

Different types of one-to-one learner

Who is my student? Well, in our years of one-to-one teaching, we have found that our students fall broadly into 4 different categories. Here are the different types we have found:

The dynamic business person



The 'too busy' business person



The young learner



The recreational student



Let's now look at each learner in turn.

The dynamic business person

This student is often full of energy and enthusiastic for their lessons - highly organised and highly motivated.

Quite often this student will be in business and will be a high flyer. They may be in a senior position or even the boss of their own company. So this category of student fits with the main students we used to teach, and the type of student Wilberg writes about in 'One to One'.



They can be a real pleasure to have a conversation with, be full of stimulating ideas and well versed in general knowledge - not just their area of business or speciality. They will take an interest in current affairs and you'll find it quite easy to talk to them.

Quite often you will find that this student knows what they want from their lessons. They may be target driven and very focused, attend lessons regularly and usually punctual. Also you will find that when they arrive they are ready to learn – not beset by the day's problems or the challenges of meetings, deadlines and business issues. Or if they are, then they are generally able to put them to one side for their English lesson.

Our Needs Analysis becomes much easier with this type of student. The goal or focus is readily apparent and we can see them working towards it. Initially motivation isn't an issue and quite often initial lessons go well, with our student appearing to be learning and enjoying their lessons.

But we have found that the challenges with this student sometimes come later on. The dynamic between teacher and student begins to change over time. Lessons are still enjoyable – after all, isn't it great to have this enthusiastic student in front of you, rather than that group of bored teenagers you are used to teaching? But while lessons can seem productive, there is a danger here. In this situation we have seen that the roles can become reversed, with the student starting to lead the agenda for the lesson topics. This happens especially when the student is looking for a greater degree of fluency practice.

So it is possible that you both become carried away with the topic of conversation formed by the local news report you heard on the radio on the way to the lesson. You find that the quick chatty warmer you had in mind suddenly seems to go on and on. At the end of the lesson, when you look back at your plan, you realise that it has been ignored and politely put to one side.

From time to time, it is good to relax and break away from the standard format – to have a 'speaking lesson' where both student and teacher enjoy in conversation about a current issue or topic. But even in these 'speaking lessons' you need to remember that you are still the teacher and your job in the classroom is a specific one. So when you are having a predominantly speaking lesson, remember to note down any new language, pronunciation difficulties or tenses/word order problems that you find as you progress.

Top Tip – break out from the standard format occasionally

Then make sure you finish the conversation part of the lesson 10 minutes before the end so you can go over some of these items again. Perhaps put these on the board to draw attention to them. The review stage is very important as it lets the student know that you have found areas for

them to work on (which is partly what you are being paid to do) and also it gives you a focus for subsequent lesson revision.

If you don't do this, then no matter how much you think you are getting along with your student, or how well the lesson seems to be going, without a focus you aren't teaching anything. They might as well be chatting in English to someone in the street.

If your lessons become predominantly 'chat', you risk losing focus and failing to teach anything. Ultimately it may be pleasurable for you and your student, but where is the learning? Teachers who have long term students will recognise this problem immediately. We do not have an endless source of material in our files and there are only so many times you can study the present perfect simple.

Here is a case in point.

In **AUDIO FILE 4**, listen to William Bradridge talk about Mr E, one of his more dynamic students. Mr E didn't like the course book the school had recommended and preferred to chat about his travels, wife, girlfriend and football. You'll discover the challenges faced and how the group teaching him were able to negotiate a way back to the lesson plan and course structure.



http://global-english.podomatic.com/entry/2008-07-15T04_04_23-07_00

So while our dynamic business person can be a pleasure to teach, it is not always so easy when familiarity sets in. But if you recognise some of the potential pitfalls and can ensure that learning is demonstrated, you can have extremely successful learning episodes with this type of student.

The 'too busy' business student

If our first student was the dream in terms of an enjoyable student to teach, then this student will have you wondering what you are doing in the classroom at all. Let's set the scene, shall we?



