

NAME

pedagand – Pierre-Évariste Dagand, CS researcher

SYNOPSIS

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pedagand --meeting { --local | --remote }  
pedagand --supervision { --Master-thesis | --PhD-thesis }  
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DESCRIPTION

pedagand is a computer science researcher interested in programming languages, compilers and the general betterment of the human condition through widespread and democratized automation.

The day he completes his research program, we will all be sipping peppermint teas and Mojitos by the pool, with robots toiling away for us and paying their taxes (yes, I'm looking at you Amazon).

In the meantime and in case you need to interact with **pedagand** for work, this manpage documents its interface.

(And that's enough illeism for now.)

Values

I am driven by a few core values:

running on a maker's schedule:

I aggressively organize my time for uninterrupted, focused work.

seeking the company of clever people:

I won't stay in a room where I feel competent.

keeping good personal hygiene:

I won't participate in power games. Even if you win the rat race, you're still a rat.

putting science before ego:

I will talk openly about any sketchy idea I might have. If someone has the perseverance to work them out before I do, it's fine by me. Being human, I would certainly prefer to be involved in the discovery process but that's for the thrill of it, not to stick my name on something. However, I won't hold any grudge if some idea comes to fruition without me.

Conversely, I have a bad track-record with attributions: whilst presenting an idea, I may forget to mention its original authors. Please forgive this Koestlerian bias of mine: I am not actively trying to steal the show, I am just being careless, focusing on the idea rather than the individuals who formulated it. Do keep me in line and interrupt, by any means!

OPTIONS

--email

I read email about 3 times a day: upon waking up, during lunch break and before going to sleep.

I generally respond to emails in batch in the evening. For non-urgent matters, I will batch my responses for the week-end (usually: Sunday evening).

If I am particularly busy, email processing will take a back seat: you may experience up to 3 weeks delay in my response. Either way, I am currently able to respond to every email I receive. If you have sent an email that called for a response, feel free to ping me again.

I work under the assumption that email (inbound and outbound) is a faulty and asynchronous channel. Act accordingly.

--administrivia

I will delay administrative tasks as much as possible so as to handle them in a single batch, either on a Sunday or a Monday morning. I mean no disrespect by my calculated inefficiency: filling an endless stream of forms would be an all too easy form of procrastination that could pass for work.

--meeting

I strive to keep meetings short. I may actively seek to shorten a meeting that seems to have outlived its usefulness: this is out of respect for everyone's time, not impatience and rudeness.

I work under the assumption that meetings are a necessary evil but seating in a meeting room does not constitute productive work: we would all be better off elsewhere (kudos to Fritz Henglein, who enlightened me on this topic).

--local In the lab, I follow an Open Door policy. Literally, my door is always open. Just barge in, at any time.

--remote

I tend to shy away from meetings outside of the lab because it interrupts my daily work and traveling -- however close -- is wasteful, time-wise. As a result, I try to amortize these costs by allocating large time slots to such remote meetings, with the expectation that actual work is carried out after the meeting per-say.

--supervision

I have a weekly one-on-one with my supervisee. I consider my supervisee -- however junior -- as equals: no deference must be given to me and any disagreement that may arise during our discussion must be voiced, immediately and clearly. In French, the informal subject pronoun "tu" is therefore de rigueur when addressing me.

The role of these meetings is twofold. First, it is an opportunity to reflect upon the achievements and difficulties of the week closing. In that role, I strive to be as naive an observer as possible: I practice informaeutics. Second, we devote some time to plan for the subsequent week. The supervisee is expected to drive this planning: I will never judge the amount of work carried in a week but I will be watchful of the accuracy of this planning. The supervisee is thus responsible for providing a good estimate of the time it takes to complete a task.

Transitioning from "being a student" to "being a researcher" can be challenging. Being a student is often synonymous to "giving the right answer" and, failing that, bluffing one's way out of a tough question. Becoming a researcher is about learning to ask the right question. This means perpetually confronting one's ignorance head-on. To ease the transition, I setup the ground work of my

supervisee as a "mistake desensitization" ([<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desensitization_\(psychology\)>](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desensitization_(psychology))) program.

