

Application and Reflection of Questioning: Creating Meaningful Dialogue with Student

Athletes

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Proficiency Level

**Abstract**

This study outlines the effectiveness of question driven discussion with athletes. Two interviews took place with a high school freshman swimmer, the second having taken place after reflection on the first. Prior to reading the interviews, rationale is provided for the benefit of asking athletes questions instead of just giving instructions. Particularly, attention is given to questions that yield reflective answers that let athletes think about responses and apply themselves in multiple scenarios. The GROW model of questioning is outlined, and the interviews were modeled according to this structure. The GROW model was used because it designs questions for reflection, and allows athletes to think critically about themselves, their performance, their teams, etc. Data is outlined in two tables that record the amount of seconds spoken by the coach and the amount of seconds spoken by the athlete. A comparison of the two interviews and discussion of their impact highlights the successful dialogue that comes from a question driven discussion between coach and athlete.

### **Introduction**

Communication with others is a fundamental aspect of our daily lives; it's a necessity that drives the way we act, or do, and how we evaluate the world around us. The ways in which a person communicates can be very revealing about character, personality, mindset, beliefs, etc., and can impact the ways in which we make judgments or assumptions about people. In the realm of high school sports, the ways in which coaches and athletes communicate with each other can directly impact attitudes toward one another, and can go so far as to effect team and individual success. As the adults in the equation, it is especially important for coaches to take note of how they communicate with their athletes. Often, it is easy for coaches to fall into patterns of instruction and direction instead of facilitation and guiding. Therefore, it is imperative that coaches consider the way they communicate with their athletes to avoid any possibilities of negative attitudes or tensions.

According to Burton and Raedeke, "Communication is the act of expressing (or transmitting) ideas, information, knowledge, thoughts, and feelings as well as understanding what is expressed by others" (2008). Since the point of communication is transmitting messages, it's important for coaches to think about how their messages are delivered. When working with high schools (and younger), coaches need to consider a lot of factors related to the athletes' ages. Because adolescent athletes can be all over the place emotionally and mentally, how coaches deliver messages can be received in a variety of ways depending on individual athletes. Effective delivery strategies include being positive and honest, stating messages clearly and simply, saying the message loud enough and repeating the message, and being consistent (Coaching Education Center).

Implementing these strategies is easier said than done, however; coaches often get to a point of being “stuck in their ways,” and can be resistant to revisiting techniques.

However, the most important part of delivering a message is ensuring that the recipients understand the message clearly and know how to put the words into action.

When communicating with a team, there are some things that coaches need to keep in mind. Depending on the sport, coaches are often commanding the attention of 20 or more. According to Driska (2017b), an athlete’s attention span is roughly his/her age in seconds. With that in mind, coaches need to craft their messages that use those seconds effectively before the listeners start to drift. Often times, coaches have to repeat themselves more than once, which can get frustrating. While communicating instructions, Eccles and Tran encourage the use of redundancy to allow messages to sink in. “After talking [a play through], provide players with playbook and a handout. Then talk the play through again. Use the ‘onion’ principle, namely provide ‘layers’ of reminders and pointers” (2008). Making repetition part of a coach’s practice can help eliminate the need to answer the same questions multiple times. When the entire team understands the coach’s messages, their performance becomes much more unified, or cohesive. Schmidt et al identify a coach as “the definer, shaper, and provider of the sport experience for the members of a team” (2005). These responsibilities are all dependent of how a coach communicates ideas, intentions, and messages to ensure all athletes understand identify with the team’s goals and objectives.

Coaches spend a lot of time communicating with the team as a whole. Whether it’s pre-game pep talk or directing plays in practice, coaches deliver messages to groups of athletes almost daily. However, when a coach and athlete converse one on one,

athletes can tell a lot about the coach as a person, which can influence athletes' opinions about their coach. When meeting with athletes one on one, coaches need to be prepared to let the athlete speak. Driska (2017b) recommends an "80/20" rule of thumb – the athlete should be speaking 80% of the time, and the coach 20%. This allows the athlete to say as much as he/she needs to on a topic while the coach listens, asks follow up/supporting/clarification questions, etc. Additionally, in these situations, it is important for coaches to avoid merely instructing or directing the athlete. A one on one conversation is a two way street in which coach and athlete share involvement. Erickson and Côté (2012) define a coach-athlete as a dyad in which both parties play an important role. This means that both athlete and coach share speaking and listening roles on some level of equality. A one on one conversation should be viewed as "a dynamic co-acting system rather than simply the sum of independent actors" (Erickson and Côté 2012). When communication is organized around this ideal, the outcome can be much more meaningful and effective.

