

The Coaching Cycle: How Coaches Can Support Teachers and Improve Student Outcomes

The overall goal of instructional coaching is to strengthen teacher practices and thereby improve student outcomes.^{1,2} The National Center for Systemic Improvement (NCSI) defines instructional coaching as a coach working collaboratively with a teacher through a recursive and job-embedded feedback cycle focused on strengthening implementation of effective instructional strategies. Throughout the coaching cycle, instructional coaches apply research supported practices—building relationships using alliance strategies; observing teacher practice; modeling instructional strategies; and providing teachers with performance feedback—to strengthen the implementation of effective instructional strategies.^{3,4}

Coaches can use this tip sheet to learn about the three-step coaching cycle and how to use it to help improve teacher practice and student outcomes. Understanding the steps of the coaching cycle can help coaches, as well as those training or supporting instructional coaches, to best meet the needs of teachers and students.

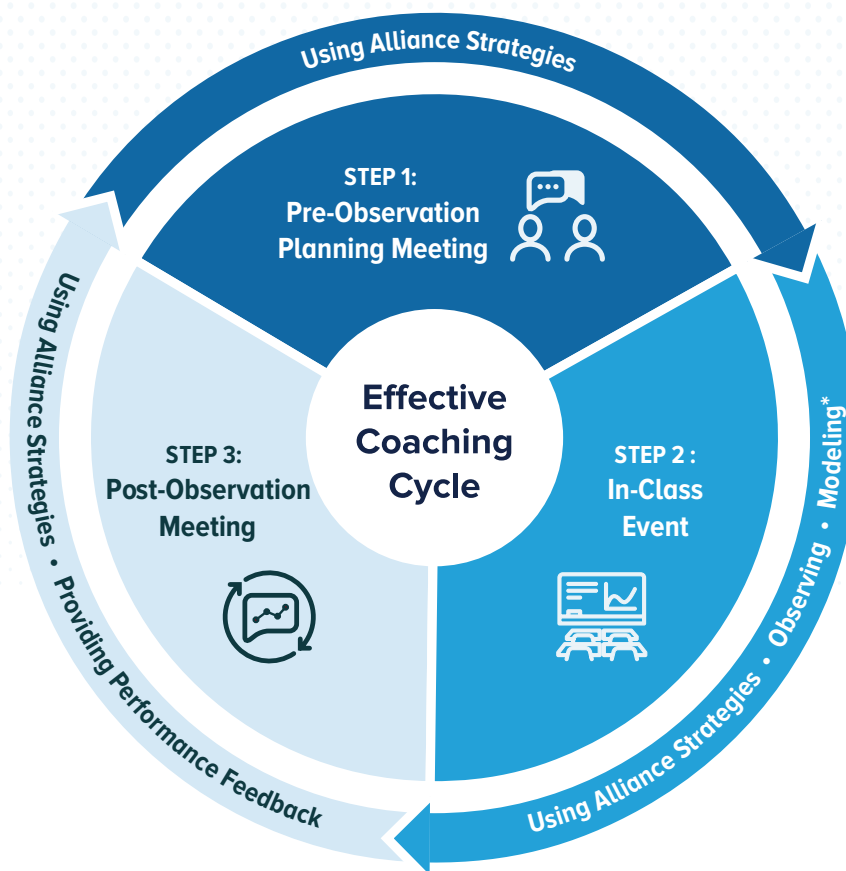
To learn more about the practices used within the coaching cycle, view [Defining Effective Coaching Practices to Support Teachers and Improve Student Outcomes.](#)



Introducing the Coaching Cycle

As illustrated in Figure 1, the coaching cycle is comprised of three steps: the pre-observation meeting; the in-class event; and the post-observation meeting. Coaching is an iterative process in which goals are reviewed, plans are updated, and progress is tracked regularly.

FIGURE 1. THE EFFECTIVE COACHING CYCLE



* Modeling happens at coach's and teacher's discretion. It may not be necessary during each in-class event.

Adapted with permission from Pierce & St. Martin, 2022¹

Notice that research-supported coaching practices are embedded within the coaching cycle.

For example:

- Alliance strategies are used throughout each step of the cycle,
- Observation and modeling occur during the in-class event, and
- Performance feedback occurs during the post-observation meeting.

Frequent and open communication is critical to developing and maintaining a positive and collaborative coach–teacher relationship. Throughout the coaching cycle, coaches use alliance strategies to build trust and develop a positive relationship with the teacher.

