

# Additional information about the Master's thesis exchange

## **Use this exercise at the start of the thesis semester – or during the previous semester**

The exercise can be done when about half the students have chosen their thesis topic, while the other half are still considering their options. It can be done halfway through the previous semester, or in the first week of the Master's thesis semester.

If all the students are certain of their topics, there might not be any reason to do the exercise, unless you want to use it to create sparring groups or for general mutual inspiration. It is best to do the exercise when a number of the students are still undecided and need inspiration and good ideas for possible topics.

## **Preparing presentations**

Before the round of presentations, you can give the students 3-5 minutes to find the sentences they want to use to present their topic. They can do this alone on a piece of paper, or you can split them into pairs so they can tell each other about their topics. This ensures that they will all have done some preparation and will find it easier to listen to what the other students have to say.

If there are a lot of students, they might only get 30 seconds to make their presentations. This is not much time, but it is enough to present three things: My topic, and the theory and method I am going to use. So there are three things the other students have to focus on.

## **Keeping an eye on the time**

If there are ten students, they each get two minutes (= 20 minutes). If there are 50, they each get 30 seconds (= 25 minutes). Nobody can bear to listen to a presentation for much more than 30 minutes.

Here's one way of starting the round of presentations:

"In just a moment we'll start with Line, sitting on my right, and then we'll go all the way round. You each have one minute. But how long is that, actually? Look at me while you make your presentation. I'll keep an eye on the time and will mouth 'Thank you', like this, when your time is up."

When 5-7 students have finished their presentations, everyone will have a sense of how long a minute is; and then it should be easy enough to stick to the overall timeframe. Some students will spend less than the time allowed, while others will spend more. If the students lose track of time by more than 30 seconds after several presentations, you should step in and say "Thank you" and maybe "We're losing track of time. Please try and stick to one minute from now on."

## **Will everyone find a partner after the presentations?**

Once the presentations are over the students should find a partner. But this might not work out as smoothly as expected. Some students might end up without a partner, while some groups might be too large. After the presentations, tell the students that this is a risk and that they need to work things out, for instance by talking to someone they don't have much in common with and simply asking about each other's topics. Things might work out in the next round. It might also be fine to work on your own – at least such students will know that no-one else is writing about the same topic.

### **Don't force the students to form writing groups**

Please note that this activity is not suitable if you really have to form groups (use an open-space process for this, see e.g. "Gruppeinddeling a la Open Space", pp. 61-66 in Ib Ravn: *Møder der kommer os i møde*, Kursuslex, 2012).

The idea behind this exercise is that everyone should be able to freely present their topics without fear of being put into groups with three other students they don't want to work with.

Even though three students are interested in the same topic, nobody should feel pressurised to form a group with anyone else. So the teacher should end this exercise without summing up (don't say: "Right. How many groups were formed?") Instead, leave it up to the students to get in touch with each other later on.

### **Using the exercise to create sparring groups**

You can also use the exercise to create sparring groups, with 3-5 students meeting every 2-6 weeks to talk about their writing. This is more casual, but it gives the students a forum in which to talk about the challenges they are facing and get some support from each other.

Tell the students that sparring group meetings can be arranged as follows:

1. Each student gets 30 minutes. One student is responsible for keeping track of time today. You can spend the 30 minutes as follows:
2. Student A presents a challenge they are currently facing in their thesis – relating either to the content or to the writing process. 5-10 minutes.
3. The others talk about A's challenge and try to come up with good ideas for A. A listens without responding and notes down thoughts on their laptop. 5-10 minutes.
4. Finally they all talk about A's challenge with a view to helping A. 10-20 minutes.