WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF STUDY GROUPS?

- A study group can reinforce what you heard in class, helping you gain a deeper understanding of the material.
- Collaborative learning occurs. You observe how other students analyze and problem-solve.
- Study groups provide opportunities to talk about the material. Explaining concepts to others can increase your understanding. Listening to others discuss the material adds a powerful auditory component to your learning.
- You can make up questions based on the material, and then quiz each other.
- You can gain multiple views of what is important. Group members may bring up ideas that you hadn’t considered.
- Others in the group can help you fill in gaps in your notes.
- A study group provides a place to ask questions that you may not have asked during class.
- Your motivation can increase because you’re working toward a common goal and you know your group depends on your preparation.
- Participating in a study group may make it easier for you to participate during class.
- You learn teamwork, an important skill in other classes as well as the workplace. If you organize a study group, mention that on your resume.
- You may develop new friendships and find study partners for future courses.
- You can accomplish more in a shorter period of time.

HOW CAN YOU FORM A STUDY GROUP?

- Get to know your classmates. Invite a few who seem serious about learning and who would be compatible with your personality and learning style to study with you. Students who take thorough notes and who ask questions during class are good candidates.
- Ask the professor to circulate a sign-up sheet or invite interested students to stay after class.
- Include at least one person in the group who is stronger with the material.
- Avoid groups larger than five or six students. A large group may be less productive, some people may avoid responsibility, and some may not participate actively.
- Distribute a list of each person’s phone number, address, and e-mail address.
- Meet regularly, not just before major exams, for maximum benefit and optimal learning. Two or three times a week is usually best, for about 60-90 minutes per session.
- Establish clear start and end times.
- Study before your group meets. Complete the assigned reading or try to work out problems in advance so you can actively participate. Don’t expect other group members to do all the work.
- If possible, meet in the classroom in which the course is taught, especially if you need a blackboard or dry-erase board. You could also use a table in the Office of Academic Support (Seton Hall, 1st floor) or an empty classroom. Quiet places are preferable to noisy areas like the Gallagher Center. Be sure the location is well-lit and convenient for everyone.
- If you study with just one other person, meet in a public area, not a residence-hall room or an isolated area.
- Meet soon after class, preferably within 24 hours, while the material is fresh.
HOW CAN YOU MAKE STUDY GROUP SESSIONS PRODUCTIVE?

- Create an agenda for each session and maintain structure. Estimate the amount of time needed for each topic, and determine in advance who will do what. A leader can keep the group on task.
- Agree on rules and procedures such as length of sessions, location, and potential distractions to avoid such as music or food.
- Comparing notes may be a good starting point but don’t stop there. If you simply swap notes, you risk becoming too dependent on other students and you might not listen as actively in class. Actively discuss and re-explain the material in your notes and book. Paraphrase as much as possible.
- For efficiency, divide material among group members. For example, “You summarize this section, and I’ll summarize that section.” Consider each person’s talents and strengths.
- Predict and answer possible test questions.
- Avoid doing too much in one session. Spread material across several sessions for better learning.
- Don’t waste time complaining about the course or the professor. Be respectful of others in your group.
- Evaluate each session and set clear goals for the next session.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO AFTER STUDY GROUP SESSIONS?

- You still need to do your own studying. A study group is a complement to, not a substitute for, your own studying.
- A group representative can meet with the instructor periodically to ask for specific study tips, particularly before tests and exams. Make a list of points that the group is unsure about, and ask the professor for clarification.

References