Communication is not only speaking, but actively and respectfully listening, too. Because coaches are superiors or authority figures to their athletes, it is important they are aware of how their listening behaviors influence the direction of the discussion. Just like when speaking, there are certain behaviors coaches need to be aware of to either encourage or discourage student discussion. According to Driska, body language can be very indicative of how an athlete will perceive the coach. For example, coaches should avoid sitting across a desk from the athlete to minimize the idea of a power differentiation. Additionally, dismissive behaviors like checking a watch, avoiding eye contact, fidgeting, crossing arms, etc. can signal disinterest, frustration, or general apathy

to what the athlete is saying (Drisk, 2017c). Instead, coaches should maintain eye contact and nod at various points to show interest in the subject. Asking follow up questions, repeating what the athlete is saying, and showing appreciation for the athlete's ideas and points of view helps the athlete feel valued by the coach, and can determine how much respect or trust the athlete will place in the coach (Driska, 2017d).

An excellent communication strategy that coaches can use in one on one discussion is asking meaningful questions. Sometimes, coaches get in a habit of only instructing or directing. Additionally, questions coaches ask can sometimes be too narrow to facilitate meaningful discussion. When asking questions, coaches need to remember the idea that conversation with an athlete means "turn taking" and both individuals have the right to speak (Cope et al 2016). Coaches may sometimes ask questions without waiting an appropriate amount of time for response. As Cope et al point out, "In many instances, coaches [use] self-answering questions and rhetorical questions where players had little time to think about their response" (2016). In these cases, the coach may get impatient and fill in his/her desired answer without letting the athletes think about how to respond. This can create the idea that the coach is looking for a right answer, and athletes may feel insecure for fear of providing the wrong answer.

When used effectively, questioning can allow a coach to learn a lot about an athlete, and can lead to better coach-athlete relationships. Gould stresses that questions help to build relationships, and can increase a coach's awareness about things their athletes are feeling (2017). Asking meaningful questions allows for athletes to take ownership of their role in the sport they play. The purpose of this study was to conduct a meaningful question based conversation session to evaluate what an athlete values in a

discussion with a coach. Additionally, reflection was used as a method for improving athlete-coach discussion.

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

Participants in this study included a freshmen swimmer and myself. This student was selected because I knew he was involved in multiple sports, and because I know this student well socially and academically. Academically, he is a good student who turns in work and takes genuine interest in his education. Personally, he is a well-mannered kid who is goofy and humorous. In class, he may make comments that are off task, but never deviates to the point of total distraction. Those who don't know him may identify him as more goofy than he is serious. Knowing him academically and socially, I wanted to get to know the athletic part of him. His involvement in multiple sports would allow me to hear him discuss these aspects of his life that are very important to him, so I would be able to learn things about him and see a new side to who he is.

### **Procedures**

Two interviews were conducted – an initial, and a follow up after analysis of and reflection upon the first. The interview took place in my classroom, a place that both he and I are familiar with. During class, he often takes liberty to sit in the chair behind my desk, and the interview was no exception; he sat at my desk, and I sat at one of the student desks directly next to him. I had prewritten questions that I had planned to ask him based on the GROW model of questioning. This model of questioning asks athletes questions about their Goals, Realities, Options, and future actions (Will – as in, what will you do next?). Asking questions along this model allows students opportunities to think

about their responses and to be cognitively engaged in the situation. Additionally, athletes are asked questions that allow them to consider their performance in the moment, to forecast the goals they want to achieve, and to think about the options and strategies they can use to meet their goals.

During the first interview, I asked these questions in the outlined G-R-O-W order, and did not ask many follow up questions to further extend the conversation. During the second interview, I broke up the order of the questioning and asked follow up or clarification questions that allowed the athlete to clear up any information for me or to continue on an idea more specifically. Both interviews were audio recorded and later transferred into a written medium collected on the tables presented in the following information.

### **Data Analysis**

These interviews were analyzed via listening to the audio recordings at multiple times and intervals. Each time, the interview was listened to in entirety before being broken up to record on the tables. This allowed me to hear everything straight through before hitting pause to record answers. Next, the interviews were listened to in chunks. I frequently paused the recording to record information onto the tables. Over all, my questions were recorded into the table word for word. For the athlete's responses, I recorded them word for word in the interest of typing the answers clearly. This was done by pausing and rewinding the recording multiple times to re-listen to what was being said. These efforts were fruitful in allowing me to record and reflect upon the most accurate data from our discussions.