You've battled the rush hour traffic to get to class on time for your lesson. Your plan, realia and materials have all been prepared and what's more you have remembered to bring them with you. The tape/CD player is cued, or the link to that amusing YouTube video you found last night – a great way into the theme of your lesson - is set up and ready to go on the PC. You're all ready for your student.

But where are they?

Oh no, they are late again. You sit and twiddle your thumbs, making mental notes about how you will amend the plan to take the shortened time frame into consideration.

10 minutes passes. Still no student. (How long do you wait before going to find out where they are?) Then, in they amble, with a sheepish grin and an apology. You welcome them and start the lesson.

2 minutes later the phone rings – 'Sorry, I have to take this call...'

This is the student you struggled to get out of bed for. This is the person that makes you ask the question 'why did I bother?' You think back to the reasons you went into TEFL – to see a bit of the world, an adventure, a career change...and you wonder about another career change, out of one-to-one teaching. At least with a group class you know you'll have someone to teach!

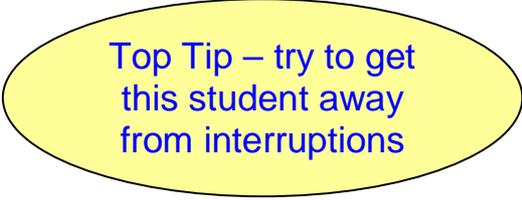
With the overly busy student lessons can be laborious, often disrupted by outside influences. The phone, the fax, the mobile, the voice and text message are just a few of the daily lesson interruptions we have had to deal with. Your plan has to be readjusted – sometimes abandoned. As teachers we can also become demotivated, because we see very little learning progress being made. After all, if they are too busy to take much interest in their lessons, then why should we?

Ultimately, some teachers find that it gets harder to stay professional in this situation. The risk is that we begin to plan for a failed lesson, or come to expect that we will not be able meet our teaching aims. Quite often our student starts out with good intentions – they want to be there or they are being paid to be there. Otherwise the course would never commence. But the practicalities of their busy lives, coupled with the difficulty in going back into a learning environment - perhaps after some time away from the classroom - can lead to the type of situation we see above.

So how should we look to change the situation with our 'too busy' student?

Well, one way is to work with the student to design a flexible work schedule, which allows them to study in a way that fits in with their lifestyle. This may involve changing the time of the lessons, or the days on which lessons are held. So if Monday mornings are a busy time for our student, it seems pointless scheduling the lesson for 09:30 AM. You could ask your student whether they have a regular break during the day, in which they could fit a lesson. Alternatively, are they

available in the evening, or possibly on a Saturday morning? Another option might be to have lessons less regularly but more intensively, before meeting a customer, for example. They are more likely to be motivated to achieve at this time as they will see that they will need their English.



Top Tip – try to get
this student away
from interruptions

Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, try to get the student out of the office, or the environment which is causing the interruption. If you have to teach the student in their workplace, try to arrange lessons in a meeting room without a phone. Or better still, take the student away from the workplace, perhaps to a restaurant, café, or other quiet location where you can have your English lesson. If you can get the student to come to your place of work then so much the better! It is probably unrealistic to expect your student to turn off their mobile phone during lessons, but you can always try!

However, see if you can limit the number of interruptions, or use the interruption as a way of developing your class. It is obviously quite relevant to your student, so perhaps they might like to talk about it in English. If it is a call from a customer and the student is happy to speak about it, use it as a base to develop how they deal with their customers in general, or the situation with this customer in particular.

Finally, try to make your lessons as interesting as possible. You've got to capture their imagination. If you can get them enthused so that they want to come and learn with you, then you stand a greater chance of success. So build your lessons around their interests and engage them with subjects that are going to stimulate them as well as help them to learn.

You'll see more on these types of learner, together with how we would approach a younger learner or a recreational student in all of our 1-2-1 courses.