The Study Group Toolkit

Benefits of Study Groups

- Material is better understood and retained, because study groups encourage active learning. Research shows that active engagement with the subject through discussion and teaching results in a heightened level of understanding.

- Students can confirm with each other any confusing or complex subject material. You can maximize your time efficiency by dividing up large tasks into more manageable chunks. Fellow students are often able to explain complex concepts in a way that is easier to understand than a professor.

- Study groups provide additional sets of eyes and ears to catch what you might have missed in the lecture and/or reading. Lecture notes can be compared and meanings clarified.

- Fellow students can be a source of support and encouragement

- Opportunity to teach, not just be recipient of someone else’s knowledge. Research shows students learn more from teaching each other.

- Increase in confidence in academic capability and provides motivation. You have a responsibility to the group to be prepared. Study groups make you stay on top of the work and not save all of your questions until the night before a test.

- Opportunity to learn new study habits from peers. Studying doesn’t have to be a boring, solitary activity. You can learn other students’ strategies and ideas for studying.

- Learning becomes more personally relevant and intellectually stimulating.

- Study groups assist in learning valuable leadership skills such as how to listen and encourage group members, participate effectively, articulate your ideas, and work through issues as a group of diverse abilities.

What to Expect from a Study Group

- A supportive environment where you feel comfortable contributing
- A place where it’s ok to say that you don’t understand and not be criticized for it
- A place where you are expected to come prepared, contribute meaningfully, and respect your peers
- A group that meets reliably once a week
- A group of peers equally dedicated to understanding the material as a group
- A group that challenges you to look at material from different angles
- A place to review material covered in class, exams, readings; ask questions; and practice problems

What NOT to Expect from a Study Group

- A substitute for going to class or doing the homework
- A guaranteed A
- A place to have the material “taught” to you. That’s what class is for.
- That someone will have the answer you’re looking for. Often the group will have to struggle through a concept together.
- A place to vent about the professor, class, or classmates. No one likes hard work, but complaining about it won’t get the job done.
Tips for Forming Study Groups

- **Become aware of your study group expectations.**
  - Before you join or form a study group, consider what you hope to get from the experience. People join study groups for different reasons. Your reason for joining a study group should guide decisions as to the composition and goals of the group.

- **Study groups are not necessarily for everyone.**
  - Think about whether you have had positive study group experiences or have participated in successful group projects in the past. If you have not had productive study group experiences, consider whether you can alter your approach before you decide that study groups are not for you.

- **Set an optimal group size.**
  - The size of the group is important. It can involve as few as two individuals, but an optimal group size is about three – six people. This group size will allow participation and discussion, yet also allow the group to function if one member cannot attend a meeting.

- **Establish a schedule of meetings and assignments.**
  - Having weekly meetings and following a regular schedule will allow you to keep up with course material. This will also prevent cramming for tests because there will be consistent outside-the-classroom studying and review. It is also important to agree on guidelines for meetings.

- **Select a location for meetings.**
  - Avoid meeting in places that are too comfortable or full of disturbances that can be distracting to the group.

- **Establish study group goals.**
  - A study group should be formed by students who have similar goals. The existence of different goals among members of a study group can lead to confusion, anxiety, and tension. In addition, an agenda should be established for each meeting so that time is not wasted trying to figure out what the group should be doing.

- **Prepare for the meetings.**
  - A study group is not a substitute for doing your own work. A study group is most beneficial when members are prepared with topics to discuss, points of confusion, or important questions. Study groups should be used to review material and to test understanding of that material. Additionally, time should be set aside during each group meeting to discuss material that students do not understand.