Prior to initiating the coaching cycle it is helpful for coaches to hold an introduction to coaching conversation or meeting. This meeting serves to launch the work between the coach and teacher. By the end of this meeting, the teacher should understand the expected outcomes of coaching, the coaching cycle, and the roles of the coach and teacher. This understanding sets the stage for the future work between the teacher and the coach as a true partnership. A strong partnership has high levels of collaboration and a foundation of trust and transparency. As needed, coaches and teachers should return to this conversation to ensure they are still on the same page about expectations.



Step 1: Pre-Observation Meeting

This meeting occurs prior to the in-class event. By the end of this meeting, the coach should have a clear understanding of the teacher's perspective about teaching and student learning and about their goals for participating in coaching, including the specific behaviors they most want feedback on during observation. Additionally, the coach and teacher should discuss different elements of the in-class event such as the lesson's instructional goals; if modeling will be helpful; and how the coach will conduct the observation and collect and share data. During this meeting, the coach uses alliance strategies to build on and reinforce the positive, collaborative nature of coaching established in the introduction to coaching meeting.



Step 2: In-Class Event

The coach's core tasks during the in-class event are observing the teacher; modeling (when appropriate); and collecting data. Observation is used to ensure the coach understands how the teacher implemented the targeted instructional strategy. During this step, the coach takes data on the teacher's practice and students' response. The coach will use these data to construct positive and potentially corrective performance feedback to share during the post-observation meeting. If necessary and agreed upon by the teacher prior to the in-class event, modeling is used to support the teacher's correct use of an instructional strategy.



Step 3: Post-Observation Meeting

The post-observation meeting occurs following the in-class event. During this meeting, the coach and teacher discuss the teacher's reflections on the lesson and the coach's feedback based on the data collected during the in-class event. This bidirectional conversation helps the teacher reflect on their practice; better understand the impact of teaching on students; and identify clear action steps to further improve teaching and learning. Feedback conversations occur in a timely manner and should consist of more positive statements than corrective ones. The post-observation conversation informs any needed next steps, including revising instructional goals and repeating the coaching cycle.

Using the Coaching Cycle to Improve Teaching and Learning

Professional-learning research has consistently found that teachers need more than one training to change practice. Instead, they benefit from long-term, job-embedded support using effective coaching practices.^{5,6} This tip sheet illustrates how coaches can apply research-based coaching practices across the three steps of the coaching cycle to build positive relationships; collect teacher and student data; and provide targeted and specific feedback to teachers in order to strengthen the implementation of effective instructional strategies. While each coach-teacher relationship is different, the coaching cycle provides a systematic, data-driven framework to help coaches define and refine their work with teachers, along with helping teachers set goals; plan for and take action to achieve those goals; and reflect on their progress and needs. The cyclical nature of coaching promotes on-going learning among teachers, so to improve their instructional practices and ultimately improve student outcomes.

Endnotes

- 1 Pierce, J. D., & St. Martin, K. (2022). *Coaching for systems and teacher change*. Paul H. Brookes Publishing.
- 2 Kraft, M.A., Blazar, D., & Hogan, D. (2018). The effect of teaching coaching on instruction and achievement: A meta-analysis of the causal evidence. *Review of Educational Research*, 88(4), 547–588.
- 3 Neuman, S. B., & Cunningham, L. (2009). The impact of professional development and coaching on early language and literacy instructional practices. *American Educational Research Journal*, 46(2), 532–566.
- 4 Wehby, J. H., Maggin, D. M., Partin, T. C. M., & Robertson, R. (2012). The impact of working alliance, social validity, and teacher burnout on implementation fidelity of the good behavior game. *School Mental Health*, 4(1), 22–33.
- 5 Kraft, M.A., Blazar, D., Hogan, D. (2018). The effect of teaching coaching on instruction and achievement: A meta-analysis of the causal evidence. *Review of Educational Research*, 88(4), 547–588.
- 6 Joyce, B. R., & Showers, B. (2002). *Student achievement through staff development*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

The content of this product was developed by the National Center for Systemic Improvement (NCSI) under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, #H326R240001. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government.

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Suggested Citation: Pierce, J., Peterson, A., Davis, B., & Berry Kuchle, L. (2025). How using a coaching cycle can help coaches to support teachers and improve student outcomes. WestEd.