

# LEARNING

## DEVELOPMENT & SUCCESS

### Why Study Groups?

Study groups help students practice active learning. They provide an avenue for students to gain deeper understanding of course material. Study groups are meant to enhance student learning by allowing students to explore course material with others, gain further insight into course concepts, and be accountable and responsible for their studying.



#### Benefits of Study Group Learning

- **Motivational Support:** Study groups can motivate you into a studying mindset and can be a source of encouragement when you find that your motivation is slipping.
- **Accountability:** You may become more committed to studying because your group members will be counting on you to come to each study session prepared.
- **Ask Questions:** Are you reluctant to ask questions in class? You may feel more comfortable inquiring about confusing or complex course material in a small study group.
- **Share Knowledge:** There is strength in numbers; group members may have different interpretations or understandings of course material and these new insights may help you learn a concept more clearly than you would have studying alone. Likewise, difficult math problems may be solved more effectively as a group.
- **Improve Class Notes:** You can compare your class notes with your study partners to clarify information and fill in any gaps.
- **Teach Others:** Teaching or explaining information to others is a great way of reviewing and assessing your understanding of course material. Additionally, teaching others can help to reinforce your mastery of the information and build confidence.
- **Acquire New Skills:** Each person brings different strengths to a study group, such as organizational, note taking, and problem solving skills. By participating in a study group, you have an opportunity to learn new study habits from your peers.



#### Forming a Study Group

- Take the time to **connect** with your classmates, or post a message on an OWL discussion board. Find individuals who **share your goals for academic**

**success.** The most effective study groups are composed of students who are motivated, dependable, attend class regularly, take good notes, and participate in class discussion.

- Form a group of **three to five people** - small enough to manage well and keep everyone involved, yet large enough to offer a diverse level of skills and learning styles.
- Try to meet on the **same day and time each week** and work together for no more than **two to three hours**. Having a time limit will help the group to stay on task.
- Select a meeting place that is **free of distractions** and has room to spread out your books.
- **Choose a group leader.** Decide whether it will be the same person for each meeting, or if you'll rotate leadership responsibilities. The role of the group leader is to help group members stay on task and to ensure that all members have the chance to share their ideas.



### Guidelines for Effective Study Group Sessions

- **Set Guiding Principles and Expectations**  
To ensure that all group members work together effectively, it is important to spend the first meeting discussing and writing down the guiding principles and expectations of the group. Some helpful principles could involve the following:
  - \* Commit to attend, prepare, and be on time for meetings.
  - \* Stay on task.
  - \* Actively listen to each other without interrupting.
  - \* Be respectful of diverse perspectives and learning approaches.
  - \* Work collaboratively to resolve any conflicts or concerns.

It may be important to regularly review the group's goals and expectations to ensure that everyone is staying on track. This could be effectively handled by setting aside time at each session for members to give feedback regarding the progression of the group. For example, are expectations being met? Are there any new issues that need to be addressed?

### Outline Study Objectives and Goals

Decide as a group what you will cover in a session. Knowing what you want to accomplish will help the group to maintain focus and manage time. At the start of each session create an agenda that outlines studying objectives. If you are unsure of what you can do to maximize your time together, here are some ideas:

Review lecture notes and readings: discuss key concepts, ask questions, and share knowledge.

- \* Prepare for tests and exams: practice recalling or applying information, work through problems, and predict exam questions.
- \* Take turns teaching course material.
- \* Learn studying strategies from each other.

- **Possible Pitfalls to Avoid**

A study group can be a positive learning experience, but it can also be easy for groups to get off track and spend their time ineffectively. Therefore, it is important that study group members anticipate pitfalls they may encounter and that they openly discuss and agree upon how to handle them. Below are common pitfalls to avoid:

- \* Do not let your study group get distracted or treat sessions as a time to socialize. It is important that someone fulfills a leadership role and helps members to stay on task. It may also be beneficial to schedule short study breaks or plan social get-togethers for outside of study sessions.
- \* Do not let study sessions become a time to complain about courses or professors. Recognize this as a distraction that is counterproductive and remind yourself or your group members of the academic goals that originally motivated everyone to participate in a study group.
- \* Do not accept members who consistently come unprepared for study sessions. It will be very difficult to benefit from study group learning if one or more members are not contributing.
- \* Do not allow one or two members to dominate group discussions. For the group to be successful, it is important that all members have a chance to offer their individual learning styles, skills, and perspectives. As a group, discuss the importance of equal participation.



### Optimize Your Study Group Learning

- **Be prepared.** Before each session complete assigned readings, review notes, and prepare questions.
- **Always take steps to avoid confusion.** If you are having trouble understanding something, attempt to paraphrase what you have heard others explain, or ask someone to help you paraphrase.

- **Practice thinking out loud** and request that others do the same. This practice will expose the group to new and various ways of understanding concepts, and may help you fill any gaps in your own understanding.
- **Be positive.** Your group may encounter some challenges, yet by working through problems as a group, you will be learning valuable team working skills. Encourage and maintain the attitude that "we can do this together."



### Is A Study Group For You?

We all have individual learning styles and preferences, and study group learning may not be a good fit for everyone. The goal of a study group is to help advance you academically. Be sure to assess whether your study group is contributing to academic success. A study group can be useful for those who learn well actively, but less useful for those who tend to get distracted by social temptations and/or are not well-prepared. Also, be sure to evaluate whether a study group would be useful for each course - it may work well for some courses, but not others.