

Meetings skills

TOPICAL ISLANDS

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

Meetings are an important forum for the exchange of information and ideas. Decisions are made in meetings which have a considerable effect on the student's work. A meeting is an opportunity for the student to make an impact, but it can also feel frustrating and intimidating if it is not run properly. This activity introduces the student to a twelve-point framework for running a meeting; as a participant or as a chairperson, the activity gives the student a basis to judge good practice.

Method

Ask the student to identify meetings they have attended during the last week. There may be gatherings which the student has not perceived as *meetings*, so it is useful to look at different kinds of meeting. Walk the student through the *Topical islands* schedule, checking their understanding and discussing what it can mean in practice. (Allow 15 - 20 minutes).

Arrange for the student to be an observer at a meeting, using the *Topical islands* schedule to evaluate the meeting. The student should repeat this process in a meeting where they are a participant, then - ideally - where they have a chance to chair a meeting. In the latter instance, it helps to video the meeting, with participants' consent.

Use the practice tutorial to review the student's use of the *Topical islands* schedule. How has their experience of using the schedule influenced their thinking about meetings? Has it changed what they actually *do* in meetings? (About 30 minutes).

Variations

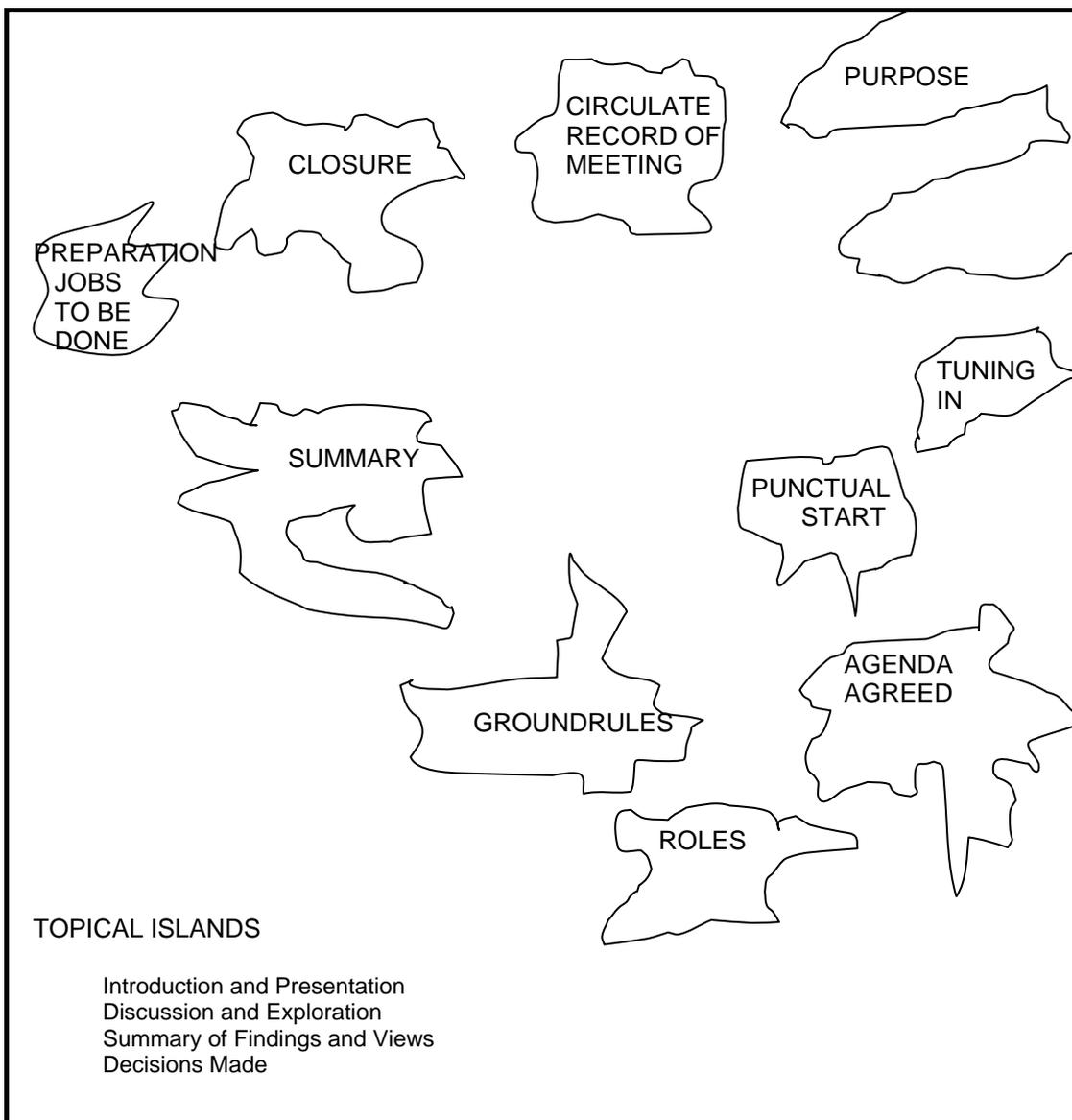
The definition of *meeting* is not clear-cut and there are many links with small groupwork. Team meetings, case conferences, residents' meetings, support groups, all have elements which related to the *Topical islands* schedule. There may be great variations in the climate of different meetings (for example, the formality or informality) but the essential steps from preparation to closure remain the same. It is interesting for the student to experience different kinds of meeting and to see if the purpose of a meeting gets reflected in the way the meeting is run.

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TOPICAL ISLANDS Activity

The map below represents twelve stages to help a meeting achieve its purposes. The map does not necessarily show the relative size or importance of each stage in any particular meeting. The islands follow a rough sequence, but most meetings are characterized by both *linear movement* from topic to topic, and *circular* movement, with eddies of discussion around each topic explored in detail.

Use *Topical islands* as a kind of board game to analyze the progress of a meeting. Try it out first in a meeting where the practice teacher is a participant and where the student is an observer. This way, both of you experience the same meeting, with the student able to focus on the *Topical islands* activity rather than having to contribute to the meeting.



When you are familiar with the way this activity works, do a *Topical islands* sheet for a meeting where you are a participant or, better still, the chairperson.