

Study Skills: Successful Study Groups

Study groups can be one of the most effective methods of studying out there but they can also be distracting and hard to work with. Here are some ideas about how to effectively use a group study session.

Have a goal: 'I want to study for the test together' is not a goal, and it's a poor start to a study session. Decide what you want to study, how much you want to study, and how long it's going to take. An example: I want to have the study guide over chapters 4 & 5 (What) completed in the next 2 hours (How long), with at least 2 sentences for every item in the guide (How much).

Come prepared: Come to the study group with your own goal in mind, it's easier to choose between goals than it will be to come up with one as a group. Also have all your materials for the course before you arrive. Having them ready will help get the session off to a good start and will allow you to more effectively utilize the time when you have the most focus.

Have a focus: Have one person take on the role of teacher or study lead, and have them pose questions or problems to the group. Decide on the answer as a group. Once everyone understands move onto the next problem. After a few questions have the leader switch with someone else. If you disagree with your groups answer or find it not compelling, make a note of it so that you can ask your professor or TA.

Quiz each other: Flashcards take a long time to make, but a person sitting across from you with the textbook is just as effective. If they are struggling, give them hints or clues. If they still don't get it, explain it in your own words. This is far more effective than doing individual flashcards, because the clues and hints are often memorable and can trigger your brain to remember the correct answer.

Challenge each other!: Don't accept every explanation or answer your group decides on, but challenge your group members to explain their reasoning and how they arrived at conclusions. The goal is not to prove your group mates wrong; it is to best understand the correct answer. Being able to defend a point means you have a very deep level of understanding over the material. ('No you're wrong' or 'the book says you're wrong' are not acceptable ways to defend a point).

Review: At the end of each study session, take 10 minutes to review what you went over and what areas you missed. Ask any questions about uncertainties you had.

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