## Results

### Conversation 1

The first conversation used the GROW model of questioning in the order the model is presented – Goal questions, Reality questions, Options questions, and Will questions. The athlete answered the questions that were presented, but there was little done on the part of the interviewer (myself) to ask for more information about his answers. The conversation flowed continuously with little pauses that were too long or distracting. The athlete was able to answer every question clearly and confidently, and did not need clarification or redirection.

Time	Speaker	Summary of what was said	Seconds (Coach)	Seconds (Athlete)
0:00 – 0:03	Coach	How long have you been swimming?	3	
0:03 – 0:11	Athlete	Started monthly in the summers in second grade, started year round in the 5 <sup>th</sup> grade		8
0:11 – 0:12	Coach	Where do you swim?	1	
0:12 – 0:19	Athlete	Used to swim at Ypsi high school for the Ypsi Otters, now I swim for the Saline Stingrays		7
0:19 – 0:20	Coach	Will you swim for Huron?	1	
0:20 – 0:23	Athlete	Will stop swimming for Saline and will swim for Huron		3
0:23 – 0:29	Coach	Approaching swimming season, what are your goals for this season?	6	
0:29 – 0:40	Athlete	Make states – I was looking at State cut times, have been getting close to those, so I want to make those times		11

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Time	Speaker	Summary of what was said	Seconds (Coach)	Seconds (Athlete)
0:44 – 0:47	Coach	Is that a realistic goal for you?	3	
0:48 – 1:02	Athlete	Yes it's realistic. Made states last year for club, and I think club practices harder than high school practices		14
1:03 – 1:14	Coach	In swimming now, what would you like to see that isn't happening or what would you like to work on that isn't happening now in your performance?	11	
1:16 – 1:40	Athlete	Probably making it to practice. I play a lot of sports at once because I like to cross challenge myself. When I was playing [water] polo, I couldn't go to swim practice, and last year I also wrestled, so it was to make it to practice. If I practiced more I'd drop a lot more time.		24
1:44 – 1:50	Coach	What kind of things are you doing in practice right now really well? What's happening in practice?	6	
1:51 – 2:05	Athlete	Since polo just ended, I'm sort of just getting back into the pool, but I think I've gotten back into shape really quickly, considering I did swim during polo but it wasn't as much swimming as I used to do, so I'm proud of myself for that.		14
2:09 – 2:17	Coach	What's helping you, what are you trying so far that is helping you to get back in shape, back into the swing of swimming?	8	
2:18 – 2:27	Athlete	Just making every practice I can, mornings, evenings, I even go to high school girls' practice.		9
2:29 – 2:41	Coach	You say that you participate in a lot of other sports, often at once, how is that relevant to what's happening for your swimming performance right now?	12	

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Time	Speaker	Summary of what was said	Seconds (Coach)	Seconds (Athlete)
2:43 – 3:11	Athlete	It really helps...For dry land, we workout outside of the pool. I'm used to it because I wrestle, so when we do something that has to do with weights or running, I'm used to that, I'm good at that so I can do a lot of it, which will make me better in the pool.		28
3:12 – 3:13	Coach	So you're kind of all around conditioned?	1	
3:13 – 3:14	Athlete	Yeah		1
3:16 – 3:21	Coach	Who might be able to help you get back into the swing of swimming?	5	
3:22 – 4:03	Athlete	I think my friends. They really did actually help me get back into it. I have a friend named Kevin who joined my team and he really missed it when I wasn't there. He kept asking me to come back and once polo ended he was right on it. He got me a schedule, he got me a ride to practice and to morning practice. Also the swim captain here [at Huron]. He's been driving me to morning practice and to school after morning practice.		41
4:10 – 4:19	Coach	What are <i>you</i> doing so far? What are <i>you</i> doing to get yourself back into that mentality of swim practice?	9	
4:22 – 4:47	Athlete	Waking up in the morning and saying, "I gotta do this." I have a wall at my house, it's kind of like a dry erase board, and I write my times up there with my goal time. So whenever I wake up and I see it's there, it shows me what I'm working for.		25
4:48 – 4:49	Coach	How often do you update that?	1	

