STUDY GROUPS

Study groups can really help you learn your material. They give you an opportunity to run ideas and theories by other students, and also give you a chance to reinforce what you have learned through the means of teaching others. Below are some guidelines to assist you in forming and ensuring the success of a study group.

Setting Up a Study Group

1. **When you form a study group, make sure all members are enrolled in the SAME class with the SAME instructor.** If your members have the same instructor, but are in different sections of a class, be aware that you may be working on different assignments or that you may be at different stages of a topic.

2. **Your group should have no more than four or five participants.** Remember that you will need to find a mutually convenient time to meet, which is why it is best to limit the number of people within your group. After all, it’s hard enough to coordinate a time for four people to meet that accommodates all of their schedules. Unfortunately, adding more people to the group will further complicate the coordination of schedules.

You will need to encourage participation in the group. Your study group will not function well if some members never get to speak – keep in mind that it’s easy for some people to get lost in a group, even if the group only has three or four participants.

3. **Decide how often you want to meet.** The frequency of your meetings is best determined by your purpose for meeting. If the group is preparing for major tests, the group may choose to meet once or twice before each test, after you’ve had a chance to review the information independently and compile your questions. On the other hand, you may decide that short, more frequent reviews are more appropriate for the particular subject that you are studying. If you are working on a paper, you may meet at each stage – topic selection, research, rough draft, and final draft – to get consistent feedback.

4. **BE AWARE of UNCA’s policies regarding academic integrity and honesty.** You also need to know your instructor’s policies regarding group work and collaboration. Being in a study group is about helping each other better understand the material and be successful in class, NOT doing each other’s work!

Study Group Ground Rules

In order to have your group function effectively and efficiently, it’s best for all of the group members to agree to a set of ground rules. Below are a few examples:

1. Arrive on time for each study group session.
2. Come to each session prepared to work.
3. Develop an agenda – based on class activities or assignments – with goals for each session.
4. Stay on task – save socializing for afterwards.
5. Set a time limit, keep track of it, and stick to it. Sessions of 60-90 minutes are usually long enough.
6. Determine a meeting place that is free from distractions and is conducive for work. Try to avoid meeting in open areas since your group’s discussion may distract the people around you, as well as your own group members.
7. If you opt for a long study session, be sure to take planned breaks. Muscle-stretching not only helps the body, it also helps the mind.
8. Set the time, date, location, and goals for the next meeting before the end of the current study session. This will help ensure no one gets left out and promotes an active, productive group dynamic.
Study Group Communication

Communication is necessary in order for any group to function. Below are a few suggestions to promote communication, which will help your group complete tasks in a timely manner.

1. **Only one person should speak at a time.** Each person should be allowed to finish their statement before others begin to make comments.
2. **Be active listeners.** Use the same guidelines that you use to listen in class (refer to “Tips for Listening to Lectures” information sheet for suggestions).
3. **Everyone should contribute to the group’s discussions.** Comments don’t have to be answers – they can be questions, examples, or connections to real-world situations.
4. **Criticism should ALWAYS be constructive.** Name calling, insults, jokes, and derogatory comments have no place in a learning environment.
5. **Maintain a positive attitude.** Remember that you are all participating in the learning process. Phrases such as “I’ll never get it” or “There’s no hope” should be replaced with more positive comments such as “We’ll figure this out together.”

Review and Discussion Strategies

There are several advantages that study groups can use – try out the ones listed below until you find something that works for both the subject matter and all of the participants in your study group.

**Strategy One**
Use any study guides that your instructor has provided. Decide if you all want to answer all of the questions, then get together and talk about them. Another option is for your group to divide up the study guide into sections and each take a few questions. For this option to be successful, each person must be aware that the rest of the group is depending on him/her to do their part.

**Strategy Two**
Using your class notes, develop and share mock test questions with each other. Read over each other’s notes to fill in any gaps in on your own, or get together to merge class notes with textbook information.

**Strategy Three**
Use each other to teach difficult or confusing information. If two members understand a concept that the others find difficult, allow them to do the teaching. Chances are the roles will be reversed in the future. If you decide before the meeting which are the “tough topics”, those who understand them can be prepared to teach them.

**Strategy Four**
Develop mock test questions, take the tests and grade each other. Don’t forget that not all test questions end with question marks. There’s also matching, multiple choice, term definitions, true/false, listing, and diagram labeling. Test questions can also be at varying levels – some may ask you to memorize information while others require deeper thinking or the application of concepts to real-world situations.

**Strategy Five**
Have fun! Develop a version of Jeopardy, pool a few dollars for a little prize for the winner – you could even invite other study groups for the same subject to participate. Again, everyone should be involved in the creation of the questions.

Reference