

## 2. ESTABLISHING A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE STUDENT AND PREPARATION FOR MEETING

**This chapter deals with the following content:**

- the progress of group development and its parameters, which may be of assistance in working with students, be it in a group or individually;
- preparation for meetings with the aim of making them more effective.

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When you prepare for any kind of meeting, it is advisable to bear in mind that the development of group dynamics follows its own laws, which are also characteristic of the development of relations between two people, so a knowledge of this is beneficial both for those tutors working with students for the most part individually and for those working with groups.

## 2.1. Group development

The development of the dynamic in a group progresses through five stages (Tuckman and Jensen, 1977), as follows:

- forming (mutual connecting);
- storming (upheaval);
- norming (calming down);
- performing (establishing functional relations);
- adjourning.

The stages of group development progress **in the same sequence in both formal and informal groups**. Each stage plays its part, and **it is advisable for each one to be implemented properly** if you want the group dynamic to be as solid and successful as possible.

Below is a descriptive breakdown of each individual stage:

a) **In the first stage, forming**, the members of the group cautiously observe each other, and there is a reserve, uncertainty, involving standard and tested patterns of behaviour and communication in clichés.

You probably have some experience of encountering an acquaintance starting off with the ritual greetings and the question “How are you?”, to which you expect the response “Good”, and this is followed perhaps by some talk of the weather and general topics before anything shifts. The pattern is similar in a group that is just becoming acquainted.

In order to get past uncertainties as quickly as possible, the leader can help by:

- presenting the purpose of the group or meeting (you can present the aims you have for the meeting, or perhaps tutoring in general, your role, what you expect from students and so forth);
- setting out the structure of the meeting (for instance an agenda);
- ensuring that all the members introduce themselves (it is important for every single member to do this, and given the reservations it makes sense at the beginning to keep introductions formal and fairly impersonal – for instance name, surname, perhaps their home town and such);
- providing a sense of safety (possibly by you introducing yourself first and setting the example for the rest to follow);
- not singling out individuals (maintain the same attitude to everyone, do not comment on an individual's introduction, just thank them for it and so forth).

b) **In the next stage, storming**, friction arises in the group, and this is essential for structures to be created and roles to be assigned or taken on.

In order for this stage to progress effectively, as a leader you must:

- permit discussion of the work as a group (what members would like to do and so forth);
- set boundaries (steer the conversation so it does not wander off into irrelevant topics and so forth);
- include all members in the conversation;
- encourage talk about the views and values of the members (for instance you can ask them why they chose a particular direction of study, what is important to them in life and so forth);
- prevent disputes on the personal level (the leader can allow disputes about what people want to do and how, but must stop those disputes relating to the personal

circumstances of individuals in the group, such as where they live, gender, etc.);

- encourage the acceptance of diversity (emphasise that differences are acceptable, that they can enrich the group, benefit the work and so forth).

c) **In the third stage, norming**, the group binds together, rules are developed, along with perhaps new tasks in the group, adjustment of behaviour progresses, the role of the group is clarified and trust in members emerges.

The role of the leader in this stage is to:

- outline the purposes (possibly through discussion of the group's purposes, so the visions of members can be coordinated);
- outline the roles (perhaps by checking who has what role or task and so forth);
- outline the rules (perhaps by checking how members understand the rules and so forth);
- foster the connectedness of the group (perhaps through joint rituals, customs, some pleasant activity and so forth).

In this stage, if it progresses intensively, the group binds together strongly, meaning that it can have a deep trust in itself, and can establish its own strong rules and customs, although this can present difficulties in the inclusion of new members. In the event that in this stage or after it a new member joins the group, care needs to be taken that the new member is given a detailed presentation of the rules (including informally), important events in the development of the group and so forth, since this will ease inclusion.

d) **The performing stage** means that the group has now matured sufficiently for the roles of members to be functional and adaptable, meaning that they can be effectively interchanged, adapted and so forth. The members are competent, autonomous and capable of independent decision-making.

The role of the leader in this stage is to:

- monitor progress and achievements and report on them to the group;
- promote the independence and self-confidence of members (this can be through praise, encouragements, etc.);
- delegate problem-solving to the members;
- delegate tasks;
- present the members with challenges.

