



Coaching

«For me, coaching means working with someone to find out where they want to go and how they can go there and accompanying them along the way. The constantly changing destinations and paths on the road open up a creative universe» (Honegger, 2017, S. 37).

What is coaching in higher education?

In the context of higher education, coaching refers to a proactive, supportive relationship aimed at enhancing student learning and success. Academic coaching involves the instructor focusing on the development of the student's skills and knowledge through personalized guidance and feedback. This approach emphasizes the importance of building a strong, engaged relationship between the instructor and student. The primary goals of academic coaching include improving increasing academic achievement, student retention, and fostering a deeper connection to the educational material. This method is particularly effective in identifying and supporting struggling students early on, thereby facilitating their progress and helping them to achieve positive academic outcomes (Barkley, 2011).



Why should I coach my students?

Coaching of students opens new fields of action in teaching. With the changes in higher education towards more competency-based learning and teaching formats such as guided self-study, it is important for lecturers to be able to assume their role as guides and advisors. Understanding and applying coaching techniques enable them to respond more effectively to the individual needs and learning goals of students, ultimately leading to enhanced student engagement, improved academic performance, increased motivation and confidence, and the development of essential life skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and self-reflection (see Thomann et al., 2017).



Key principles of coaching

- **Building Trust and Rapport:** Central to coaching is the establishment of trust and rapport between instructors and students. Trust creates a safe and supportive environment where students feel comfortable expressing themselves, sharing challenges, and exploring new ideas. By building strong relationships based on mutual respect and empathy, instructors can better understand students' needs, motivations, and learning preferences, laying the groundwork for meaningful coaching interactions.
- **Effective communication** lies at the heart of successful coaching relationships. Instructors must employ active listening, empathy, and clarity to ensure clear understanding and alignment of goals between themselves and their students. By asking open-ended questions, paraphrasing, and providing constructive feedback, instructors can facilitate productive discussions, promote self-awareness, and empower students to take ownership of their learning journey.
- **Goal setting and action planning** are fundamental components of coaching that empower students to define their aspirations, identify obstacles, and chart a path toward success. Instructors assist students in setting specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals tailored to their individual needs and circumstances. Through collaborative action planning, students develop strategies, milestones, and accountability mechanisms to track progress, overcome challenges, and celebrate achievements along the way.

(See Honegger, 2017)

Coaching Techniques and Formats

GROW Model (Goal, Reality, Options, Will)

The GROW model is a widely recognized framework for coaching that guides students through a structured process of goal setting and action planning. It consists of four key stages.



Goal: In this stage, instructors work with students to clarify their objectives and aspirations, ensuring that goals are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART).



Reality: Students assess their current situation, identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats relevant to their goals. This stage promotes self-awareness and a realistic understanding of the challenges and resources available.



Options: Students explore various strategies, solutions, and alternatives to achieve their goals. Instructors encourage creative thinking, brainstorming, and considering diverse perspectives to expand students' options and possibilities.



Will: In the final stage, students commit to specific actions and develop a concrete plan of execution. Instructors provide support, encouragement, and accountability to help students stay focused and motivated to follow through on their commitments.

(Leach, 2020)

Ten Phases of Coaching in Higher Education

The *Ten Phases of Coaching in Higher Education framework* by Thomann et al. (2017) outlines a structured approach to coaching interactions between students and lecturers.



1. Occasion/Contact (Student and/or Lecturer)
 - Coaching takes place in an agreed didactic setting.
 - The lecturer becomes aware of a question/problem from the student or vice versa.



2. (Methodological) Clarification/Alignment (Lecturer)
 - Evaluation of whether coaching is the appropriate method.
 - Clarification of the lecturer's role and relationship to the person being counselled.



3. General Orientation, "Contract" (together)
 - Clarification of roles, resources, and expectations.
 - Agreement on goals, procedures, and framework conditions.



4. Exposition: Presentation of the Question or Problem (Student with Support from Lecturer)
 - The student tells their story and receives support.
 - Joint clarification of understanding and encouragement of self-reflection.



5. Diagnosis: Definition and Analysis of the Question/Problem (together)
 - Identification of main problems and decision on the definitive question.
 - Association of similar situations for better analysis.



6. Search and Evaluation of Solution Approaches (together)
 - Search for different solution paths and evaluation of strategies.
 - Consideration of previously used solution strategies.



7. Decision on Approach/Planning of the Approach (together)
 - Determination of the approach and planning.
 - Consideration of the learning steps to be mastered.



8. Agreement on Objectives (together)
 - Formulation of goals and clarification of goal control.
 - Agreement on further discussions and measures.



9. Conclusion/Evaluation (together)
 - Review and summary of the coaching process and outcomes.
 - Clarification regarding any methodological adjustments needed.
 - Farewell.



10. Reflection (Lecturer)
 - Content review of the counselling through notes and reflections.
 - Evaluation of one's own counselling behaviour.
 - Follow-up: Brief discussion after some time with student about effectiveness of coaching.



Tips to implement coaching in your teaching

Here is how you can effectively integrate coaching into their teaching:

- **Cultivate a Supportive Environment:** Foster a classroom atmosphere that encourages open communication, trust, and collaboration among students. Create a safe space where students feel comfortable expressing their ideas, asking questions, and seeking support.
- **Develop Active Listening Skills:** Practice active listening to understand students' perspectives, concerns, and learning needs. Pay attention to verbal and nonverbal cues, ask clarifying questions, and demonstrate empathy and understanding towards students' experiences.
- **Incorporate Coaching Techniques:** Integrate coaching techniques such as the GROW model or Ten Phases of Coaching in Higher Education by Thomann et al. and setting SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) goals into your teaching practice. Encourage students to reflect on their learning process, identify areas for improvement, and take proactive steps towards their academic goals.
- **Promote Self-Reflection and Goal Setting:** Encourage students to engage in self-reflection activities to assess their strengths, weaknesses, and learning progress. Guide them in setting meaningful goals that align with their academic aspirations and personal development objectives. Empower students to take ownership of their learning journey and develop strategies to overcome challenges and achieve success.
- **Establish a Coaching Culture:** Create opportunities for ongoing coaching and mentorship within your teaching environment. Encourage peer coaching, collaborative learning communities, and mentorship programs where students can support each other's growth and development. Foster a culture of continuous improvement, where feedback is valued, and learning is viewed as a collaborative and iterative process.

By integrating coaching into teaching practices, university lecturers can empower students to become independent learners, critical thinkers, and confident problem-solvers, ultimately enhancing their overall learning experience and academic success.

(See Honegger, 2017)

Sources

- Barkley, A. (2011). Academic coaching for enhanced learning. *Nacta Journal*, 55(1), 76–81.
- Honegger, M. (2017). Monique Honegger Studierende beim Schreiben und Lernen begleiten. In *Zwischen Beraten und Dozieren* (S. 37). hep Verlag.
- Leach, S. (2020). Behavioural coaching: The GROW model. In *The Coaches' Handbook* (S. 176–186). Routledge. [Link](#)
- Thomann, G., Honegger, M., & Suter, P. (2017). *Zwischen Beraten und Dozieren*. hep Verlag.

Further Resources

- Johnston, J. (2010). *Mentoring Graduate Students*. Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching. [Link](#)