

How to Organize and Conduct Effective Study Groups

Guidelines for Getting a Group Together

- *How many?* 3-6 students. If more are interested, form two groups and get together occasionally to share information and prepare for exams.
- *Who?* Don't base study partners on friendship; look for people who stay alert in class, take notes, ask questions, and respond to the teacher's questions.
- *Where?* Hold study group sessions in a place free of distractions with room to spread materials out – like the Academic Success Center on the third floor of the Cullom-Davis Library!
- *How long?* Study groups should meet for *no more* than 2-3 hours at a time.
- *When?* If possible, try to meet on the same day(s) and time(s) each week. Treating the study session like you would a class helps you keep to a schedule and ensures that everyone will attend.

Getting the Most Out of a Study Group Session

- *Set rules and guidelines from the start.* At your first meeting, make sure everyone has agreed on expectations, and then establish rules and guidelines (e.g. Will slackers be kicked out of the group?).
- *State objectives or goals.* Knowing what you want to achieve at each session helps the group manage time and stay focused. At the end of each meeting, make a plan for the next session and allocate times for each task. Make sure you have an ending time. Stick to your plan.
- *Be prepared.* Before a session, be sure to finish your assigned reading, review notes, prepare any group assignments, and list topics/questions you want to review.
- *Communicate openly.* Don't be shy about asking for your peers' feedback: "Am I rambling too much?" or "Did I present your point of view correctly?" If reviewing reveals points of disagreement or confusion that you cannot resolve as a group, record questions to ask your professor.
- *Stay on topic.* For each session, assign someone to steer group members back on topic if they drift.

What Do You Actually Do When You're Together?

- Assign people to teach and lead a discussion on each topic in your agenda. Make assignments at the end of each meeting for the next meeting so that each person can prepare questions and think about the best way to address the topic.
- Have everyone create questions that test comprehension, application and memory of the material. Take turns asking, answering, and explaining *why* the correct answer is correct. (Collect questions at each session; then, take the cumulative practice exam you've created to prepare for the real exam.)
- Role-play: You can act like a parent explaining the ideas to a child. Or how about becoming your professor and deducing what questions will be on the exam? Here's another interesting exercise you can use in your study groups: the "Final Exam" procedure by Win Wenger of the Renaissance Project (<http://www.winwenger.com/part52.htm>)
- Studies show that connecting knowledge to kinetic activity (characterized by movement), rhythm and music significantly helps retention. Create songs, movement, chants, etc. that will help your group remember key information/terms.
- Periodically evaluate your performance as a group (Brigham Young University's Teamwork Rubric provides some worthwhile criteria you can use to evaluate your group: http://ctl.byu.edu/sites/default/files/Teamwork_Rubric.pdf), then work to fix areas where you are weak.

Material adapted from Anastasia Pryanikova, "How to Form an Effective Study Group," Lawsagna: neuroscience-fueled tips for productivity, creativity and influence; The College Board, "The Power of Study Groups," The College Board; Latino Scholars Network, "How to Form a Study Group," Hispanic Scholarship Fund.

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