

## Study Groups

Many students find it helpful to study in groups to help them better externalize their thoughts, keep their study sessions stimulating, and maintain accountability. While studying with a partner or a group may not completely replace independent study, it can be an effective part of a comprehensive study plan. However, if not done well, studying with friends can be more distracting than helpful. This handout shares tips for how to create effective, productive, positive study partnerships, whether in person or online.

### Why form a study group?

**Accountability.** You'll be more prepared and stay focused if you know your group is counting on you.

**Active studying.** When studying in groups, you're more likely to use the active study strategies that research shows are more effective for learning.

**Support.** Have a question? Need help? Your group will be there when you need it.

**Community.** You and your group are all working toward a common goal, and for most students, this is more enjoyable than studying alone.

### Who should you study with?

Study groups are most effective when kept small enough to allow enough time for everyone to ask and answer questions. Choose peers who are committed and will come to each session prepared and ready to work.

It is often useful to designate someone to facilitate the group. This person will be in charge of scheduling, tracking group progress, and helping the group stay focused. This could be one set person, or you could designate a "leader of the week."

### How do you find group members?

It can be difficult to take the first step of forming a study group. If you don't know your classmates very well, consider starting by asking the people around you. Even if they are not interested, they may know of another student who is. You might also consider thinking about

how members of your class communicate with each other. Do students in your class communicate through a platform like GroupMe or on a platform used for class like Zoom or Sakai? Platforms you use for class like Zoom and Sakai can be a big help when reaching out to classmates that you may never meet face to face. If you don't know your classmates very well but need someone to study with, chances are that other people in your class feel the same way!

### **Tips for connecting with classmates through Zoom:**

**Use chat.** Do you have live video classes? If so, consider using the chat feature to connect with other students. Before or after class, use the chat to see if any of your classmates are interested in forming a study group. To ensure that the conversation doesn't become distracting or bleed into class time, consider including your email address so that fellow students can follow up with you after class. In many classes, you also have the option to send a direct message through chat, so you may be able to reach out directly to classmates who you feel you would work well with.

**Take advantage of breakout rooms.** Does your instructor use the Breakout Room feature on Zoom to split you into smaller groups? If so, consider using that space as an opportunity to build a ready-made study group. Ask the people in your breakout room if they'd be interested in forming a study group. Gather their email addresses and follow-up via email after class to iron out the details.

### **Tips for connecting with classmates through Sakai:**

**Use Sakai Messages.** Does your instructor have the Messages function enabled on Sakai? If so, consider sending your classmates a message via Sakai to identify classmates who may be interested in building a study group together. To send a message, click on the "Messages" tab and select "Compose Message." In the "To:" line, you have the option to select your section or choose individual students.

If you are still stuck, consider reaching out to your instructor. They may be able to connect you with a study group or send a message to the class on your behalf.

## **When should you meet?**

Your study group should aim to meet about once weekly. While meeting right before an exam is a good idea, meeting regularly throughout the semester will yield the greatest results.

Once the "who" is decided, find a mutually agreeable time when everyone can attend and then agree upon the length of the session (60-90 minutes). Scheduling websites like When2Meet and

Doodle can help you identify a time that works for everyone, especially if you're coordinating study groups remotely. Consider times when everyone is likely to be focused. If your group likes to socialize, consider adding time for socializing to the schedule. It may help to have some time to catch up socially at the beginning, or socializing may work well as a reward at the end of a successful study group session.

## Where should you meet?

Look for a space that allows discussion but isn't too noisy. Ideally, this space will have whiteboards and outlets for your laptops. Look for seating that isn't too comfy, so you'll stay focused and ready to use the whiteboard.

The library offers great suggestions, including quiet rooms.

Don't overlook the option of meeting online! Consider using, Slack, Microsoft Teams, Group.Me, or any group chat software you currently use to keep in touch with friends and family to host a study group or an accountability group. If you are studying remotely and find yourself missing certain features of in-person studying, consider searching for online alternatives. For example, if you love using a big whiteboard, try using the whiteboard feature in Zoom. If you usually study with flashcards, consider using Quizlet.

