

COACHING GUIDE: RESOURCE 14

7 Steps for Peer Coaching and Student Leadership

Students can serve as important resources for each other, helping improve public speaking and facilitate practice sessions by running warm-ups and drills, determining topics, taking charge of team-building, and supporting 1:1 coaching.

When coaching your peers one-on-one, a more structured, planned approach can help make the process more comfortable and less awkward. Even with structure, it is important to continuously reinforce norms about treating each other with kindness and respect. Closely monitor the culture of the group and check in with people about how their coaching relationship is going and intervene in conflicts early.

Step 1: Selection

Avoid favoritism and cliques by creating an activity where people get to choose partners based on the type of issue, goal, preferred working style, or how they like feedback (rather than who their friends are). Have people write their preferences on a post-it first and then spend 10 minutes walking around and trying to find a “match” for the kind of peer coach they would find useful. Rotate partners every so often so people can try other coaches.

Step 2: Pre-Conversation

Once paired, the peer coach has a discussion about the motivation and intent behind the speech, the specific goals for peer coaching, and any preferred norms and type of feedback. The peer coach should write down these details to inform their coaching.

Step 3: Diagnostic Run-Through

The speaker runs through the entire speech or presents as much current progress as possible. To address nerves, it helps to start with, “This is where I am right now.” The peer coach primarily just observes and makes the occasional note, mentally noting how much to push the student and what seems like the next nearest level of success.

Step 4: Debrief Discussion

After the run-through, the peer coach and student have a discussion about their overall impressions and reactions. Together, they refine goals and agree on a first step for the practice, taking into account how much time is available and how soon the final presentation is scheduled.

Step 5: Targeted Work

The peer coach focuses on a specific short section of the speech. Ideally, this can include: 1) something that requires the most work or will take the longest to improve; 2) something that connects to the desired goals; or 3) something that will allow the speaker to work on a skill or technique that is common throughout the rest of the speech. The peer coach provides specific feedback and then helps the speaker practice making changes based on that feedback. The peer coach should keep an eye on whether the speaker is looking overwhelmed with the comments.

Step 6: Reinforcement

After the targeted work is complete, the peer coach leaves time to run-through the speech again (or at least run-through the material surrounding the targeted section, if there’s not enough time). Sometimes, it can be useful to video-tape the first run-through and the reinforcement run-through to see if there’s improvement.

Step 7: Reflection

Before ending a peer coaching session, pairs should spend at least 5 minutes reflecting on progress. The peer coach should take notes and ask what helped, what improved, and where their partner still has questions.

