

Finding an Academic Coach

Academic coaching often requires a considerable investment of time, energy, and money. But just how do you find a good coach? What should you look for? How do you recognize a top professional private teacher?

Below are nine suggestions that will help you to avoid common mistakes and maximize the odds that you'll make the right choice:

- **Hire an experienced career professional**

In academic coaching, as is the case within other professions, you generally “get what you pay for.” It’s usually well worth the extra money to hire a career private teacher (look for at least 10 years documented experience) who is well known and respected by other educational professionals in your area and has a strong local track record and reputation to protect. Moonlighting classroom teachers, college students, tutors, or other “part timers” that charge lower fees but have another full-time salary to fall back on are more likely to provide inferior instruction and be less committed to your service and satisfaction.

Talk to teachers and administrators, organizations of local professional private educators, and other coaches listed in the phone book (look under “Tutoring”). Ask them for the names of the best academic coaches in your area. Teachers whose names keep coming up are likely to be your best bets.

- **Avoid “tutoring agencies” or “learning centers”**

Tutors who work through agencies or learning centers normally do so because they’re inexperienced and unable to get enough free referrals from satisfied clients to support their own practice independently. (They would if they could – tutoring services generally charge lower rates to begin with, and keep a large percentage of the fees collected by tutors as their commission.)

- **Look for a business listing and web site**

Professional academic coaches will generally list themselves in the business section of the phone book. The more established and successful ones often maintain their own web sites, blogs, and private business offices.

Beware of ads, however. The best private teachers get more than enough clients through “word of mouth” referrals, and generally don’t need to advertise.

- **A valid business license?**

Professionals will obey the laws governing businesses in their area; ask to see a copy of a current business license.

- **Ask about membership in professional organizations**

Serious professional private educators, like professionals in other fields, maintain active memberships in various professional organizations (e.g. the Association of Educators in Private Practice, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, the Association of Educational Therapists, etc.) to keep abreast of cutting-edge trends and developments, create and maintain business connections and resources, sharpen their teaching skills, etc.

- **Check resume and references**

Make sure the resume indicates sufficient educational background (bachelor's degree or higher), many years of teaching experience in the appropriate subject area(s), and serious commitment to the field education. Get at least three current references, and call to interview each one. Excellent written references or testimonials documenting a long and successful private practice should also be made available.

- **Set up appointments with different coaches**

The right personal "chemistry" between student and coach is necessary to achieve superior results, and this kind of natural, mutual affinity is best assessed in person. It may be wise to consider trying out more than one teacher for an hour or two before making your final decision.

- **Examine marketing materials carefully**

The level of care with which any professional markets his or her own business speaks volumes about the quality of work and commitment to excellence you can expect. Look for a complete, well-designed web site, or ask for an "information packet" that should contain, at minimum, a cover letter, current resume, written references, and a business card.

- **Conduct personal interviews**

Set up a face-to-face interviews with each coach on your "short list," and use this time to evaluate each coach's personality, teaching style, and general level of professionalism, collect informational materials, get answers to your questions, etc.

True professionals will be punctual, organized, responsible, and business-like. Look for well organized teaching materials and business records, and a clear (preferably written) explanation of fees and of payment and cancellation policies.

By doing careful research, hiring a professional, checking materials and references, and conducting personal interviews with more than one candidate, you can find the best academic coach for the job.