

Best practices for student coaches

You're a student coach for buddy groups. Congratulations! To help you, we've put together this document to explain your role as a student coach.

1. Your role as a student coach

Who are you as a student coach?

You are a senior student who supports buddy groups of first-year students. In this role, student coaches strengthen a sense of community among first-year students, with the degree programme, and with Saxion.

What are your tasks?

You will supervise first-year students. Your tasks involve:

- Familiarisation with Saxion and higher education environment;
- Giving examples from your own experience;
- Using working methods and various activities to strengthen a sense of community among students and within the degree programme;
- Encouraging teamwork among students by getting them to make agreements with one another;
- Monitoring student attendance at the buddy group meetings and involving the SCC if there are concerns;
- Being a point of contact for students.

Practical matters regarding the above tasks:

- You will supervise your buddy group for one hour a week;
- You will have time to prepare these meetings.
- You will discuss the content of your meeting with the group's study career counsellor to ensure that separate content builds on each other and there is no unintentional overlap.

How can Saxion's Dienst Onderwijs & Student (OSS) support you?

- This document: best practices for student coaches, with an appendix describing working methods;
- If necessary, student coaches can use the Blackboard 'SkillsCoach' environment. This Blackboard environment already exists and is where you will find all the information and tools relating to study skills in particular.
 - If you want to access this Blackboard environment, sign up by e-mailing: skillscoach.ssc@saxion.nl

How do you work together with a buddy group?

You supervise the buddy group using a student coaching programme provided by the degree programme. This programme may focus on the topics covered in the list of tasks above. If the degree programme has chosen not to provide a programme, you can use the activities and working methods mentioned in appendix I. Check whether your degree programme offers a programme for student coaches.

In your buddy group, you tell students that they are also responsible for:

- The attendance of fellow students;
- Proactive contributions from fellow students;
- His or her own development.

Everyone is equal in the buddy group. This means that a student coach doesn't take on students' responsibilities but simply records them for use during the discussions with the study career counsellor. You also join in with activities and are prepared to answer questions that students may have, or listen to any suggestions.

How do you work together with the buddy group's study career counsellor?

The following table lists the requirements for community building and the objectives of a buddy group. These are important for community building and clearly set out how your tasks relate to the study career counsellor's tasks.

Student coach (you)	Study career counsellor
<i>Requirements and aims</i>	
<p>Requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make clear the purpose of the buddy group • introducing basic rules • make agreements with regard to co-operation, behaviour, and attendance clear <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students get to know and trust each other • Students bond with each other and the programme • Students can find their way around Saxion and higher education, both physically and online • Saxion is aware of students' welfare • Students feel a sense of responsibility for each other • Students learn from each other's experiences 	<p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saxion is aware of students' welfare • Students feel a sense of responsibility for each other • Students value the group, because they learn through group reflection • Students learn from each other's experiences <p><i>In the absence of the student coach, the study career counsellor can implement the requirements and aims described for the student coach</i></p>

<i>Tasks involved in building community among students</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using working methods to strengthen a sense of community among students and with the degree programme • Familiarisation with Saxion and higher education environment, both physically and online • Monitoring student attendance at the buddy group meetings and involving the SCC if there are concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular tasks of the study career counsellor, such as professional and personal development • Referring students on to OSS when extra support is needed <p><i>In the absence of the student coach, the study career counsellor can implement the requirements and aims described for the student coach</i></p>

<p><i>Coordinating content of meetings</i></p> <p>You may receive a student coach programme from your degree programme. You will regularly consult with your buddy group's study career counsellor on subjects such as the content of meetings, student attendance and any concerns about certain students.</p>

What is the remit of your role?

- The support you provide does not extend to assisting students with personal issues which affect their studies.
- You work with first-year students in buddy groups, and do not get involved in one-to-one conversations with students. Support is only provided within the buddy group setting.
- If you report that a student requires extra support for certain issues, you refer this student to the study career counsellor. You do not refer students to third parties – that's the study career counsellor's role.
- You are not responsible for teaching students particular competences and/or skills. You may however contribute to this by employing particular working methods and through your conversations with students.

2. Tips for you

Creating Chats in Teams

You should create a group chat for your buddy group in Teams

- as soon as you know which students you're going to supervise.
 - Open Teams and select 'Chat' on the left-hand side.
 - In the search bar at the top left, click on the pencil icon labelled 'New chat'.
 - Name the chat and add students from your buddy group.

