

Study Groups

Why form a study group?

1. You believe you can learn more by working together than by working alone.
2. You believe university can be cooperative not just competitive.
3. Committing to a study group will increase the chances that you do the work you know you should do.
4. You can get to know people.
5. You can help people.
6. Study groups expand your learning style (and you want to become a more well-rounded, flexible learner).
7. Study groups suit your preferred learning style.
8. You can develop teamwork skills.

How to Form a Study Group

Step 1: Initial Invitation

You can carefully select participants or issue an open invitation to everyone.

Selected Group

Of each individual ask the following questions:

- 1 Is he or she a dedicated student, attending class regularly, paying attention, taking notes, and asking good questions? Is this person dependable enough to show up prepared to contribute?
- 1 Does he or she want to participate in the study group?
- 1 Can he or she meet at a common time?

All other considerations are secondary. Secondary considerations include:

- 1 Do I feel reasonably comfortable with the person? You may want to feel just a little uncomfortable with the person, suspecting that the person may challenge you in some way and thus help you learn.
- 1 Do I have a mix of people, for example, some older, some younger; some part-time, some full-time; some male, some female; some majors, some non-majors; some of different cultures, some of the same; and so on. You want enough diversity so that people have different perspectives but not so much that people cannot agree on common goals and methods.

Open-Invitation Group

Pass a sign-up sheet around class before class starts. The sheet can be general or specific. It can simply ask people if they want to sign up for a study group, or it can also spell out the specifics such as the purpose, time(s), and place(s).

Step 2: Meet to Plan What the Group Will Do

Question: What is the purpose of the group?

Study groups could have any of the following purposes:

- Review material
- Compare and update notes
- Divide up readings or other work
- Prepare for an exam

Question: How will the group operate?

Decades of failed study groups strongly suggest that the group members agree to

- have an agenda to achieve their purpose
- set approximate time limits on agenda items
- set a quitting time and stick to it
- end each session by agreeing what each person will do for the next meeting

Following an agenda emphasizes that the group is more about learning than about socializing, and that the time spent will be worthwhile. You may want to choose a chairperson to keep the sessions on track, especially if your study group is larger (e.g., 5-6) rather than small (e.g., 3).

Question: How often, when, and where should the group meet?

Step 3: Hold an Initial Meeting

If this goes well, plan regular meetings.

Techniques to Meet the Group's Goals

Goal: Review material

- 1 Each member brings a certain number of test questions, photocopied; everyone tries to answer the questions individually or as a group; then the group discusses the answers.
- 1 Each member teaches an assigned topic. Everyone can do this every meeting, or only one or two people can present longer lessons each meeting.
- 1 The group can go through lecture notes and discuss difficult sections.

Goal: Compare and update notes

- 1 Compare what each person thinks are the important points of the lectures. Fill in any missing material. Discuss confusing material.

Goal: Divide up readings or other work

- 1 Each member presents a written summary of a reading and teaches it to the group in detail.
- 1 Pair off and do interviews on the readings. One person summarizes an assigned reading, and the other person interview him or her, asking questions which lead to clarification of the material and critical thinking.

Goal: Prepare for an exam

- 1 Analyze what topics are most likely to appear on the exam.
- 1 Each member brings a certain number of test questions, photocopied; everyone tries to answer the questions individually or as a group; then the group discusses the answers.
- 1 Create mind maps or outlines of chapters and share these with the group.

Study Groups: How to make them better

Time

Always meet at the same time.

Place

Always meet at the same place.

Begin

Always begin on time.

Monitor

Appoint a monitor to keep the group on target and the discussion moving. Focus on the here and now. Don't let the group spend too much time dwelling in the past or fretting about the future.

Goal

At the beginning of the session, state the goal for the session. "Our goal in this session is"

Plan

Sketch a plan or method to reach the goal for the session.

Discuss

Allow free-flowing discussion of anything relevant to the group's goal. Identify major concepts, clarify discrepancies between text and lecture, share examples from experience, relate theory to practice. If questions arise that cannot be quickly and accurately answered, don't waste time pooling ignorance. Appoint one member to check with the instructor and report back to the group later.

Review

Review lecture notes, highlights of readings, films, class objectives, lists to be memorized, etc.

Quiz

Drill each other. Use test questions at the end of the chapter, or better yet, construct your own.

Summarize

Periodically pause and recap the major points under discussion. At the end of the session, summarize what you have accomplished and list the things that still need to be done.

Divide

Whenever possible, divide tasks and activities.

Assign

Assign individuals or subgroup to tasks, and be sure to specify dates for completion.

End

Always end on time.

Socialize

After the official end of the group, members may feel free to leave or to stay and chat. The benefits of playing together should not be underestimated.

Successful Study Group Ground Rules

1. Understand and accept the group purpose or mission.
2. Contribute ideas, information, opinions, and feelings.
3. Invite and encourage other members to contribute.

4. Listen intently.
5. Demonstrate respect and support for other members.
6. Help keep the discussion relevant.
7. Periodically help summarize the major points.
8. Give examples and share pertinent experiences.
9. Recognize conflict and controversy as potentially positive, and refuse to see it as a personal rejection.
10. Every session or so, focus for a few minutes on the group dynamics or process, in order to monitor how well the group is functioning.

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