



Productive Study Groups

AESC
Academic Enrichment
& Support Center

Getting Started

- **Form a group** of 3-6 members and determine best time(s) to meet regularly in a quiet place where materials can be spread out.
- **Set rules and guidelines.** At your first meeting, make sure everyone has agreed on expectations and commits to attending each session, and then establish rules for the group (e.g., what to do if someone continually is missing or is tardy regularly or monopolizing the discussion).
- **State objectives or goals.** Knowing what you want to achieve at each session helps the group manage time and stay focused. At the end of each meeting, make a plan for the next session and allocate times for each task. Make sure you have an ending time. Stick to your plan.

Getting the Most out of your Study Session

- **Make a plan.** Use strategic planning and review goals for each session. This will save time and reduce frustration, disappointment and confusion.
- **Be prepared.** Before a session, be sure to finish your assigned tasks and prepare any questions.
- **Assign roles and switch roles periodically.** Assign a
 - *group leader/administrator* to ensure meeting runs smoothly and meets group goals/expectations
 - *communicator* to remind members of meetings (send out calendar invites for semester, record absences, and communicate assigned tasks for next meeting)
 - *recorder* who gathers contact information for members, keeps notes on group progress, and group notes on content
 - *liaison* to ask questions of the TA, faculty
 - and *timekeeper* who can start and stop meetings on time and keep the group on task.
- **Avoid the pitfalls** of complaining, group think, domination by one member, intimidation to other members, unproductiveness and distraction.
- **Communicate openly and concisely.** Ask for peers' feedback: "Am I rambling too much?" or "Did I present your point of view correctly?" Be humble and listen. Keep your message brief.

What to Do During Sessions (if preparing for an exam)

- **Assign a person to teach a topic and/or challenging question** on your agenda to lead the discussion for each session. Everybody must still prepare to discuss each topic of a unit.
- **Create questions** that test comprehension, application and memory of the material. Take turns asking, answering, and explaining *why* the correct answer is correct. (Collect questions at each session; then, take the cumulative practice exam you've created to prepare for the real exam.)
- **Role-play:** You can act like a parent explaining the ideas to a child. Or how about becoming your professor and deducing what questions will be on the exam?
- **Create songs, movement, chants** for key information. Studies show that connecting knowledge to kinetic activity (characterized by movement), rhythm and music significantly helps retention.

- **Use mnemonic devices** if helpful. In a **name mnemonic**, the first letter of each word in a list of items is used to make a name of a person or thing. Sometimes, the items can be rearranged to form a more recollectable name mnemonic (e.g., **Pvt. Tim Hall** = Essential amino acids (**P**henylalanine, **V**aline, **T**hreonine, **T**ryptophan, **I**solucine, **H**istidine, **A**rginine, **L**eucine, **L**ysine). Other helpful memory devices include model mnemonics such as a circular sequence model, a pyramid model of stages, a pie chart, and a 5-box sequence.
- **Practice explaining concepts** to each other in each study session. Pair off briefly.
- **Create and use concept maps** to remember material by writing the main concept in the center of the page and drawing a circle or square around it. Write related or subordinate concepts on lines that radiate outward from the center. Use only key words and add symbols or images that will help you remember ideas. Add color to the map.
- **Clarify points of disagreement or misunderstanding of content.** Prepare a list of questions that you can ask your professor during office hours or have a volunteer consult resources before the next meeting.
- **Before exam, schedule some time for stress-relief activities.** Right before the exams, members are understandably more stressed out. Schedule some time during the meeting for stress-relief activities. Share something positive and motivational with the group (e.g., photo, listen to a song, tell a few jokes, do an act of kindness or say something kind to the person next to you).

Sample Agenda: (hour to hour and a half)

5-10 minutes	Debrief, socialize, greetings
1-3 minutes	Set session goal
20 minutes	Teaching by one member and tackling a couple of questions; having all group members explain the why behind concepts and answers before moving on to next question; creating memory devices; consulting sources for clarification.
10-15 minutes	Pair off and quiz one another about concepts from earlier material
10 minutes	Tackle two to three questions on one's own related to the same content just studied
5-10 minutes	Review responses and plan for next session

Adapted from:

Baylor Success Center. (n.d.). *Forming and conducting effective study groups*. Retrieved from: http://www.baylor.edu/support_programs/index.php?id=41029

Brigham Young University Center for Teaching and Learning. (n.d.). *How to organize and conduct effective study groups*. Retrieved from: <http://ctl.byu.edu/single-article/how-organize-and-conduct-effective-study-groups>

Louisiana State University CAS Center for Academic Success. (n.d.). *The why and how-to guide to organizing successful study groups*. Retrieved from: <http://cas.lsu.edu/study-groups>