

Study Groups: Strategies for Success

So you want to organize a study group. You have probably heard that attending a study group can help you succeed in university. Study groups, however, can be a double-edged sword; when they work they are very helpful, but when they do not work they are a waste of time and energy. This handout offers some helpful tips to get the most out of your study group.

1. Forming the group

Aim for a mix of students with different perspectives so that they can offer unique insights about the material. Limit the size of the group to no more than six students to avoid scheduling problems and confusion. It is important to select an effective and responsible group leader and individuals who:

- Are dedicated students and attend class regularly;
- Pay attention in class and keep up-to-date on lecture material;
- Have the ability and willingness to contribute to the group;
- Will be focused and stay on task during the sessions; and
- Will allow each member to make use of their particular strengths.

2. Scheduling

Set up regular meeting times, either weekly or bi-weekly, depending on everyone's schedule.

- If possible, book the same room for each session, such as a library study room.
- Avoid places that might be distracting or noisy.
- Re-evaluate the scheduled meeting time if it becomes problematic for any members.
- Decide if the group wants to meet on a trial basis before committing to a longer duration, such as an entire semester.

3. Setting goals for the study sessions

Determining specific goals for each study session can help the group to stay on task and get the most out of each session. These can include, but are not limited, to:

A. During the semester

- Reviewing the week's lecture notes and assigned readings
- Discussing lecture and textbook readings
- Comparing and updating notes, and clarifying discrepancies between the lecture and the textbook
- Discussing difficult sections
- Quizzing one another on concepts from the readings and lecture material

B. Preparation for midterms and finals

- Going over practice midterms, assignments, or problem sets from the semester
- Determining and discussing topics that are most likely to appear on the exam
- Creating outlines for the concepts covered in lectures and assigned readings
- Creating a mock exam with questions from the lectures or textbook summary sections and quizzes

4. Strategies for meeting the group's goals

Goal: Review material

- Each member brings a certain number of questions for the group to answer
- Review lecture notes and follow-up with a discussion of key concepts of the lecture or assigned reading
- Audio-tape a particular lecture, and then review it with the group

Goal: Compare and update notes

- Compare what each member thinks about important points in the lectures, and fill in any missing material gained from the other members
- Compare lecture notes with the instructor's posted notes
- Discuss material that is unclear or difficult

Goal: Divide the work

- Each member presents a written summary of a reading and teaches it in detail to the group
- Pair up and try to answer questions presented in the study session
- Discuss summary questions and key concepts from the textbook

Goal: Prepare for an exam

- Analyze which topics are most likely to appear on the exam
- Consult the class syllabus and create a study plan for the group
- Review midterms, assignments, and problem sets that can be used as a guide to create a mock exam and complete during another session
- Create mind maps or outlines of chapters of material covered

5. Advantages of study groups

- Improves overall study skills including recall ability
- Encourages discipline and discourages procrastination
- Promotes discussion and builds self-confidence
- Provides new perspectives in learning
- Provides opportunities to practice presentation skills
- Encourages students to make new friends
- Fosters a sense of community, especially for students far from home