**The Ultimate Guide to Creating Your Own Study Community**

**Main Ideas:**

Write an agreement for your values and expectations of each other as a group. This will be both a reminder and a tool to help you work through conflicts that might arise.

Make sure you take time to get to know each other and check-in at the beginning of each study session. Studying together will be more fun if you are friends, and being friends will help build trust of each other.

Create an overall plan for your study time for the semester. It is OK to adjust as necessary. This will help you plan ahead and stay on track with preparing on time for exams.

Make a plan for each study session as well. Set time limits for your session plan so that you are motivated to stay on task. Having a plan will help you be accountable to each other.

Check yourselves against your study plan to make sure you did what you said you would do and that you learned the material accurately. Check your work against the textbook or other reliable resources.

Spend a few minutes at the end of your study session to review how the session went – What strategies worked well (or not)? What about the group dynamics worked well and what can you improve? (refer back to the values and expectations agreement, if helpful)

If you get stuck, need more or different ideas for learning strategies, or otherwise want assistance, come to Edens 217 during working hours, find a tutor related to your course in the Mastery Lab or Pearce Communications Center, talk with an Academic Coach, or ask a peer mentor.

**What is a Study Community?**

Study communities are self-directed groups to review class material and solve course-related problems. Study communities have a structure that is designed for effectiveness and efficient learning. A study community usually includes 4-6 students enrolled in the same course(s). Coaches are available to help study communities become established.

**Why a Study Community?**

* Learn ***2.5 times*** more in an hour than alone.\*
* Learn *study skills* from the group.
* Solve more challenging problems.
* Divide and conquer the information.
* More support and camaraderie than studying alone.
* Prepare for the working world.
* Increase your motivation.
* Feel supported by and accountable to others.
* Benefit from other *viewpoints*.
* Study information at a deeper level.
* Teach to *master* the material.

**Putting Together an Effective Study Community**

***How many?***

It’s recommended to keep study groups between 4 to 6 people. People often socialize too much and cannot cover as much material in smaller groups. In bigger groups, some group members do not contribute as much and scheduling can be a problem.

***Who?***

The most effective study is completed in study communities comprised of members (classmates) with the common goal of learning the material better to improve their academic performance. Students dedicated to succeeding in school usually will complete assigned reading, take extensive notes, and clear up confusion by asking questions. Community membership should remain constant.

***Where?***

It is best to study in environments without distractions and areas where group members can communicate freely. [Reserve a group study room](https://columbiasc.libcal.com/reserve/edensrooms) in Edens, grab a table in the main study areas, or meet in the Pearce Communication Center or Mastery Lab.

***How long?***

Do not study more than 2 to 3 hours at a time when studying in a group. Understand the 45/15 rule where you study 45 minutes and take a 15 minute break, then come back together and summarize previous work. During long sessions, group members tend to socialize more and do not study as productively. Study sessions for an hour or less tend to be rushed and unproductive since only a few subjects can be discussed. Find a happy balance!

***When?***

You should commit to meet regularly, at the same mutually agreed upon location and time each week. Individual members can have time to properly prepare prior to meeting with the group. Do not wait until the night before an exam!

**Getting the most out of a study group session**

***Stay focused***

Before each session, identify the roles of each participant, including who will facilitate. Develop an agenda, or a list of things you want to accomplish and set a time limit on each main task so you stay on track.

***Ensure participation***

Every member of a study community should actively participate. A great way for each member to contribute is to assign specific topics and have each member instruct the group. Peer teaching is a great way for individuals to retain information.

***Be prepared***

The most effective study sessions occur when all group members come to the session prepared. Each member of the study group should review lecture notes, complete select readings from the textbook, and identify specific subjects to study. Decide whether to have a formal or informal study group. See explanation on the "Formal versus Informal Study Communities” page.

\*John, D. W., Johnson, R. T., & Smith, K. A. (1991). Cooperative learning: Increasing college faculty instructional productivity (ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No. 4) Washington, DC: George Washington University.

**Forming a Study Community**

* Begin as early in the semester as possible!
* Try to find classmates from your own section or from a section with the same professor. Focus is important.
* Gather a diverse group of students in order to include different perspectives, but make sure all members have similar learning goals and values.
* Exchange contact information and set a first meeting; be specific with date, time, and location.
* Discuss what is important to you in a study community. Establish expectations such as an attendance policy.