Practical aspects of online meetings

- Rules
 - You will lead the online meeting as a moderator.
 - You encourage students to turn on their microphone during the meeting (unless this causes disruption). To build a community spirit, it's important that the chat is natural and unforced.
 - Make students aware that what is discussed in the group stays in the group. Formally agree this, This is a prelude to turning your buddy group into a safe, trusted space.
 - Start by talking to students about their responsibility as a participant in the buddy group. This means things like: attend, be on time, listen and ask questions, respect one another and take part (see also *How do you work together with a buddy group?*)
- Communication channel
 - Meetings take place via online video calls, in Teams chats.
 - You decide with the group which channel you want to use to communicate outside meetings, e.g. via a WhatsApp group, Teams (chat) or e-mail.
 - You decide with the group where documentation (such as minutes) will be kept for the group. Tip: files can be stored in the Teams chat.
- Video, audio and network (**applies to you as well as students**)
 - Encourage students to turn on their camera during the meeting. To bond with each other, it is important that students and the student coach can see each other.
 - You suggest the following:
 - Make sure backgrounds aren't distracting - avoid sitting with your back to strong sunlights or other strong light sources.
 - Try to reduce background noise by holding the meeting in a calm, quiet space; shut the window if necessary;
 - Use a headset (or earpieces with a microphone);
 - Try to find a place with good WiFi connection.

Meetings

Structuring meetings

- You use the student coach programme as much as possible – this contains components for each meeting. Introduce the component at the beginning of the meeting, so that students are clear about what's going to be discussed.
- Although there's a set programme, it's important to give students time to provide their input as well. What do they want to discuss? Which questions do they have for you or for the group?
- Create a varied homework assignment (which doesn't have to be big) for each meeting. Alternate between individual assignments and assignments done in pairs. This will ensure that students are constantly involved in the buddy group, including outside meetings. The homework assignment can be anything: thinking of a name for the group, talking about each other's experiences, creating a vlog about their favourite hobby, or sharing something with the group.

If students fail to attend

- If there is no contact with a student, a student is not taking part in the buddy group or meetings, or a student cancels at the last minute,
 - Discuss this with your buddy group: What should you do in this situation? Ask whether the agreements about this are clear. Are there agreements in place about who takes the initiative for making contact, and the communication method?
 - For example, ask one of the attendees to reach out to students who fail to attend ('we miss you', for instance). Ideally, this should be done online in an online environment in which all participants in the buddy group can keep track of the exchanges.
 - This is important, because a buddy group is the sum of its parts. So, if one member is absent, this affects the whole buddy group.
- If a student has failed to attend twice in a row, without giving reasons, discuss this with the study career counsellor.
- If the student has been absent multiple times but has given a valid reason for this, ask the buddy group to involve that student.
 - If you feel there's something strange going on, despite the valid reasons, discuss this with the study career counsellor. Trust your gut instinct on this.

Technical issues

- If there are technical issues, you'll have to improvise. It's a good idea to ask participants in the buddy group how they want to proceed.
- It can take a while to find a solution... But the best ideas are usually the ones you have when you're forced to get creative!

Reflection and evaluation

- Use fun activities and working methods to help students reflect, avoiding 'schoolish' activities such as reflective writing.
- Ask questions about the content of the meeting and evaluate this.
- Ask questions about what the student has learned and what they're going to do with this knowledge.
- Encourage students to write down their evaluations and reflections (it doesn't have to be long).
- Invite students to share their observations, concerns or reflections. This helps participants at an individual and group level, as others are encouraged to express their own personal experiences.
- Reflection is a group activity; students learn by hearing about others' experiences.

Make it personal

- Make it personal right from the beginning, but wait until participants in the buddy group feel safe and trust each other before going into any real depth.

- Invite participants to share, but don't force them to give an answer. Participants will share what they feel comfortable telling you. However, you can ask questions to encourage the participant to share their thoughts on what they do and don't like.
- Online teaching is personal from the word go, as students are participating from home. Use this in various working methods.
- Explain what's going to happen (by referring to the programme, for instance), and do this for each assignment, so that students can prepare.
- Explain the objective of learning based on one's personal situation.

How do you supervise a study group?

