

## **NLP Practice Groups**

by John Seymour

*Because practice groups are so important, we are putting this article both in the newsletter and in the Forum on the JSA website. If you are reading this, and have a practice group, I would love to hear some of your experiences of what works well for you. Please write in to the Forum. If you have questions about practice groups, post them in the Forum and I will do my best to answer them.*

So, what exactly is an NLP practice group? It is a small number of students of NLP who meet regularly to practice their NLP skills. Why do practice groups matter? Because NLP is at heart a set of skills. Like any skills, you only acquire them by repeated practice. There are hundreds of practice groups meeting regularly across the country. And yet, many Practitioner trainings still do not support practice groups.

On the positive side, if you do attend regular practice groups, the payoff is huge. First, many of these skills are generative (outcome thinking, mental rehearsal, resource states, etc) and will benefit you for the rest of your life. More than that, they will help you to create the rest of your life and the more you practice the higher your levels of competence will become. You will have more of your skills up to unconscious competence faster. This, of course, is the biggest payoff, when you are getting the full benefit of highly generative skills, with minimum effort.

So, how exactly does a practice group work? Typically between three and six students meet one evening a week at one of their homes. Their aim is to have a good time talking about all the things NLPers talk about and, of course, practicing the skills they most want to develop. There will often be a social beginning and end, and in the middle a practice session lasting around one to two hours.

It is essential that you are quite explicit about how you will respect client confidentiality. It is also important to use each of the three classic NLP roles, and to spend equal time in each role. In the client role you choose an issue to explore that you are motivated to resolve. The practitioner works with you on this for the agreed length of time, often around 30 minutes. The observer keeps time and is available to coach the practitioner if they get stuck. You then move on to the next role for the second round, and the third role for the last round.

Each of these roles has different advantages. The observer can learn a lot from the interaction and be in a good position to give the practitioner feedback on what they did well and what they could improve on. In many ways, the observer position is the best one for making useful learnings.

When you are in the client role, you learn the skill of picking which issue to work with. Daily reflective journaling will give you a range to pick from. Some will be

relatively easy to shift, and you may get through a few in a session. Some will be medium hard, and they may take a number of sessions to shift. Some will be really hard. You may not feel emotionally ready to tackle them; respect this. They may also be hard in that you may not get a shift unless you work with someone considerably more skilled and experienced. We encourage our students to bring in any unresolved issue to the next seminar, where the assisting tutors will be happy to work with them between training sessions.

From hesitant beginnings, most people learn to make good use of their client time and resolve many of the issues that have prevented them from achieving important life goals. Resolving significant issues and achieving the goals that really matter to you, are some of the most satisfying parts of the whole training, and where you really develop as a person.

When it is your turn to be in the practitioner role, you practice using many of the skills you have been learning. These might typically include:

Embodying the presuppositions of NLP

Rapport

Information gathering:	Clarifying the issue
	Eliciting a well-formed outcome
	Diagnosis
Changework:	Using a change process
	Testing
	Future pacing

In practice this process can vary considerably. For example, simply clarifying both issue and outcome is often enough on its own. The learning either becomes obvious, or sometimes it just occurs spontaneously. Whichever way it turns out, as the practitioner, you have been using and developing your skills. And these are some of the key skills that will serve you well for the rest of your life.

There are many other variations on this basic practice session. For example, if the practitioner wants to practice a specific change process, six-step reframing for example, you may be able to work with a client who has an issue that is suitable. There are many other variations that can work well. Please write yours to the Forum on our website. Also any question. Thanks.