab	Ask if they have any questions about vocab, ask them what specific words mean
Speaking	They answer the same questions about themselves
Correction	Show them their mistakes which you were writing down while they were speaking
Practice	Pick one or two of their mistakes, explain the rule (or get them to), and then drill it

Some places to find interviews:

1. <http://jobsearch.about.com/od/interviewquestionsanswers/a/interviewquest.htm>
2. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/business/getthatjob/unit4interview/page3.shtml>
3. "Business Spotlight" – online but not free (a lot of language schools have subscriptions though...)

SAMPLE LESSON 2

Gap Fill

One of the companies I teach at employs a lot of scientists and they can talk all day about a lot of technical stuff that's way over my head. I remember one student, who had been studying English for years and years, one day was telling me about a presentation she gave at an international conference. She was going on and on, in perfect English, about oxidative incineration or bioremediation or something like that. But then when the subject changed to the weather, she said, "There was cold."

How is that possible?! (Well, I've got some suggestions for the school system, but that's another topic.) Obviously, this student had a gap in her knowledge. In school, she should have mastered basic words and phrases and conversation topics before moving on to scientific English. But she didn't. And I've seen this again and again with my students.

They tell me they want legal English, but they don't know how to say big numbers.

They want business English, but they're still speaking Czenglish and have no idea.

The gap fill test I made represents (see "Gap Fill Template"), in my opinion, what are the basics in English. If they've been studying for more than a few years, I believe they should already know this stuff. And if they haven't studied it before, then it's a good place to start.

Give the test	Do as much of it as you can orally
Instant Lesson	Pick one grammar or vocab mistake they made and give a mini-lesson on the fly. As much as possible, rather than just explaining, ask questions which lead the student to discover the answer.
Practice	Drill the corrected mistake(s)

SAMPLE LESSON 3

Teach How To Learn

Just because your student is a student doesn't mean he knows how to be a good student.

If he's like a lot of my student he:

- Doesn't want to take notes/writes down as little info as possible
- Doesn't look at his notes or book between lesson
- Does his homework ten minutes before the lesson
- Forgets his notes at home/at the office
- Forgets that he had homework
- Uses words like 'never' 'difficult' 'impossible' and words like 'lazy' and 'stupid' to describe himself

All these things make it a lot more difficult for you to do your job and for the student to make progress.

But the good thing about this list – unlike a talent for languages – is that they're all under your students' control. They're just bad habits which can be replaced by positive ones.

Furthermore, when you teach a student how to learn, you're getting them to take responsibility. Rather than holding on to the 'put your English in me' attitude a lot of students have, if he knows how to teach himself, he should realize he is the one who is accountable for his progress.

Overview	"First, you're going to..."
Reading	They read, you correct their pronunciation
Vocab	Ask if they have any questions about vocab, ask them what specific words mean
Speaking	Ask them specific questions about the text. Next, ask them how they could use the information to improve their English. (Write down their mistakes.)
Correction	Show them their mistakes. Ask them to correct them.
Practice	Pick one or two of their mistakes, explain the rule (or get them to), and then drill it

SAMPLE LESSON 3

Teach How To Learn

Here are some topics and links to articles. You'll probably want to cut out some sections to make them shorter, or rewrite sections/replace words to make them easier.

The Curve of forgetting

- <http://ol.scc.spokane.edu/jroth/Courses/English%2094-study%20skills/MASTER%20DOCS%20and%20TESTS/Curve%20of%20Forgetting.htm>
- <http://uwaterloo.ca/counselling-services/curve-forgetting>
- <http://sidsavara.com/personal-productivity/the-ebbinghaus-curve-of-forgetting>

Prioritizing (I recommend cutting and pasting from "Efficiency.")

- <http://www.fourhourworkweek.com/blog/2009/01/20/learning-language/#more-1077>

Motivation (same article, but cut and paste from "Adherence.")

- <http://www.fourhourworkweek.com/blog/2009/01/20/learning-language/#more-1077>

FINAL NOTE

Screening

I've focused a lot here on how to win over potential students, but sometimes you meet a student who, well, you would just rather not see again.

Sometimes people's personalities just don't fit together well. It's not a good match.

In my experience, whenever I've recognized this, but accepted the student and started having lessons, it never lasted long.

You don't have to like or want to teach everyone. However, when you're just starting out and need to fill the hours, sometimes you can't be too picky. But since your time is limited, you want to be in a position where you attract and can pick only the best students, whatever that means for you, the most dedicated, the most interesting, or the ones willing to pay the most.

There are also business reasons to consider. If a student asks for Tuesday at 6pm, but then cancels in advance 50% of the time, that's a lot of money you're losing.

Some reasons why I've fired or not accepted students:

- cancelling in advance too often
- smelling (as in bad)
- negotiating too hard or wanting to renegotiate
- requiring me to travel too far