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Time	Speaker	Summary of what was said	Seconds (Coach)	Seconds (Athlete)
4:50 – 4:59	Athlete	After every meet. I haven't updated it recently because I haven't been swimming. But after every meet if I drop even a millisecond I'll write it on there.		9
5:02 – 5:16	Coach	So you talked about your friends who are going to be helpful to you. What other kinds of things do your friends do? What suggestions do they give you?	14	
5:18 - 5:51	Athlete	They want me to try everything. Because...I was a good wrestler, and my wrestling friends knew I was a good swimmer, so they wanted me to do both. I'm trying to figure out what I really want in the end. And they've been a big help showing me what I could do. How far I could go.		33
5:54 – 5:58	Coach	What are your next steps?	4	
6:00 – 6:06	Athlete	High school swimming. Hopefully making states. And then I'll probably keep swimming on through the spring for club.		6
6:08 – 6:21	Coach	Thinking about going on from here, how do you see swimming staying in your life – do you see that swimming might take over other sports or be taken over by other sports?	13	
6:23 – 6:50	Athlete	I think swimming is eventually going to take over. I don't think it will take over water polo just yet because this was my first year and I had a really good season. But I feel like if I needed to choose...like if my coach came to me and said I have a set schedule for you, but you have to choose, I feel like I could choose swimming.		27
6:52 – 7:00	Coach	What kind of support do you need right now to keep you that back to swimming mentality, that "I want to make states" mentality?	8	

Time	Speaker	Summary of what was said	Seconds (Coach)	Seconds (Athlete)
7:01 – 7:18	Athlete	My friends like I said, but also my dad. He’s always there. He’s always driving me home from practice, he’s always making sure I get into meets and that I can make it to the meet.		17
7:21 – 7:25	Coach	What might get in the way of your goals?	4	
7:27 – 7:55	Athlete	Other sports. And also my non-athletic friends. Since they’re not on a team or in a club they don’t know how much time that really takes and how much you put into that. So sometimes if they want to hang out, I’m like “I have practice.” And they’re like “Oh you had practice yesterday.” Like, “Yeah I have practice every day...” they don’t get that.		28

Totals	Coach	Athlete
7 minute, 55 second interview	110 Seconds ~26%	305 Seconds ~74%
475 seconds total interview		
415 seconds speaking		

Feedback from participant:

- *What do you think I did as far as a speaker, as far as a listener, communicator overall?*
  - I noticed when I looked up you were always looking at me, and like shake your head, and nod
- *Anything you would suggest I improve upon, or work on?*
  - Maybe if you put yourself into the conversation a little bit, like give me feedback on what I’m saying.

**Quantitative analysis.** Out of 415 seconds, I spoke for 110, and the athlete spoke for 305. Considering Driska’s (2017 **letter**) recommendation, this nearly fits the 80/20

ideal for speaking and listening. The athlete was presented with questions that allowed him to think beyond yes or no questions, and put responsibility of providing clear answers on him. There were 18 questions asked in total. Of the 18 questions, the average response time for the athlete was about 17 seconds. This data indicates that the majority of questions posed allowed for the athlete to give a response that was beyond “yes” or “no,” and created meaningful opportunities for discourse between athlete and coach. The longest response to a question was 41 seconds.

**Qualitative analysis.** From the data, it can be noted that the responses of this discussion were based on athlete interest and motivation. The questions were formatted to allow the athlete to explain the answers in detail. Additionally, because I am unfamiliar with competitive swimming, he was able to put himself as the expert of the situation. The questions that got the longest answers were about his motivators, primarily the people that inspired him. For example, he spoke for 33 seconds when asked about the ways in which his friends supported him, and for 41 seconds when asked who would be helpful to getting him back into swimming. Less time was spent on questions that had simple, easy answers.

**Reflection for the future.** After this interview was conducted, I asked the athlete for feedback on how well he thought I did asking him questions. He noticed that I kept eye contact the entire time, and said that I could tell he was listening. This information is helpful because it will be a reminder to continue to use eye contact and engaged body language. An area of improvement he suggested was to put myself in the conversation more and to provide feedback to his answers. This was helpful because it dictated my involvement and questioning practices for the next interview

### **Conversation 2**

This discussion was directed in the same manner as the first conversation. Again, questions were based on the GROW model, but this time I made a point to avoid a specific order for asking questions. I made a point to get more involved in the discussion, and formatted questions that would allow me to ask for clarification or explanation. Additionally, I summarized the points of our conversation, and referred back to earlier questions for further elaboration. This created much less redundancy in the conversation and allowed the athlete to go into more depth to answer the questions he was asked.