I work under the assumption that the supervisee is in the pilot seat while I am sitting in the cozy comfort of my ivory tower. I am deeply aware of the fact that, if we produce subpar work, I am only risking a few bruises to my ego while the supervisee could get academically and/or professionally shot down. As a result, I see it as a fundamental right of my supervisee to get unlimited access to my time and attention. If need be: ask, repeatedly and loudly.

Conversely, I have grown accustomed to a certain standard of research methodology and writing quality. I am (morally but also physically) unable to compromise on those. If in doubt, checkout my own PhD thesis ([<https://pages.lip6.fr/Pierre-Evariste.Dagand/stuffs/thesis-2011-phd/thesis.pdf>](https://pages.lip6.fr/Pierre-Evariste.Dagand/stuffs/thesis-2011-phd/thesis.pdf)) to see what I expect from an average student reaching graduation.

--Master-thesis

My experience is that students struggle to write decent reports, in part due to time management issues. This is a tragic rookie mistake: being able to convey an idea is at least as important as coming up with it! Or, as the meme goes:

"Remember kids, the only difference between screwing around and science is writing it down." -- MythBusters

I offer a straightforward publication service to my Master's students: if you embark on a Master thesis with me, I will be available to turn your thesis in a form suitable for publication in a conference, if you so desire.

--PhD-thesis

To prospective students: as a rule, I only hire PhD candidates with whom I have had the opportunity to work with before. It is in our mutual interest: before making such a long-term, high-stakes commitment, it is best to get to know each other in a non-committal setting.

In my experience, PhD students go through roughly 3 phases:

first phase/year:

students absorb the literature and related works. I try to get them to publish a paper right before they enter the second phase.

second phase/year:

students realize that their work is mostly subsumed by pre-existing or on-going work. I try, well, not to be offended and to get them to the last phase with as little drama as possible. They radically question their PhD topic. While certainly unpleasant, this is perhaps the most interesting phase from a scientific standpoint.

third phase/year:

I expect students to have found their own voice. I try to help them push their agenda as best as I can, through conference publications for example. The

ultimate goal is for them to be able to produce a single-authored paper by the end of their PhD.

--work-week

I work from Sunday to Friday. Short of a looming deadline, I spend my Saturdays off-the-grid.

Friday is usually Hamming's day: I do prospective work and grant writing (I call this "writing science fiction"). I tend to plan my work week on Sunday. I handle email and administrivia (for anything doable online) on Sunday and the rest of the administrivia on Monday (when in-person interaction is necessary).

BUGS

I tend to postpone administrative tasks for too long. I wholeheartedly apologize if you are on the non-receiving end of one.

I seem to be always rushing after deadlines. Either I consistently over-commit or I consistently under-deliver, the jury is still out on that one.

I am guilty of not reading enough papers these days. I would blame my kids for having turned me into a sleep-deprived zombie since 2017 but my wife forbade me. I strongly encourage everyone not to do the same (with respect to reading papers, I won't be so bold as to be contraceptive in a manpage)

I enjoy writing a bit too much, which leads me to write funny when I get carried away. Apologies.

SEE ALSO

Maker's schedule, Graham <<http://www.paulgraham.com/makersschedule.html>>

The Act of Creation, Koestler <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Act_of_Creation>

PhD meta-advice, Stephen Kell <<https://www.cs.kent.ac.uk/people/staff/srk21/blog/2019/01/11/#phd-meta-advice>>

Career advice, Terry Tao <<https://terrytao.wordpress.com/career-advice/>>

What's a mathematician to do?, MO <<https://mathoverflow.net/questions/43690/#44213>>

The Utopia of Rules, Graeber <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Utopia_of_Rules>

You and your research, Hamming <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a1zDuOPkMSw>>