In the case of course tutoring, this stage would be reflected for instance in students themselves taking on the setting of topics, independently finding solutions to problems, an absent member being quickly substituted and the group working well together, even if the tutor is not present.

e) **The final stage is that of adjourning**, which comes at the end of the diploma assignment or academic year. The conclusion can bring about feelings of sadness, with affection expressed towards the leader and members of the group, especially if the third stage, in which the members bonded, progressed very intensively.

The role of the leader in this stage is to:

- sum up the achievements of the group;
- highlight the achievements of individuals;
- **organise the rituals that signal the conclusion** (for instance evaluation, the conferring of certificates or diplomas and so forth).

In the development of the group dynamic after this stage, it is important to be aware that as the meetings progress and the group becomes more mature, group meetings flow more smoothly and quickly.

**In order for the group dynamic to be maintained as well as possible, it is advisable to have group meetings at least once a week**, which in the context of tutoring probably only applies to course tutoring, where the content of lectures and practicals are discussed each week. In other forms of tutoring you will therefore need at each meeting to plan more painstakingly the individual steps by which you will foster the group dynamic. It is good to be aware that certain group members will progress through specific stages more rapidly than others, and this might require them to be slowed down a little (for instance so they do not share too much too soon) while others are encouraged more (for instance to say a bit more about themselves).

## 2.2. Before the first meeting with students

You can set up the first meeting with students in various ways. You can decide that you should first meet up with the whole group that you are tutoring, or you can start with separate meetings with individual students. In both cases, in your meetings try to keep track of the stage of group development, since even in the case of meeting individually with students, development progresses through the same stages.

I recommend that the first meeting be held as a group, even if it is small, since in this way when there are questions from members you can provide more in-depth explanations about what tutoring will involve and what the rules are, the group can bond and there is better cooperation over the content being followed in tutor meetings.

It is advisable to explain in advance at least in outline in the invitation what will take place at the first meeting. This lets you set out in advance the structure and allows the students to feel safer, to prepare for the meeting and so forth.

## Tasks that are good to carry out before the first meeting

Table 1 shows what tasks are advisable to carry out before the first meeting. Of course you can adapt the preparation to the circumstances you are in, but I trust that the table will help.

Table 1: What you need to do before the first meeting

| Task   | Time                                       |
|--|--|
| get information on how many students you are in charge of                | at least ten days before the first meeting |
| decide whether the first meeting will be held in a group or individually | at least ten days before the first meeting |
| reserve a space for the first meeting with students                      | at least ten days before the first meeting |
| think up the content that will be covered in the first meeting           | at least a week before the first meeting   |
| make up the invitation to the first meeting                              | at least a week before the first meeting   |
| obtain the contact details of the students                               | at least a week before the first meeting   |
| send out the invitation to the first meeting                             | at least a week before the first meeting   |
| draw up the final plan for the first meeting                             | at least two days before the first meeting |

If you are organising a group meeting (both the first and subsequent), it is advisable, if you have this option, to agree on the date and time of the meeting with the students (adjust the example of preparing for the first meeting in Table 1 in this case and send out two invitations – the first for a decision on when students can most conveniently attend, and the second a notice on when you are meeting).

In coordinating the meeting it might help you to use one of the websites for coordinating meetings (such as <https://doodle.com/>), which you can also use for coordinating the times of individual meetings. If you do not have this option, think seriously about when your students most probably have time, and call the meeting for that time.

Since some meetings are not possible to hold in person, or if you are trying to organise meetings before the start of the academic year and it is hard to get hold of the students from all corners of the globe, you can organise a meeting through one of the online chatrooms. If you do not have access to tools such as MTeams or Zoom, which require payment for full functionality, you can use Google meet (<https://apps.google.com/meet/>), or Jitsi meet (<https://meet.jit.si/>).

Since your online meeting might require you to draw something, vote on something or conduct some kind of workshop, you can get help for this from Mural (<https://mural.co/>), Clickup (<https://clickup.com/>), and users of Google tools can make use of Jamboard (<https://jamboard.google.com/>).