Time	Speaker	Summary of what was said	Seconds (Coach)	Seconds (Athlete)
0.00 – 0.09	Coach	So you're just wrapping up polo season, and getting ready to transition to swimming. Have Huron's practices started yet?	9	
0.10 – 0.13	Athlete	No. We start next week.		3
0.13 – 0.16	Coach	But you are still doing your club swimming team right? How often a week do you practice with club right now?	3	
0.17 – 0.28	Athlete	I go everyday, unless I have something else. I play saxophone and have lessons on Sunday, so I can't go on that day.		11
0.29 – 0.37	Coach	How do you manage to mix those outside of school hobbies?	8	
0.38 – 1.10	Athlete	It's a challenge because is an in school and out of school hobby and so is swimming – it's an in school and out of school sport. So I have to balance four different things instead of instead of two because I have to get a schedule for saxophone and a schedule for my in school and out of school swimming, and events for band. Like when it was marching season, I couldn't do a lot of things for polo because I was marching.		32
Time	Speaker	Summary of what was said	Seconds (Coach)	Seconds (Athlete)
1.16 - 1.18	Coach	Are you nervous for this season, or how are you feeling?	2	
1.19 – 1.48	Athlete	I'm excited. I broke my foot last summer, like during the first week of summer and I didn't get to swim all summer. I had just started to drop a lot of time, and it was exciting to see how far I could go because I was practicing so much. But once I broke my foot, by the time I was cleared to play sports again, it was polo season. So I hadn't swam in a long time.		29



1.49 – 1.52	Coach	But you're excited though. That's good! You're not feeling nervous or jittery?	3	
1.53 – 1.54	Athlete	No		1
1.54 – 1.58	Coach	What do you want to improve for this season?	4	
1.59 – 2.18	Athlete	Probably more of my distance events. I'm a really big sprinter, like 50s, an occasional 100. But they only have 100s in high school, so that's a difference that I want to make up.		19
2.19 – 2.20	Coach	Do you think that's a realistic goal for you? (Yeah). What makes that goal realistic? What makes you think, "Yeah, I can do this!"	1	
2.22 – 2.40	Athlete	Playing polo. There is a lot of swimming in polo, and going back and forth without a rest. I think playing polo made my endurance increase.		18
2.43 – 2.54	Coach	So you say you're looking to improve your distance. Are there any specific strokes or maneuvers that you're hoping to improve this season?	11	
2.55 – 3.18	Athlete	This isn't a [Huron] event, but my 200 fly for club. I want to try to make states for that in club. And also my 100 fly. My 50 fly is really fast, but my 100 fly, considering my 50 fly, isn't where it's supposed to be. So I'd like to bring that down.		23
3.19 – 3.27	Coach	So it looks like you've got to work between same stroke and just adding that extra effort for that extra distance? (Yeah). How do you think you can accomplish that?	8	
3.28 – 4.06	Athlete	Swim it in meets. I have to convince myself before I get in to just go all out. What I used to think is, "Oh it's double what I'm swimming, I have to pace myself." But really it's, I'm going all out for <i>this</i> long instead of this		38

		long. With the 50, like the 50 free, you just go and there's no rhythm to it really. It should be the same for the 100 free. I used to think I needed to pace myself and get a rhythm set, so that's why I wasn't dropping as much time as I should have been.		
4.08 – 4.14	Coach	Interesting. So by doing that, it's almost like you were dropping too much time by trying to pace yourself for the whole thing?	6	
4.15 – 4.18	Athlete	I wasn't dropping as much time as I should have.		3
4.19 – 4:21	Coach	Oh, ok. I'm sorry, does that mean gaining time then?	2	
4.22 – 4.51	Athlete	Not gaining. I was still dropping, but, if I can swim a 24 50 free, and then a 25 for the second 50, that's a 49. That's what I should be able to do, but I go 50. Because I swim a 24 the first 50, and a 26 the second 50 thinking I'd have to pace myself instead of dying at the end.		29
4.55 – 5.14	Coach	Are you happy with your overall performance approaching this season? Especially how you mentioned how breaking your foot was unexpected and cut you out of some significant pool time during the summer. Are you happy with your performance as you approach Huron's men's swim season?	19	
5.15 – 5.27	Athlete	Yeah, I'm kind of surprised actually. I'll be going to a meet this weekend so I'll be able to see how I've been doing, but in practice I think I've been doing really well.		12
5.29 – 5.45	Coach	Like you said, you're not feeling nervous for Huron's swim season. You're feeling pretty excited. Besides just times and looking at your improvements, what else makes you feel excited approaching this season?	16	