- **Evaluate the group.**
  - If the study group is not meeting your goals, discuss your concerns with the group and try to come up with suggestions for improvement. If you decide to leave the group, do not leave your colleagues in a bind (by dropping out the week it is your turn to lead a group meeting, for example).
Responsibilities in a Study Group

☐ Arrive on time to every session. That means attending when you do understand the material, as well as when you don’t. It does not mean you show up only the week before an exam.
☐ Bring your notes from class, textbooks, handouts, and anything else relevant to the course.
☐ Complete the reading and assignments to the best of your ability before the study group. The study group is not a substitute for doing your work.
☐ Look over your notes and the text before the study group so that you will come prepared with questions to ask and topics you want to discuss.
☐ Go to class! You won’t be able to contribute meaningfully if you skip class.
☐ Actively participate in the study group session. Do not sit back and wait for others to figure it out. Doing so shows lack of commitment.
☐ Treat others with respect.
☐ Complete the tasks the group assigns you on time.
☐ Don’t be afraid to say you don’t understand something. Don’t criticize other when they don’t understand.
☐ Strive to be the best teacher and learner that you can be. Always seek other ways of looking at things and other ways of explaining concepts.

Roles in a Study Group

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<th>Roles</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
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<tr>
<td>Leader/Goal Setter</td>
<td>• Ensures meeting runs smoothly&lt;br&gt;• Ensures the group goals and expectations are met&lt;br&gt;• Divides work for the next meeting and asks for volunteers to take responsibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Facilitator</td>
<td>• Motivates group members&lt;br&gt;• Provides support and encouragement&lt;br&gt;• Pulls the group from digressions and chatting back to the task at hand&lt;br&gt;• Helps to ensure that all learning styles are being considered</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recorder/Note Taker</td>
<td>• Keeps contact information&lt;br&gt;• Presents the agenda at the start of the meeting&lt;br&gt;• Reminds members who is responsible for what&lt;br&gt;• Keeps notes on study group’s progress&lt;br&gt;• Takes notes on important class information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liaison</td>
<td>• Goes to professor, tutor, or TA to get clarity on problems or topics for the group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time Keeper/Evaluator</td>
<td>• Defines and monitors progress&lt;br&gt;• Checks to see if group is ready to decide or come to a conclusion&lt;br&gt;• Summarizes and synthesizes results&lt;br&gt;• Resolves conflicts&lt;br&gt;• Judges results and outcomes&lt;br&gt;• Ensures sessions are kept within the designated time</td>
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Types of Study Group Activities

- **Review Lecture Notes**
  - Your study group members may have picked up on something you missed.
  - Orally reviewing notes is an excellent way to begin to learn the material and identify any questions you have.
  - Use a whiteboard to illustrate any concepts or problems.
  - Create visual organizers to aid in learning and review (matrices, outlines, concept maps, etc.)

- **Reading Review**
  - After each member has individually read the assigned reading, discuss each chapter – how does the reading compare with the notes?
  - Assign sections of the reading for team members to summarize and teach to the group.

- **Instructor Meetings**
  - Your study group should meet with the course instructor to answer questions and seek assistance preparing for exams. This sends a message to the instructor that you are serious about doing well in the course.

- **Sample Problems**
  - Work on sample problems independently and in groups.
  - Write a list of steps for completing the problem and take turns explaining how to solve problems.
  - Decide on a few problems to work independently to confirm understanding.
  - Utilize a whiteboard to ensure everyone understands how to work the problem.

- **Exam Preparation**
  - Assign each group member certain sections to review and teach.
  - Ask each group member to create a study guide for his/her section.
  - Formulate sample test questions and take practice exams simulating the testing conditions (amount of time; without books/notes, etc.)
  - Review practice exams to determine why any problems were answered incorrectly.

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Ideas for Starting a Study Group Session

- **Ball Toss**: Review and warm-up exercise. Have everyone sit or stand in a circle facing each other. Toss a ball of crumpled paper to a student and have him/her tell what they thought was the most important concept learned in class.

- **Process Ball**: Similar to the above, but each person tells one step of a process (such as mitosis, etc.) or a concept when the ball is tossed to them. Meanwhile, have someone else in the group write the steps on a whiteboard.

- **Two Truths and a Lie**: A group member writes three statements related to the subject matter being studied on the whiteboard. Two of these statements should be true and one false. The group must then discuss and determine which ones are true and which are false.

- **Jeopardy**: Thinking of possible questions and then answering them is a useful way of reviewing material and testing your understanding. Divide the group into two teams. Have the leader in the group write answers on index cards. These can be key words, facts, theories, etc. The leader then reads out the answer, and the team that provides the question gets a point.