**Running a Formal Study Community**

**At the first session:**

* Set ground rules and expectations for the study group.
* Pick a regular meeting time that will work for everyone each week throughout the semester.
* Reserve a study space that will be available throughout the term—a *quiet* residence hall lounge, an unused classroom, or a group study room in the library.
* Designate roles; see the chart below.
* Review the class syllabus and make a schedule of topics for the semester.

**For each session:**

*Before*

* Attempt to do your homework, read the textbook, and try ALL suggested problems prior to sessions.

*During*

* Review, compare, and fill-in your notes.
* Schedule times for breaks.
* Actively listen to all group members without interruption.
* Do not allow one student to dominate the group discussion.
* If conversation wanders, try to redirect it to the stated topic.
* Do not let the session become a forum for complaints.
* Important: Reserve 5–10 minutes at the end of each session to determine whether set goals were accomplished as a group.

**Formal Study Group Roles:** Allocate responsibilities among your group. Use these or create your own.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Role** | **Responsibilities** | **Group Member Name** |
| Facilitator | * Moderates sessions * Focuses group on your goals and expectations |  |
| Note-Taker | * Archives notes on each session. * Records members’ contact information |  |
| Communicator | * Sends reminder emails about meetings and assignments * Tallies group members’ missed sessions |  |
| Resource Planner | * Arranges for supplies: reference books, tutors, projectors, study space |  |
| Time-Keeper | * Administers session timelines |  |
| Liaison\* | * Writes down questions from sessions * Attends professor’s office hours |  |

## \*This position should rotate to give all members the chance to attend office hours.

## Forming an Informal Study Community

* At the beginning of the term, ask your friends, hall-mates, or teammates.
* Exchange contact information and set a first meeting; be specific with date, time, and location.
* Start studying by yourself in a lounge and others will approach you.
* Don't make your study community your only source of help.
* Limit your expectations and goals for the group.

## Running an Informal Study Community

### Setting up the group:

* Meet when it is convenientfor you.
* Meet in a place that is comfortable, convenient, and distraction-free.
* Don't designate a leader or roles.

### For each session:

* Decide what you want to accomplishin that session only. Don't worry about a longer-term plan.
* Compare notesand information.
* Actively listen to all group members without interruption.
* Do not allow one studentto dominate the group discussion.
* Don't expect to stay on track all the time**.**
* Limit time spent complaining**.**
* Take a break at your leisure**.**
* After each study session, decide whether your personal goals were accomplished.

Adapted from MIT Center for Academic Excellence http://web.mit.edu/uaap/learning/tutoring/organizing.html

**Study Community Scheduler**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Time** | **Location** | **Task** |
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| **Assignment (Quiz, Exam, etc.)** | **Date** |  | **Sample Agenda- 75 minutes** | |
|  |  |  | 5 minutes | Debrief, Get Started |
|  |  |  | 5 minutes | Set session goal |
|  |  |  | 15 minutes | Work on own |
|  |  |  | 15 minutes | Group work |
|  |  |  | 15 minutes | Work on own |
|  |  |  | 15 minutes | Group work |
|  |  |  | 10 minutes | Assessment |
|  |  |  | 5 minutes | Review Session |
|  |  |  | 5 minutes | Plan for Next Session |

By signing below, I agree to attend all study group meetings, arrive on time, be prepared to contribute, actively participate, provide assistance and encouragement to other group members, and be productive and efficient.

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Adapted from LSU, Center for Academic Success, “Study Group Starter Kit”

**Use your learning preference to enhance your study group!**

Knowing how you learn can help you and your study-group develop effective study skills! Even though “learning styles” are a myth and all students can learn in each style, the group can still benefit by knowing how each member prefers to study. Since all students think and learn differently, by knowing your preference and leading activities that lean towards that preference in your study group, you can enhance your and your group members’ learning.

*Visual strategies*

* + Use color when taking notes.
  + Draw diagrams, charts, and other visual aids while studying.
  + Create mind maps to organize information.
  + Watch videos on YouTube.
  + Look at the pictures and graphs in the textbook for information.

*Auditory strategies*

* + Pay attention in and record lecture.
  + Read aloud.
  + Listen to audiotapes or videos about the information.
  + Discuss study topics with others.
  + Ask questions of your professor in office hours.

*Text-based strategies*

* + Create lists and step-by-step procedures in words.
  + Read the textbook, especially the headings and rewrite/reread your notes.
  + Write an essay or summary about important points.
  + Change charts and diagrams into statements or lists.
  + Generate multiple choice questions.