- Ensure interaction in the group by taking an active attitude, set a good example to the group, respond enthusiastically and act on spontaneous input. You don't need to follow the programme to the letter.
- If a student is visibly happy, shocked, or looking vacantly at the screen, ask them what emotions they are feeling. Engage with the student and enter into dialogue.
- Invite students to share their experiences with the group.
- Address students by asking them specific questions, and try to alternate the people you do ask so that everyone gets to say something. If somebody is particularly quiet, make sure you invite them to share their thoughts.
- Ask questions about the pace and clarity of assignments.
- Make participants aware of their individual responsibility: establishing online group unity relies on students being fully involved in a buddy group.
- If you're using assignments, keep the meeting fast-paced by setting time pressure for assignments; this requires students to be creative when solving the assignment.
- Occasionally step back from an ongoing conversation, discussion or assignment, so that the students can sort it out themselves – you don't need to control or lead everything.

Students confide in you and your buddy group

- If students talk about their personal problems in confidence and don't want this information to be shared with the study career counsellor, what do you do?
 - Be honest about your role: You discuss students' attendance with the study career counsellor and refer students to the counsellor if they have any problems.
 - Say that the student would be wise to share this information with the study career counsellor, as they can provide better support to the student.

3. To dos for the first weeks

Tasks per week for student coaches, in chronological order

Meeting 1 (initial introduction)	Meeting 2	Meeting 3	Meeting 4
<p><i>For first meeting:</i> Get to know the study career counsellor and agree how you're going to supervise students</p> <p>Receive names of students</p> <p>Create a group chat in Teams for buddy groups</p> <p><i>During first meeting:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explain the role of the student coach - Explain the basic rules - Get to know each other - Introduce higher education/study programme - Suggest dates for the meetings over the coming weeks (if these haven't already been timetabled) 	<p>Check the basic rules and add students' responsibilities to them.</p> <p>Use working methods that help students get to know one another better.</p> <p>Make sure students have the opportunity to ask questions about timetables, MySaxion, etc.</p>	<p>Use working methods that help students get to know one another better.</p> <p>Make sure students have the opportunity to ask questions about timetables, MySaxion, etc.</p>	<p>Use working methods that help students get to know one another better.</p> <p>Make sure students have the opportunity to ask questions about timetables, MySaxion, etc.</p>

Appendix I Working methods for community building

This appendix lists the various working methods you can use to build community and help students get to know one another. There is information on the objective of each working method, what you need, how the working method can be put into practice and what your role is. These are only ideas to inspire you. The working methods are listed in no particular order, so there is no logic to how they have been arranged. Of course, there are many variations of the examples given – they're simply to inspire you and help you get off to a good start.

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Storytelling

Purpose

Using stories to reach an objective and involve students. Stories are an ideal way to first make contact with people, to engage them, to entice them, to offer clarity and meaning, to make fans or to foster community spirit. Stories attract us, they make intangible things tangible, can be shared with others and add meaning to life events. Stories are an effective communication method: they get people engaged and deliver results.

Materials

- Creativity.

How?

Everyone has a story to tell, i.e. their experiences of starting higher education.

What happened before that? What preliminary study has someone completed? Was it an obvious choice to study in higher education? Did you already know right away what study programme you wanted to do? Who helped you choose? What issues did you face progressing to higher education?

Hearing other people's different experiences should help students to feel less alone in their own experiences. It can be very helpful to hear that other students were faced with obstacles but managed to overcome them.

Ask the students to tell their story!

A storyteller's tools

- Use personal experiences, events and memories.
- And use humour!
- Think about the core of your message and make sure it's structured.
- Bring the story to life and show something. Visualise – use images and clips!
- Think in terms of 'what if'.

You could present your speculations on this during one of the meetings.

Student coach's role

- You should participate as well!
- Ask questions: Why? Could you provide an example? Who identifies with this? Etc.

True or false?

Purpose

Using personal statements to get to know one another.

Materials

- Creativity.
- Kahoot
- Preparation

How?

Each student comes up with two to three statements that are true or false and sends these statements to you. You use them to create a kahoot, which you can play together during the meeting so that students can get to know one another. You can also use multiple-choice questions or combined versions.

Student coach's role

- Gather the statements
- Use the statements to create a kahoot

Brainstorming

Purpose

Brainstorm about how you can create a community feeling. What would help to create a community with fellow students?

Materials

- Creativity.

How?

Brainstorming can take many forms, such as:

- with the entire group
- in small groups
- in pairs
- individually, by asking students to make a brief note

Important: Share all the brainwaves with the group as a whole and together pick some fun ideas.

Student coach's role

- Explain the assignment
- Form groups or pairs
- Keep an eye on the time
- In the event of feedback: Oversee who may say what

Escape room

Purpose

Fun, engaging activity to get to know each other better and create a community spirit. You may get to know each other in different ways: Who is the initiator? Who enjoys solving problems? Who's the brains and who's the muscle?