5.47 – 6.12	Athlete	I'm excited for the team in general. When I started high school sports, I thought it would be a lot more challenging to be on a team sport, but when I did polo, it was so much fun. All those polo players will also swim, and then there's even more kids, so I'm excited to have a big team.		25
6.12 – 6.16	Coach	What are some things that happened to create that feeling of team camaraderie?	4	
6.20 – 6.34	Athlete	Probably just hearing about it. Like, the polo team travels with each other; we eat with each other outside of polo, outside of sports. I feel like people like to be a part of that.		14
6.36 – 6.47	Coach	It's kind of like another form of support system you have (Yeah.) What is important for you to do as you prepare for swim season?	11	
6.38 – 7.31	Athlete	Get my schedule straight. As far as saxophone lessons, and when I'm going to go to club practice, because I'm not allowed to swim in certain meets. Right after high school season ends, we have club state meets. If I want to get some club state times, I have to go to club meets. And I can only go to like three, so I have to set those to balance between my high school state meet so I'm not going meet to meet. But it also balances with my practice schedule, so I can have a good chunk of practice and then go to a meet.		53
7.33 – 7.42	Coach	How do you think you're going to balance these two swimming schedules for club and Huron?	9	
7.45 – 8.05	Athlete	Well I feel like it's not going to be that challenging because all of my coaches have done this before. They have swimmers who are seniors now who		20

		have been splitting for four years now, so I feel like they have things that are already set, and they have things that they already do for these situations, so I feel like it's not going to be that bad.		
8.06 – 8.18	Coach	So you think coaches will be a big support system when it comes time to balancing that schedule? (Yeah). Are there any particular drills that you enjoy doing more so than others?	12	
8.20 – 8.35	Athlete	It's kind of weird but I like fly drills. Especially sprint fly drill. Like really short 25 one arms, or something like that.		15
8.35 – 8.37	Coach	Why is it weird that you like that?	2	
8.38 – 9.04	Athlete	It's weird that I like that because a lot of people don't like that. And I like butterfly to a certain amount. I hate the 200 fly. I've never swam it in a meet but I've swam it at practice. I don't hate the 100 fly, but I don't like the 100 fly. It's kind of in the middle. I'm starting to like it more now that I have to swim it.		26
Time	Speaker	Summary of what was said	Seconds (Coach)	Seconds (Athlete)
9.07 – 9.12	Coach	Do these drills help you with those strokes that you're trying to improve?	5	
9.13 – 9.47	Athlete	Yeah. I also like kicking drills. I like to kick a lot, which is really weird. When we watch film and I'm kicking, it's really slow. But if I have a kickboard and I isolate my arms my legs work a lot more. It's another convincing myself thing where I have to convince myself to just go.		34

Original interview stopped due to interruption in the room. New interview is started.

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Time	Speaker	Summary of what was said	Seconds (Coach)	Seconds (Athlete)
0.04 – 0.08	Coach	How are these drills helping you for the goals that you have?	4	
0.09 – 1.30	Athlete	It helps amping up my kicking and getting it to where it's supposed to be. I kick different the way I do in practice than I do in meets. I can't tell the difference in my 50 but I can in my 100. Just kicking in practice brings it to where it needs to be in my 100 swim. And with the butterfly, normally on my 100, that last 25 my shoulders start to get really tired. The kick is what brings you out of the water and then you have to bring your arms around to pull yourself out of the water. But what will happen when my shoulders get tired is I'll kick and I'll bring myself out of the water but there's no pull so I just kind of hit the water again. The drills with the one armed butterfly to get my arms and shoulders strengthened.		21
Time	Speaker	Summary of what was said	Seconds (Coach)	Seconds (Athlete)
1.32 – 1.38	Coach	Outside of swimming, outside of school, what do you think you can do in preparation for this season as a whole?	6	
1.41 – 1.57	Athlete	Eat healthy, just keep swimming really. Get enough sleep and stay focused on what I want to do.		16
1.58 – 2.01	Coach	What are ways that you keep yourself focused?	3	
2.02 – 3.17	Athlete	This weekend for example, I have a meet, and I have a conference for a program that I do called Jack and Jill. The conference is in Detroit, but this meet is the last meet I can get into. So I signed up for this conference		1.15 (75)