*Kinesthetic/hands-on strategies*

* + Go on a field trip.
  + Add examples into your notes.
  + Practice by discussing.
  + Use flashcards.
  + Do something while studying such as squeeze a stress ball.
  + Try walking while reading notes.

**Third**: Use each learning style in a study group, no matter how your group members prefer to learn. Seeing material multiple ways increases memory retention and creates a deeper understanding!

Adapted from Maryland Community College, S.O.A.R Program, “Developing Effective Study Habits”

**Collaboration = Success**

Take your pick of these collaborative activities in your study session. You’ll be using tried-and-true techniques, and it will keep the whole group engaged! These are some standard suggestions but feel free to be creative and use new ideas to keep the group working productively.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Predict Test ?’s**  Have each student create a test question (or more) and compile them to create a practice exam! | **Outline the Chapter**  Work in pairs and start with the headings of the chapter. Read the text to find the important points under each heading. Compare these points with other groups. | **Grab Bag**  Each student puts a question in a bowl, and then the bowl is passed around. Each member must answer the question they pulled from the bowl using their resources. |
| **Summarize Lecture**  Write a one minute summary or an outline of the previous lecture(s). This will be especially helpful when studying for exams and the final. | **Divide and Conquer**  Assign each group member a topic to teach the group or a section of the material to prepare an incomplete outline or study guide questions. | **Concept Map**  Build a web of connections among concepts. Start with a high-level concept in the middle. Draw lines to indicate how concepts relate to each other. |
| **Vocabulary**  Compose a list of key terms from lecture (or the textbook). Scramble them and then in pairs organize them into categories. Try defining them and giving examples of when to use these terms. Finally, discuss. | **Summarize the Steps**  Write out the steps of how to solve a problem in words. This will be more useful in solving future problems than one correct answer! | **3-2-1**  Each member writes down 3 topics he knows, 2 he doesn’t understand, and 1 possible test question. Present all to the group and discuss. |
| **First Line**  Particularly helpful in problem-solving courses, solve the first line/step of a problem. This can help build confidence in categorizing problems. Try this as a race! | **Board Work Model**  Work out problems in 4 columns: Work the steps, generalize the steps in words, knowledge required for the problem as a whole or each step, and propose a similar problem. | **Venn Diagram**  You may remember making these diagrams in middle school, but they can be very useful to compare and contrast any new information! |
| **Peer Lessons**  Have each person or pair solve the problem and then teach it to the group. | **Think-Pair-Share**  Let everyone in the group think about/try a problem. Then solve it in pairs and get back into the group to go over the answer. | **Mark the Book**  With a partner or the entire group, take notes in the text book. If you’re uncomfortable writing in your book, use paper. Try using the Cornell Note Taking Method! |

**The Study Cycle**

***A continuous process of learning***

Adapted from The Center of Academic Success, Louisiana State University, www.cas.lsu.edu

Class

Time

**Attend**

**Step 2**

10 min

**Preview**

**Step 1**

10 min

**Review**

**Step 3**

Try the following system of studying for each class you are currently taking. You will notice the short preview and review sessions are more powerful for memory and retention than you may have anticipated. You will also find the Intense Study Sessions allow you to get more done in less time. We guarantee this works.

**Attend Class**. Ask questions, **take creative, meaningful notes.** Due to the preview, you will find yourself more confident and “connected” to what lecture covers. Notes will be more meaningful and clear.

**Preview** the assigned material either the night before or the day of the class. (You can call it a mental “warm up”) **Look over bold and italicized print, headings, outlines, formulas, images and graphs.** Read over the summary and other material offered at the end of the chapter. As you “skim” the chapter, ask yourself questions you would like answered in class.

**Review** as soon after class as possible. (This is your “cool down.”) Look over your class notes; make sure they are complete and accurate. Make note of anything that was confusing.

**Utilize Intentional Study Sessions:**

Do several sessions each day based on your class needs. They are designed to allow you to accomplish more in shorter, more intense periods of focused study time.

Do you have more time? Start again with a new goal...

Set a **goal** for the next 30-50 minutes

**Study** with focus and action (organize, map, summarize) to accomplish your goal for 30-50 minutes.

Take a 5-10 minute **break**

**Review** what you just studied

**Refresh your memory! Saturday or Sunday is a nice time to take a few minutes to review ALL your notes from EACH of your classes from the previous week.**

As you look over your notes and materials you will begin to make connections between concepts, understand new ideas and construct associations that allow you to process material at higher levels—moving up Bloom’s Taxonomy.