## Tips for effective studying in groups.

**Set ground rules to help your group session run smoothly.** Suggestions: everyone takes turns asking and answering questions, no phones, or social media except during breaks, show up prepared, no judgment of anyone's skill level, no competition.

**Appoint a facilitator.** It's hard to get things done together if someone's not running point. You can have a permanent facilitator, or you can appoint a "leader of the week" to be the timekeeper and help the group remain on task.

**Make sure everyone is prepared.** The best study group sessions happen when everyone is prepared. Work with your group members to decide what you want to cover in your next session. Consider using email or Google Docs to keep track and delegate and remember to choose content that is relevant and up to date. Pick specific homework problems to review with one another and decide who is presenting each problem. Be careful not to focus on too many application problems, but instead make a point of discussing more conceptual questions.

**Have a regular structure.** Decide with your group how you want the session to proceed, and most importantly, set SMART goals for your session ([see this video](#)). Adding structure will ensure that you stay on task and cover all the material.

**Set a study agenda.** Let each participant suggest topics to review, practice or clarify.

**Allow time to vent.** Take a few minutes, if needed, at the start of the session to vent frustrations, stress, etc. But put a cap on this; complaining about your classes won't help you learn the material better!

**Start with review.** Start the session with a review of what you learned in the past week. You can delegate the big ideas to group members to individually present. Group members can compare notes from class and fill in any gaps that arise.

**Bring in your questions.** Posing questions to the group opens the door for a great discussion. Ideally let the person asking the question talk through their understanding of the topic as much as they can before asking someone else to explain it.

**Create questions.** Brainstorm questions you might see on an exam. Try to answer them as a group or assign them as homework for the next session. Create [higher order thinking \(Link to higher order thinking\)](#) questions that require you to apply skills, analyze a situation, and synthesize concepts. For essay exams, anticipate possible questions and together, create an outline for an essay.

**Take turns teaching or presenting homework problems.** Teaching a concept to your peers is a great way to ensure that you understand the material. Have group members demonstrate a skill or concept using a whiteboard (or piece of paper). Work together to draw a concept map or write key points of topic; after you're done, explain each key concept. Ask a member to explain a concept, allowing others to ask questions as you go.

**Use [active study strategies](#).** As a group, create a concept map, teach each other, make an outline of the lectures, or create a study guide for the upcoming exam.

**Review.** At the end of your session, take a few minutes to review the information that was presented. Quiz each other on basic recall facts, such as vocabulary, dates, and formulas. Test yourself on bigger picture concepts using recall to be sure you have a good mastery of the material. Think about how your session went and what you as a group want to change next time to improve.

**Keep a record.** It can be helpful to take inventory of everything you've worked on together, including your study agenda, questions, and plan for the next session. Consider keeping all of this information in a central location, such as Google Drive or Microsoft OneDrive. Just as you have designated a facilitator, you can choose a record keeper or have someone assume the role each week.

**End with a plan for the next session.**

## How can technology help?

Is your study group not able or not always able to meet in person? Technology makes it possible to meet online or to add an online component to your study group:

**Meeting online.** Consider using digital tools such as [Zoom](#), [Microsoft Teams](#), or [Group.Me](#) to meet online.

**Staying in touch.** Platforms like [Slack](#) can support study groups whether they meet online or not. Use chat rooms to keep conversations going asynchronously in between meetings.

## Connect with other resources.

While group study can be an excellent tool, it shouldn't be the only way you study. There are many other effective study strategies and resources that you can use alongside it. Check out a few of these to incorporate into your study time as well:

Make an appointment with an [academic coach](#). Our academic coaches can help you discuss group study strategies, work with you on implementing other effective strategies, or talk through any other academic issue.

Attend one of the Learning Center coach's [workshops](#) on studying effectively.

Try some effective study strategies from our other handouts:

- [Study Smarter, Not Harder \(Link to Studying 101\)](#)
- [Using Concept Maps \(Link to Concept Maps\)](#)
- [Higher Order Thinking \(Link to Higher Order Thinking\)](#)
- [Studying for Math \(Link to Studying for Math\)](#)

## Works consulted.

Shaw, D. M. (2011). Promoting professional student learning through study groups: A case study. *College Teaching*, 59, 85-92.