Advice for Successful Students: Study Groups

Group study is effective for a number of different purposes. These include: exam preparation, clarification of course materials, sharing of information and learning strategies, completing homework assignments and more. I find study groups to be very valuable and am hoping that they have been or will be for you as well. Below are some of the benefits I see resulting from studying with others, as well as a few suggestions for forming and conducting an effective study group.

Benefits of group study

- When there is a group counting on you, you are more likely to get the job done, i.e., LESS PROCRASTINATION
- Group study encourages you to explain things out loud which increases confidence and comprehension of the material.
- As Aristotle wrote – “Teaching is the highest form of understanding.”
- Your interest in the subject and motivation for learning can be increased with group study.
- Group study saves time because large assignments can often be broken down into more manageable tasks, which are distributed between group members. In other words, “Divide and conquer!”
- Your group members will bring up ideas, interpretations, and study strategies you’d never thought of. i.e., various views = good anticipation of test questions.
- If you don’t understand something, you automatically have people to ask about it.
- Cooperative learning with others, when done properly, teaches individual responsibility for your learning and forces you to challenge your less effective study behaviours.

That’s great! But...how do I form a study group?

- **Option 1**: Approach classmates who you think would be good members for a study group – you don’t need to, though sometimes it’s best not to limit yourself to friends.
- **Option 2**: You could leave a note on the blackboard/overhead asking that interested students contact you.
- **Option 3**: You could pass around a sign-up sheet in class or post one outside your class door or in your residence hall.
- **Option 4**: You could leave a message online, such as on Canvas or the SFU group on Facebook.
- **Option 5**: Some combination of the above or any other way that comes to mind.
- Find a regular meeting place and time, preferably a distraction-free environment. i.e. Not the pub!
We have come together, now how do we conduct our study group?

- You might want to pick a daily moderator to keep the group on track – someone responsible for making sure the members of the study group study. Without proper precautions, study groups can become “gripe’ groups or social groups.
- Set an agenda for your meeting – What is it that you want to accomplish during each session? How long will your meeting last?
- Decide as a group how you will make sure that all group members contribute equally to the group.
- Possible option: Determine what needs to be done and divide the work equally among group members according to topic, chapter, problems, etc.
- Make sure that quieter, shyer members get a turn. Consider having some activities where each member takes a turn speaking.
- Decide how information will be exchanged among group members: photocopies, chalkboard, orally, etc.
- More specifically, during your meeting you may want to:
  - Leave time during each session for brainstorming possible exam questions. Then at the next meeting, you could discuss the answers.
  - Compare lecture/lab notes to ensure that each member has recorded the key concepts. If there was anything which confused all or most group members, have a representative from the group speak to a TA or professor for clarification.
  - Work on any questions found at the end of a chapter in your text, book or lab manual or make up your own questions and quiz each other.
  - End each session with an assignment for each group member.

A few other things to keep in mind - You collaborative learner you!

- Before forming a study group, check with your professor as to whether group study is acceptable for that particular class.
- Group study is not a substitute for learning the material yourself.
- Group study should be mutually beneficial for all members of your group – you must come prepared!
- A study group can be small (yourself and one other person) or larger, but do limit the size of your group [I suggest 6-8 members max].
- Of course I have to be cheesy and end with...Have fun and happy studying!

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