For each meeting, either online or in a lecture room, you should in any event **define the goals** you are trying to achieve, and prepare specific activities aligned with this. At the first meeting it would be ideal if you achieve the following goals:

- introduce yourself;
- define when and how you can be reached (email, possibly telephone, office and so forth);
- get to know the students (as persons, their expectations, fears and so forth) and
- agree on subsequent meetings (when, where, what content will be covered).

Of course the accomplishment of certain goals could be stretched out over several meetings, especially if you have a large group of students, but have these meetings as much as possible together, if possible with no more than a week in between, since otherwise it is hard for the group dynamic to flow.

## 2.3. First meeting with students

At the first meeting with students you can follow the group dynamic by gradually addressing issues that are appropriate for the specific stage. An example of the structure of a first meeting with students (this is appropriate both for orientation and course tutoring) is given in Table 2.

Table 2: Example of the structure of a first group meeting with students

| Part of meeting                          | Content                                      | Notes  |
|--|--|--|
| introductory part (forming)              | introduction of tutor                        | Introduce yourself in the way you would like the students to introduce themselves (i.e. just your name, name and surname, some additional information and so forth).   |
|  | introduction of students                     | Appropriate content for getting to know each other at this stage is their name and surname and perhaps the place they come from.   |
|  | presentation of structure                    | Present the structure of the meeting, how long it is expected to take and other points (this could also be before the student introductions), and you can tell them how and when you can be reached (email, office hours) and how soon you will respond (try to be as quick as possible) and so forth. |
| intensification of connecting (storming) | introduction of members (tutor and students) | Appropriate content for getting to know each other at this stage includes your horoscope sign, what drew you to study, what is important in your life, who your role models are and so forth.  |
| connecting in the group (norming)        | agreements on rules                          | Appropriate content for this part is an agreement on the time and place of meetings, and how you can contact each other (via email, creating a Facebook group or other suggestions).   |
|  | introduction of members                      | Appropriate content for getting to know each other at this stage includes what they enjoy, what of these things could they do together (you can celebrate birthdays together, go to the cinema and so forth), and agreements about this.   |



|                                       |                              |  |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|--|
|                                       | determining roles            | You can agree on who will take the minutes, who will take care of invitations to tutorial meetings, who will be in charge of remembering birthdays and so forth. |
| agreements going forward (performing) | introduction of members      | Appropriate content for getting to know each other at this stage can include talking about prior knowledge, fears, expectations around tutoring and so forth.    |
|                                       | agreement on further content | Explore what content would be desirable to address at tutorial meetings (this can be suggested by the members or by you).  |
|                                       | determining tasks            | An agreement on who will do what by the next meeting.  |
| conclusion of meeting (adjourning)    | summary of events            | Sum up what agreements have been reached (what will be done by the next meeting, when you are next meeting and so forth).  |
|                                       | conclusion                   | Expression of thanks for participation.  |

2.4.  
Next meetings with students

The next meeting with students can be individual, so you can devote yourself fully to the individual, and subsequent meetings can depend on what topics are being addressed – for those that are of interest to multiple students (how to study, be organised and so forth) it makes sense to have a full group meeting (or part of the group), and when you are dealing with content relating to individuals, then obviously you would meet with them individually.

For the first individual meeting with a student you can refer to Table 3. The table offers content that could be useful, but of course you can adapt the structure and content depending on your needs and the circumstances.

Table 3: Example of the structure of a first individual meeting with a student

| Part of meeting                              | Content  | Proposed content  |
|--|--|---|
| introductory part (forming)                  | presentation of structure                            | Presentation of structure (what the content will be, how much time the meeting will take and so forth).   |
| intensification of connecting (storming)     | getting to know the student                          | What are the student's desires and goals and so forth.  |
| connecting (norming)                         | agreements on work                                   | How you can help as a tutor, how the student can benefit from your help, confidence between the two of you (so that everything entrusted to you remains between the two of you, and you can only disclose an issue in the case of consulting with experts, but not the identity of the person that entrusted this to you and so forth). |
| planning (establishing functional relations) | setting student goals for the specific academic year | Setting student goals with regard to the rules for setting goals (presented in the chapter on motivation in the Tutor's Manual), agreement on the tutor's assistance in achieving these goals and so forth.   |
| conclusion                                   | review of agreements                                 | Summary of agreements at the meeting.   |
|  | agreement going forward                              | An agreement on what to carry out by the next meeting, when the next meeting will be, who will initiate it and so forth.  |

