

# How to Form a Successful Study Group: Tips and Strategies

## 1. Forming the group:

- **An effective study group ideally has 3-4 members** (no more than 5 max).
- Your group **should meet at least once a week** and you should decide how long you want your sessions to be.
- **All members should make a serious commitment** to show up and to do the required preparation prior to any group meeting. If you show up unprepared it will impact how effective that session is for the whole group, not to mention what you could get out of those sessions.
- You should **choose a group 'leader/facilitator'** (this could be one person or members could take turns). This person would be responsible for keeping the group on track and on task within each session so that no one gets frustrated with pace or with time being wasted on other things not relevant to mastering the course material. This person should also send out a reminder email on weekly time/location info, plus any session info that's relevant.

## 2. Preparing for sessions:

- You need to **decide as a group what you would like to cover** in a session. This could be handled via email (initiated by the group facilitator) a few days before your next meeting or it could be discussed at the end of each meeting. If you are meeting weekly, you will probably be discussing and working on the preceding week's material and homework (where relevant) in your next session.
- It's easy to want to focus on homework problems, in other words, application type sessions, but you'll be ignoring a key component involved in truly understanding your material – **identifying and understanding the concepts underlying homework and/or exam questions**. This is a great opportunity to tackle as a group! Here are some suggestions:
  - **Divide the two or three lectures that you have per week among the group members**. Each 'subgroup' then summarizes the key concepts covered in their chosen lecture and creates a one page summary for each group member.
  - You can choose to **review these concepts at the start of each group session as a whole**, or each 'subgroups' can teach/present the concepts covered in their lecture to the group for subsequent review and discussion.
- You probably won't have time to cover all the assigned homework problems, so it would be helpful to **decide as a group how many and which of the homework problems you want address**. Each group member should then attempt to work through the problems on their own prior to your next group session (or at least have a familiarity with these problems).

## 3. Session structure:

- It is helpful to come up with some kind of structure to your sessions to help you keep on track as a group, and to make your time more effective in covering as much material as possible. Here are some suggestions:
  - **Decide on how long your sessions are going to be**, e.g., 2 hours each Tuesday night.
  - **In the first ½ hour you could review and discuss the preceding week's concepts**. This allows members a chance to voice any confusion, issues or problems they are having with the material, and allows you to share

knowledge as a group (often the best way to truly know that you know something is when you get the opportunity to teach/explain it to someone else).

- **The rest of the time you could work on problems/questions.** Before starting, decide in which order you want to address the problems or questions.
- **You can take turns 'presenting' the problems** (some members may have been able to solve/answer the problem/questions and some members may have gotten stuck) and as a group you can address any issues which came up when members had worked on the material individually.
- If you are in a course in which homework problems are not assigned, but you are trying to get some practice applying concepts addressed in class, turn to your textbook. **The problems/questions presented in the back of your textbook chapters are a great resource!** Read through them and decide as a group which ones you want to tackle in your next session.
- You also can **look for practice problems on the web** (which you can run by your TA or professor for relevancy), ask your professor about practice problems/questions and even come up with your own problems to present to the group.
- You should **use the last 10 minutes to do a quick review/summary** of the session and wrap up by identifying any tasks or responsibilities needing to be addressed prior to the next session.

**Study tip: think about including the following things when answering questions:**

- **Verify that you know what all the terms** in the question mean.
- **Verify that you actually understand** what the question is asking for.
- **Write out in words** what you did to solve the problem.
- **Write down what concepts** are being tested in the question.
- Try to **manipulate the problem in some way that challenges your understanding** of the concepts you listed (you'll come up with new approaches to the problem or even new questions).

*Credit: Duke University Academic Resource Center*