

Study Groups

A study group can be helpful when you are trying to learn information and concepts and preparing for class discussions and tests. Read to learn about the benefits of a study group. Then read on to learn about how to start a study group and the characteristics of a successful study group. Finally, be sure to read about the possible pitfalls of a study group.

Benefits of a Study Group

A study group can be beneficial in many ways. Here are the most important benefits:

1. A support group can "pick you up" when you find that your motivation to study is slipping. The other group members can be a source of encouragement.
2. You may be reluctant to ask a question in class. You will find it easier to do so in a small study group.
3. You may become more committed to study because the group members are depending on your presentation and participation. You will not want to let them down.
4. Group members will listen and discuss information and concepts during the study sessions. These activities add a strong auditory dimension to your learning experience.
5. One or more group members are likely to understand something you do not. They may bring up ideas you never considered.
6. You can learn valuable new study habits from the other group members.
7. You can compare your class notes with those of the other group members to clarify your notes and fill in any gaps.
8. Teaching/explaining information and concepts to the other group members will help you reinforce your mastery of the information and concepts.
9. Let's face it - studying can sometimes be boring. Interacting with the other group members can make studying enjoyable.

Getting a Study Group Started

Study groups don't just happen. Here is what you should do to get a study group started:

1. Get to know your classmates by talking with them before class, during breaks, and after class. When selecting a classmate to join your study group, you should be able to answer YES for each of the following questions:
 - Is this classmate motivated to do well?
 - Does this classmate understand the subject matter?
 - Is this classmate dependable?
 - Would this classmate be tolerant of the ideas of others?
 - Would you like to work with this classmate?

2. Invite enough of these classmates to work with you in a study group until you have formed a group of three to five. A larger group may allow some members to avoid responsibility, may lead to cliques, and may make group management more of an issue than learning.
3. Decide how often and for how long you will meet. Meeting two or three times a week is probably best. If you plan a long study session, make sure you include time for breaks. A study session of about 60 to 90 minutes is usually best.
4. Decide where you will meet. Select a meeting place that is available and is free from distractions. An empty classroom or a group study room in the library are possibilities.
5. Decide on the goals of the study group. Goals can include comparing and updating notes, discussing readings, and preparing for exams.
6. Decide who the leader will be for the first study session. Also decide whether it will be the same person each session or whether there will be a rotating leader. The leader of a study session should be responsible for meeting the goals of that study session.
7. Clearly decide the agenda for the first study session and the responsibilities of each group member for that session.
8. Develop a list of all group members that includes their names, telephone numbers, and email addresses. Make sure each group member has this list and update the list as needed.

Characteristics of a Successful Study Group

Once started, a study group should possess the following characteristics to be successful:

1. Each group member contributes to discussions.
2. Group members actively listen to each other without interrupting. Only one group member speaks at a time.
3. The other group members work collaboratively to resolve any concern raised by a group member.
4. Group members are prompt and come prepared to work.
5. The group stays on task with respect to its agenda.
6. Group members show respect for each other.
7. Group members feel free to criticize each other but keep their criticisms constructive. This can encourage group members to reveal their weaknesses so that they can strengthen them.
8. Group members feel free to ask questions of each other.
9. At the end of each study session, an agenda including specific group member responsibilities is prepared for the next session.
10. Above all, the positive attitude that "we can do this together" is maintained.

Possible Pitfalls of a Study Group

A study group can be a very positive learning experience. However, there are pitfalls to be avoided. Here are some cautions:

1. Do not let the study group get distracted from its agenda and goals.
2. Do not let the study group become a social group. You can always socialize at other times.

3. Do not allow group members to attend unprepared. To stay in the group, members should be required to do their fair share.
4. Do not let the session become a negative forum for complaining about teachers and courses.
5. Do not allow one or two group members to dominate the group. It is important that all members have an equal opportunity to participate.

The information you just read will help you decide when a study group is appropriate for you and will help ensure its success.

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