		before I knew about the meet, and I really want to go to this meet so I can get some times in before Huron's season starts. I have to go to the conference and not stay up too late while I'm there, so I can go to the meet during the day. I have to be at both places. I have a meeting at the conference in the morning and go right to the meet. Then there's a party that night at the conference that I'll have to miss so I can go to a meet the next day.		
3.18 – 3.52	Coach	Sounds like you have some good ways to be thinking about how to balance your time before practices and events. Who helps you find ways to balance your schedule? Especially because high school students can get so busy with sports and other outside of school activities that you mentioned. So who or what helps you keep some balance and prioritize things in your schedule?	34	
3.53 – 4.32	Athlete	My dad. He works here and sees how students work well and how athletes work considering when their sports are. He helps me set out my schedule. He can see the path I might take and points me in a direction that really helps.		39
4.38 – 5.00	Coach	It sounds like you've got some specific goals for this season like improving your flies and improving some of those distances, and looking to make states in two teams – those are really cool goals. So what do you think you can start doing tomorrow to start getting on top of those goals?	22	
5.02 – 5.27	Athlete	Going to practice. I haven't really let my coach know my goals. But it's kind of a two-way thing. Because they have goals for me and then I have goals for myself. They've let me		25

		know their goals for me but I haven't told them my goals for myself. So I guess I could tell them and they could kind of put the two together and make up a schedule for me to meet those goals.		
5.28 – 5.33	Coach	What do you think about the goals they've set for you? Are they challenging or do you wish they were a little more challenging?	5	
5.35 – 6.05	Athlete	It's one of those situations where I feel like my coach knows me better than I do. Because what they said is like a personal record that I expected myself to be at by senior year, but also I look back at what I've done and I notice what was really doable, so I should just do what they're telling me to do.		30
6.07 – 6.12	Coach	Do you let past accomplishments influence you? (Yeah, a lot). How so?	5	
6.13 – 6.53	Athlete	When I was 12 I won states. When I was 13 I got tendonitis in both my legs so I couldn't swim or really do anything. So when I was getting back into the pool and starting to swim again competitively all my friends that I raced with had stepped up and the ones who were on my team were all like "Well you [won states] last time, so you can easily get there. You can easily pass that. That's what really helped me amp myself up and keep going.		30

Totals	Coach	Athlete
Interview Pre-Interruption: 587 seconds (9 minutes, 47 seconds)	214 Seconds ~25%	641 Seconds ~75%

Interview Post-Interruption: 413 seconds (6 minutes, 53 seconds)  1000 seconds total interview 855 seconds spoken		
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Feedback from participant:

- *What can you tell me about how I did as a communicator? What did I do well? What should I improve upon? Last time I asked you these questions, you said to try to integrate myself into the questions more. So what do you think was different about interview two from interview one, after I had some time to reflect on what we talked about, how I questioned you – what do you think?*
  - I feel like I got a lot more feedback and it was really good. Some of the things you said weren't correct, and I got to correct you. It was good because then I know if you didn't understand something the first time I could change what I said so you could understand it.
- *That also makes you the expert of this topic. Any suggestions you have for me as I prepare to approach my JV Soccer Squad?*
  - No, not really.

**Quantitative analysis.** Out of the 855 seconds of consistent spoken interview, the athlete spoke for 641 seconds, which is roughly 75% of the total time. In comparison, I spoke for 214 seconds to make up the remaining 25% of the interview. Like this first interview, this set of questions aimed to meet the 80/20 goal. This time, the athlete was asked 26 questions, and the average number of seconds of response was 24 seconds. Compared to the other data set, the athlete was taking longer to thoroughly explain his responses. The longest response for this interview was 1.15, or 75 seconds. Compared to the first interview, this is 34 seconds longer than the original longest response. This data indicates that the athlete is taking longer to explain himself, and reflects the thought that was put into answering each question.



