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HOW TO FORM YOUR OWN STUDY GROUP

Adapted from Peer Tutoring—School of General Academics, Utah Valley State College
 (<http://www.uvsc.edu/peertutoring/studygroup.html>)

Why form a study group

“Research shows that students who collaborate in study groups often earn the highest grades and survive college with fewer academic problems” (Gardner, 2005, p. 7). Study groups promote active learning which results in increased learning. Study groups can provide opportunities to teach and learn from others, to collaborate (which can lead to more ideas, alternative approaches, new perspectives, and better solutions), to learn to work with, support, and develop friendships with others, and to develop organizational and leadership skills. Study groups can provide opportunities to share and compare lecture notes, to discuss reading assignments, to locate and share library resources, prepare for exams, and compare answers and identify sources of errors after exams. (Gardner, 2005).

How to form a study group

Select people who seem to share your desire to reach academic goals. Look for people who stay alert in class, who take notes, who ask questions, who respond to the professor's questions. Students are sometimes uncomfortable approaching other students about a study group. Ask your professor if you can make an announcement in class, or if you're uncomfortable doing that, ask the professor to make the announcement. Ask interested students to meet you after class or have them call you at home. You could also pass a sign-up sheet around class and ask interested students to write down their name and telephone number.

If you study with friends, be sure to specify that "study group" time is not social time. It's easy to get off-track and spend the time talking about your personal/social lives.

Four group to four or six people. Large groups are more difficult to manage and small groups are not as effective. If the group is too large, members may not have as much opportunity to participate. Large groups tend to foster absenteeism and a lack of commitment to the group ("They'll never miss me if I don't show up!").

Use the first meeting to "test the waters" and see how you get along together. If you're not comfortable with the group, you don't have to schedule additional meetings. Once the group seems to get along and doing well, schedule regular meeting times.

It is important to meet at the same times and in the same place each time the group gets together. Make certain that everyone understands where and when the group meets.

Be very specific about attendance and preparation. Members should attend and be on time. They should also be prepared to participate in the discussions. That means reading assignments should have been completed and members need to bring their textbooks and class notes to the study group meeting. When members attend sporadically, come late, or come unprepared, tension and problems usually arise.

Make sure someone takes the role of the session leader to keep the session productive. This role doesn't have to fall on one person—group members can take turns. Sharing the role of session leader helps members develop "ownership" in the group.

Group members should get each others' telephone numbers so they can contact each other for help, notes, etc.

How to help make the group learn and to make learning interesting

- Question each other on the material assigned (be sure to have all the readings and assignments done!).
- Use your textbook readings as a basis for discussion. Make sure you understand the readings.
- Use the questions at the beginning or end of each chapter, or use the chapter subheadings as discussion items.
- Take turns "teaching" each other the material. The person who "teaches" always learns more than the person being "taught." If you have to teach a concept you really have to know that concept.
- Try to predict test questions. Write them down and begin to develop your own "test bank." Compare notes. Maybe you need yours "filled in" or maybe you can help someone else "fill in" theirs. Discuss and share study skills and strategies that group members have found useful for your specific course.
- Take a few minutes at the end of the session to evaluate what you've done. (What did we learn? Did everyone put in their full effort? Did we spend too much time on one topic?)
- Plan the next meeting. Give the group assignments, if appropriate.

Gardner, J. N., & Jewler, A. J. (2005). *Your College Experience: Strategies for Success*. 6th media ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.