

Effective Study Groups

The basics:

- 1) Get to know your classmates and exchange email or phone numbers.
- 2) Study groups should have between 3-6 members, though **4-5 is best**. Choose participants carefully:
 - Yes – look for students who attend class regularly, take notes in class, show an interest in learning, and participate in lecture by asking/answering questions.
 - No – avoid friends you mostly socialize with and who do not share your academic goals.
- 3) Establish a **regular, weekly meeting time**. Remember, study groups are not just for test time.
- 4) Limit the length of the meeting to **1-2 hours** and schedule **short, regular breaks**.
- 5) Find a **meeting place** where you can spread out books and papers and easily talk to each other. Look for comfortable chairs and a blackboard or dry erase board.
 - Yes – Empty classrooms, group study rooms in a library or residence hall.
 - No – Public areas such as coffee shops (unless the group can stay focused).
- 6) Establish **ground rules** that create an environment of trust and respect so all members feel their contributions are valued. Each person brings a unique set of experiences and background that can add an important dimension to the group discussion; value this in yourself and in others.
 - Be sure that all group members participate and have a good grasp of important concepts.
 - Encourage members to reveal their weaknesses so they can strengthen those areas.
 - Respect different learning styles.
 - Allow everyone the chance to teach and to be taught. When you instruct the group, you not only help the other group members, but you also reinforce your own knowledge.
- 7) Establish **realistic goals**. For example, "Today we'll review the 5 concepts we discussed during our last meeting and then discuss chapter 7 which was introduced in class on Wednesday."
- 8) Expect members to **be prepared**: Bring notes, textbooks and other materials and be prepared to discuss the material. Complete assigned readings, review notes and jot down concepts to discuss.
- 9) Determine how you will **structure your time**. Will the group spend the first 15 minutes reviewing concepts from the last meeting, the next 30 reviewing a difficult concept/idea from this week's lecture, and the final 15 minutes brainstorming test questions?
- 10) Consider **assigning rotating roles**. Possible roles include: facilitator (to guide the discussion), calculator (to do math), understanding checker (to make sure everyone in the group is following along), task-master (to keep the group on task), note-taker, timekeeper, and resource manager.

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Possible agenda items:

- 1) By consensus, have the group come up with a list of the most important topics, concepts, and types of questions for the class.
 - 2) Have each member take responsibility for one topic, lecture, chapter, or item on a review sheet. Review the material you are responsible for. Then make a summary sheet and develop a few questions to share with the group. [Consider volunteering to be responsible for an area you find most difficult. Research this area thoroughly and become an expert!]
 - 3) Make a concept map of key terms and definitions.
 - 4) Discuss and resolve discrepancies in everyone's notes.
 - 5) Share tips (and memory devices) on how to recall important information.
 - 6) Compare/discuss answers to difficult homework and practice exam questions that you have already taken on your own. [Remember, homework and practice exams are for self-testing and should not be completed in your study group!]
 - 7) Brainstorm possible test questions.
 - 8) End each session with an agenda for the next session, with each group member assigned to prepare/present specific material.
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Troubleshooting:

- 1) If there are concepts the group finds confusing, elect a volunteer to ask the professor on behalf of the group. Then, at the next meeting, the volunteer can share the professor's response.
- 2) Stay on task: limit socializing to break time and try not to complain about courses or professors.
- 3) Openly and respectfully discuss if things aren't working out in your group.
- 4) Remind group members that they should study the material on their own before the group meets. If one group member is not making an effort to come prepared, suggest that the student would do better by consulting with the professor or a tutor instead of being in the group.
- 5) Avoid becoming a place for note-gathering: Discussing notes can be part of an effective study group, but discourage members from seeing the group as a replacement for attending class.
- 6) Avoid allowing anyone to dominate by setting group guidelines: For example, the group can decide that no one person can speak for more than three minutes or that once a person speaks he/she cannot speak again until another person offers a comment.
- 7) Don't give up; sometimes it takes a while to find the best study partners.