- **Learning Style Jumble**: Have group members determine their learning styles through and then wear a sign indicating the result (auditory learner, visual learner, etc.) Through the duration of the study group session, people must explain concepts in ways that are useful for particular learning styles.
Collaborative Learning Strategies

| Think, Pair, Share          | • Each pair discusses a concept or a topic for a specific amount of time.  
|                            | • Then the pair shares their collective thoughts with others. |
| Note-taking Pairs           | • Compare notes.  
|                            | • Combine and rewrite notes to form an improved partner version. |
| Jigsaw                     | • Each person learns a part of a concept.  
|                            | • Each person then teaches their part to the group. |
| KWL Chart                   | • Create three columns: What We Know, What We Want to Know, What We Learned.  
|                            | • Complete the first two columns prior to studying a particular topic.  
|                            | • At the end of the session, take a few minutes to assess your progress and complete the third column. |

Strategies for Visual Learners

- Convert information into visual maps, hierarchies, grids or timelines.
- Create illustrated flashcards.
- Create “cheat sheets” to visually organize information.
- Take detailed notes.
- Use visual metaphors.
- When you ask them to explain something, suggest that they do it by writing the explanation down.

Strategies for Auditory Learners

- Explain the problem or concept out loud.
- Make up and repeat rhymes to remember facts, dates, formulas, etc.
- Reason through solutions out loud.
- Quiz each other out loud.

Strategies for Tactile/Kinesthetic Learners

- Write lists over and over again.
- Make models that demonstrate key concepts.
- As the student is explaining something, have them point to the subject matter in the book, on the whiteboard, etc., while they are reading it out loud.
- Stand up while explaining something to the group.
- Use exaggerated hand movements to aid memory.
- Use physical analogies and examples.
- Make moveable index cards and large charts to manipulate as you study.

Preparing for Tests – Answer Open-ended Questions

- Explain why ________.
- Explain how ________.
- What is the meaning of ________?
- Why is ________ happening?
- What is the main idea of ________?
- What is the solution to the problem of ________?
- What if ________?
- What conclusions can I draw about ________?
- What is the best ________ and why?
- What do you think causes ________? Why?
- How does ________ affect ________?
- How does ________ related to what I’ve learned before?
- What is the difference between ________ and ________?
- How are ________ and ________ similar?
- How would I use ________ to ________?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of ________?
- What is another way to look at ________?
- What is a new example of ________?
- What would happen if ________?
- What are the implications of ________?
- Why is ________ important?
- How does ________ apply to everyday life?
## Campus Locations for Study Groups

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<th>Location</th>
<th>Features</th>
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| **The Learning Commons @ Perry Library** | • Group Collaboration Rooms reserved via Online Reservation System  
   o 6 rooms with 4-5 seats  
   o 1 room with 8-10 seats  
   • Each room equipped with a flat-panel TV, laptop hookup, and a computer  
   • Flexible furniture for open seating throughout |
| **Perry Library, floors 2 – 4** | • Group Collaboration Rooms on upper floors of Perry Library reserved via Online Reservation System  
   o 2nd floor (4 rooms)  
   o 3rd floor (2 rooms)  
   o 4th floor (2 rooms)  
   • Each room equipped with a flat-panel TV and laptop hookup  
   • Flexible furniture for open seating throughout |
| **Diehn Fine and Performing Arts Center – Diehn Composers Rooms and Hofheimer Art Library** | • Tables and chairs  
   • Assistance with library’s music and art collections |
| **Webb Center** | • Tables and chairs  
   • Soft-seating; outdoor seating  
   • Food court area  
   • Webb Center Computer Lab |
| **Campus Tutoring Labs** | [http://uc.odu.edu/taa/campustutoring.shtml](http://uc.odu.edu/taa/campustutoring.shtml)  
   • Language Learning Center, Math Lab, Math & Science Resource Center, Physics Learning Center, Student Support Services, The Writing Center |
| **Campus Computer Labs** | [http://occs.odu.edu/labs/locations/hours/](http://occs.odu.edu/labs/locations/hours/) |