Materials

- Online escape room

How?

Look for a fun online escape room and make sure everyone can access it. You can do this (physically) behind a computer or ask everyone to log in at home. If you log in at home, make sure everyone can talk to each other in Teams so that you can work together!

Examples of online escape rooms:

- www.deverlorenherinnering.nl (free, three to ten hours of fun, suitable for groups of nine people; can start, close and resume at any time)
- <https://www.theteambuilding.nl/2020/04/09/online-escape-rooms-spelen/> (several are mentioned: some are free, and some require the payment of a small fee)

Student coach's role

- Supervise the escape room (make sure everyone can access it and join in)
- And you can join in, too!

Our first impressions

Purpose

Getting to know someone based on first impressions: talking about the first impressions and realising they're not always correct.

Materials

- List of topics
- Preparation

How?

Each student receives a list with a number of topics, such as: hobby, countryside/city, pets, positive attributes. He or she fills this in for other participants, and then talks about whether this first impression is correct.

Student coach's role

- Students hand in a list of topics
- Keep an eye on the time
- Initiate and moderate a conversation

Truths and lies

<p>Purpose</p> <p>Using two truths and a lie to get to know one another. Every student writes two things about themselves that are TRUE and one lie. Everyone then enters into a discussion to find out what is true or false.</p>
<p>Materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pen/paper or mobile phone
<p>How?</p> <p>The participants are given two minutes to write down their three items. The time given to separate fact from fiction depends on the number of participants.</p>
<p>Student coach's role</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain the game • Supervise the game

Photo gallery

<p>Purpose</p> <p>Using photo galleries on people's mobiles to get to know one another.</p>
<p>Materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pen/paper or mobile phone
<p>How?</p> <p>Check whether everyone has a smartphone.</p> <p>Instruction to participants: 'Go to the photo gallery and pick a photo that says something about you. You can decide which one. Ask everyone to look for a photo. You have one minute to say something about it.' Give a sign after every minute, at which point we'll move on to the next person.</p> <p>Variation: Before the meeting, ask everyone to pick three photos and briefly say something about them It could be several batches of photos that are linked to a certain theme.</p>
<p>Student coach's role</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain the game • Supervise the game

Toss a name

<p>Purpose</p> <p>This game is to help to get to know one another. Depending on how you do it, you can achieve the following: learning each other's names, learning more about one another on a personal level, creating openness, getting to know each other during the game as the group roles become clearer, or learning about people's personal goals within the context of the buddy group.</p>
<p>Materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The online version just needs a bit of concentration!

Starting setup: Ask the participants to sit in a circle.

Explain: During this game, you'll all have the opportunity to get know one another better. Everyone has to stay concentrated, otherwise the game won't work.

Order of the game

Point to someone on the image and give a description of them; They introduce themselves: My name is <naam>. Then you describe another student, who says: My name is <naam>. Repeat until everyone has had their turn.

After, start a round by calling the name of one of the students. This student then calls the name of another student, etc. Everyone must have a turn – nobody should be left out, and nobody's name should be mentioned twice! The last from the group must then call you by your name to complete the round.

If the group enjoys it, add a theme; My name is <naam> And my hobby is <hobby>. Make sure everyone gets to say what their hobby is. Now we'll see who's been paying attention. you start with <iemands zijn naam> and his or her hobby is <hobby>. The game proceeds as described above, but with an extra theme.

If the group enjoys it, add another theme: such as people's favourite food. If it seems like an appropriate moment; ask deeper questions such as 'what do you want to learn?'

You can do so many rounds this way!

Differentiation

Ask who knows everyone's name and record this.

Do the same if you've talked about hobbies.

Evaluation

What happened?

Who led the activity?

What are the lessons learnt for the following activity?

Areas of concern

You achieve the best results when everyone does their best and concentrates.

Role of the student coach:

- Explain the game
- Starting the game

Pub quiz

Purpose

Fun, engaging activity to get to know each other better and create a community spirit. Who has a 'specialist subject' and what is this? Who is really into it and who's a bit quieter?

Materials

- A pub quiz

How?

Use an existing pub quiz or make one yourself. You can use the following websites to put a quiz together:

- Www.quiz-vragen.net
- www.quizzo.nl
- Www.quizplein.nl

Choose an environment you'd like to use for this, such as kahoot, and create the quiz. You can do the quiz during one of your meetings.

Student coach's role:

- Make a quiz
- Lead the quiz