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How to Form a Successful Study Group: Tips and Strategies

How should I go about forming the group?

- 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.
- 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.

How do you get the most out of your 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 or TA.
- Stay on topic. For each session, assign someone to steer group members back on topic if they drift.

What do you actually do when your study group meets?

- 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?
- 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 (the Teamwork Rubric provides some worthwhile criteria you can use to evaluate your group), then work to fix areas where you are weak.

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Rubric for Teamwork

Criteria	5	4	3	2	1
	Please Pick The Behavior That Best Represents Your Team's Experience				
Attendance	Most, if not all, members attend all meetings, are punctual, and stay for the entire meeting.		Most members are present at the majority of meetings. When members have to be absent, they inform the team or an a		One or more of the members frequently miss meetings and do not inform the team, or an agreed upon member of the team. When they do come, they are often late or leave early
Establishing and Documenting Goals	When appropriate, realistic, prioritized, and measurable goals are agreed upon and documented and all team members share the common objectives/ purpose.		Individuals share some objectives but a common purpose may be lacking. When appropriate, goals may be established but some may be too general or unquantifiable. Priorities may be unrealistic. Documentation may be incomplete.		Clear goals are not formulated or documented; thus, all members don't accept or understand the purpose/ task of the group.
Accountability for Results	The work product is a collective effort; team members have both individual and mutual accountability for the successful completion of their work.		Individuals work on separate sections of the work product and have a coordinator(s) that ties the disparate parts together (i.e., they rely on the sum of each individual's best work).		Individuals work on separate sections of the work product but have no coordinating effort to tie the disparate parts together.
Team Cohesion	Team members are committed to the team and show a sense of bonding and camaraderie. A climate of trust and acceptance exists and members feel pride in being part of the team.		Members feel some commitment to the team/group, but it is not consistent. Members' behavior ranges from competitive and individualistic to cooperative and supportive.		Low morale exists; there is little or no cohesion among group members. The team atmosphere is competitive and/or individualistic.
Communication	Team members communicate openly and treat one another with respect. All members listen to ideas. The work of each person is acknowledged. Members feel free to seek assistance and information, share resources and insights, provide advice, or ask questions of each other.		There is a general atmosphere of respect for team members, but some members may not be heard as much as others. Some members may not feel free to turn to others for help. Members may avoid discussing some topics for fear of disrupting the group's work and/ or hurting someone's feelings.		Communication is limited among group members (information is not shared with one another and/or important topics are not discussed among the group because a climate of open communication has not been established).
Team Decision Making	Clear procedures for making decisions are established and documented, when appropriate. Team members tend to make most decisions through consensus.		Decision-making procedures are established informally, leading to some inconsistency in implementation. Majority and minority opinions sometimes exist when decisions are made by the group.		Decisions are made by individuals and may not reflect the thinking or the desires of the team. There is often a failure to involve all members in the decision-making process.
Adjusting	When working to achieve goals, the team is able to adjust plans as needs arise. There is a clear understanding of the nature of mid-course corrections and why they were needed.		The team is not always able to adjust as needed to meet goals. Realization of the need for midcourse corrections sometimes comes too late.		The team is unfocused and seems to be thrashing about. There is no ability to adjust and make corrections
Team Assessment	Members regularly examine how their team is functioning and discuss their findings together for purposes of maintenance or improvement.		Members engage in occasional discussions about how their group is functioning, but it is not a regular occurrence and not all members may be involved.		Members avoid discussions about how they are functioning as a group.
Timely Submission of Work	Team members are self-motivated and can complete work assignments and reports in a timely manner without being reminded.		Work assignments and reports are submitted but are sometimes late.		Work assignments and reports are frequently late (submitted inconsistently). The team is not self-motivated and needs constant chasing to get the work submitted on time.
Leadership	Team members share the leadership role. Each team member feels responsible for helping to lead.		A strong, clearly focused leader develops. This leader sees him/herself more responsible for helping lead the team than the other team members.		The group has no leader nor do its members share the leadership role.
Managing Conflict	Conflicts are consistently resolved through open discussion and compromise.		Members are generally able to resolve conflicts through open discussion and compromise.		Conflicts that arise are either not dealt with or cannot be resolved. Members tend to hide their true feelings and opinions.