**Qualitative analysis.** The questions asked in this interview were primarily related to strengthening and conditioning for the swim season, and the athlete went into specific detail about various drills, strokes, events, etc. Additionally, the athlete commented on how the other sports relate to his ability to perform in swimming. The athlete went into great detail about team aspects, too, and commented on how being a part of a team is important to his motivation and participation. The length of responses indicates that the athlete enjoyed talking about these topics. This could also be noticed in his body language as he spoke. There were times when he was smiling and gesturing with his hands. Additionally, the more specific answers required some extended detail and explanation for me to understand; again, this works to put the athlete as the expert in the scenario. The athlete did well to put himself as a teacher and explained things to my understanding. Because questions were asked outside of the “order” of the GROW structure, there were a lot more opportunities for follow up questions, and ideas were not repeated as much.

**Reflection for the future.** In his feedback after this interview, the athlete indicated that I gave him a lot more feedback, which allowed him to continue explaining his participation in swimming. Additionally, it became less like a question driven conversation, and more like a conversation enhanced by questioning. As I approach my own season starting, I can take the feedback that I was given on both interviews to be aware of when I ask questions, when I listen, and when I simply let a conversation flow.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to examine the value of a question based discussion with an athlete in a one on one study. The discussion was question directed to avoid

creating a session that was purely instructive or critical in nature. Cope et al (2016), coaches as a whole do not prioritize asking questions to their athletes; rather, their conversations are served more as directive and instruction giving without giving athletes enough time to be cognitively engaged in the discussion. Through this study, it was noted that asking questions to the athlete allowed him to go into depth about his sport and take time to explain his answers. Thus, he was able to reflect upon and think critically about his approach.

The application of GROW designed questions created opportunities for the athlete to talk about himself, and show himself as the subject and expert of the topics. It is generally accepted that people enjoy talking about themselves in positive terms and speaking about their goals and accomplishments. By asking questions designed along the GROW model, the athlete was able to use himself as an example and dictated his areas of strength and his goals for improvement confidently. The GROW model of questioning aligns well with what Cope et al argue that coaches “need to provide opportunities for learners to ask questions of themselves and others as this results in higher levels of learning; to think and reflect more deeply about their performance” (2016, p. 386). Participation in team athletics is learning driven, as athletes have to learn an array of information about the sport, about their teammates, and about themselves; if coaches do not provide adequate, challenging “material” (in this case, questioning), then the opportunities to really learn are limited.

For this study, it can be noted that the questions that fell into the “Reality” category were talked about in depth. The athlete was able to talk at length about things he is currently doing to meet his goals and to stay motivated. Especially, he spoke a lot

about the people that keep him going and motivating him to do his best. Additionally, the longest answer was in response to, “What are ways you can keep yourself focused?” His answer allowed him to discuss a real example of how he keeps his focus by discussing an upcoming weekend in which he would be balancing swimming and participating in a volunteering event. He was able to clearly outline what would need for him to happen for him to attend both events successfully. Additionally, he was able to project how that weekend would prepare him for other times in which his attention would be divided.

It can be noticed that the interviewer (myself), did a great job applying feedback that the athlete gave. After asking for feedback the first time, I made a point to revise my questions to more specific, engaging discussion points. Additionally, I broke it out of the G-R-O-W order, and mixed up what questions I asked when. Not only did this increase the quality of the questions that were asked, it also prompted extended answers to show the athlete was taking time to explain himself thoroughly. Additionally, this conversation allowed for more spontaneous follow up questions; because the athlete was talking more, I found that I wanted to know more about what he was discussing.

An area of improvement for me would be trying to lower that balance of the 80/20 goal. Though I was only off by 5% for each interview, I would still like to aim for making that ratio as close as I can. Additionally, I noticed that I tend to cover my mouth when I’m listening. It’s not intentional, but in regards to Driska’s recommendation, covering the mouth can signal distrust (2017a). I notice that I tend to fidget when I’m sitting, and that I have a hard time sitting totally still. I will move my hands and arms in and out of various positions, and cross and uncross my legs. I think that perhaps I focus

too much on getting the “correct” body language, instead of letting myself relax more naturally into the conversation.

I was very thankful for the opportunity to interview this athlete. I saw a new side of him that adds to the regard in which I hold him. I learned a lot about him outside of school, too. For example, I enjoyed listening him talk about how he balances his school, athletic, and extracurricular activities. This discussion and the process of revising and conducting a second interview helps me think about how I communicate with my athletes, and what I can know to avoid when questioning. Additionally, I saw first hand the value of taking time to ask the athletes questions. As I approach soccer season, I have a new tool kit to help me communicate as effectively as possible.

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