2.5.  
Proposed activities for individual tutoring

For course tutoring it is of course advisable to meet throughout the academic year each week, so that you can promptly resolve issues regarding the course, look deeper into the material and so forth, while for orientation tutoring there is usually not sufficient content to need a weekly meeting. Table 4 shows an example of the timetable for meetings and other activities that can help you in your work, but of course you should adapt the structure and timing to your circum-

stances. The proposed timetable envisages an individual semester having 15 weeks, and proposes certain topics that are more relevant in a specific part of the semester, and it is good to address these in orientation tutoring.

Table 4: Example of the timing of meetings and actions in orientation tutoring over the first academic year

| Event                                   | Content  | Time  |
|---|--|---|
| first email to students                 | invitation to the introductory meeting with a group of students                        | last week before the first semester           |
| first meeting with a group of students  | presentation of tutoring, getting to know students, agreements                         | first week of the first semester              |
| first meetings with individual students | getting to know students, establishing goals for the specific academic year            | first week of the first semester              |
| second meeting with a group of students | presentation of effective ways of studying, formulating study plans                    | second week of the first semester             |
| third meeting with a group of students  | learning about efficient use of time   | third week of the first semester              |
| second email to students                | enquiry as to how things are going, whether they need any help                         | seventh week of the first semester            |
| fourth meeting with a group of students | review and discussion of study plans up until the exam period                          | ninth week of the first semester              |
| fifth meeting with a group of students  | presentation of methods for dealing with stress during exam time                       | tenth week of the first semester              |
| first meeting of student group*         | repetition before exams  | fourteenth week of the first semester         |
| second meeting of student group*        | repetition before exams  | fifteenth week of the first semester          |
| third email to students                 | good wishes for the exam period, encouragement to get in touch if things get difficult | start of first week in the winter exam period |

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| third meeting of student group*         | repetition before exams   | first week in the winter exam period                                      |
| fourth meeting of student group*        | repetition before exams   | second week in the winter exam period                                     |
| fifth meeting of student group*         | repetition before exams   | third week in the winter exam period                                      |
| second meeting with individual students | analysis of performance in the first exam period, possible planning for improvements going forward  | first week of the second semester   |
| sixth meeting of student group*         | repetition before exams   | fourteenth week of the second semester                                    |
| fourth email to students                | enquiry as to how things are going, whether they need any help                                      | seventh week of the second semester                                       |
| seventh meeting of student group*       | repetition before exams   | fifteenth week of the second semester                                     |
| fifth email to students                 | good wishes for the exam period, encouragement to get in touch if things get difficult              | start of first week in the summer exam period                             |
| eighth meeting of student group*        | repetition before exams   | first week in the summer exam period                                      |
| ninth meeting of student group*         | repetition before exams   | second week in the summer exam period                                     |
| tenth meeting of student group*         | repetition before exams   | third week in the summer exam period                                      |
| sixth meeting with a group of students  | evaluation of work in the group, evaluation of your tutoring, agreements for the next academic year | last week of the summer holidays or first week of the next academic year  |
| third meeting with individual students  | analysis of performance in the academic year, setting goals for the next academic year              | last week of the summer holidays and first week of the next academic year |

\*For meetings of the student group it is not essential for you to attend, but you can participate to improve the dynamic. You can also go over some material that you studied a while ago.

After individual meetings it is advisable to draw up (you can use Appendix 2 at the end of the Manual) minutes of the meeting (of course you should agree on this with the student, since you might be restricted by the legislation on personal data protection), which you can also send to the student and use in the preparation of your next meeting with them. It also makes sense after each meeting with students to send them a list of the agreements you have reached, what content you addressed and so forth. Be attentive to the agreements and stick to them consistently, or notify the students in good time if you cannot do this, since this will maintain trust.

## In conclusion

When preparing meetings, as well as after them, it is perfect if you have the chance to consult with other tutors about them. An exchange of experiences and evaluations from colleagues can help you in your professional and personal growth and improve your own leadership and organisation of meetings. If you are uncertain about anything you can approach the coordinator of tutors.

## References

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## Additional literature:

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