Creating Successful Study Groups

How do you form a study group?

Look beyond friends and familiar faces. Look for other students who pay attention and appear motivated. Check with each member for a serious commitment to show up prepared and to take on the well-being of the whole group. Agree that everyone has busy schedules and be prepared to study! Establish a meeting time, length of meeting, and a place that works for the whole group. Have everyone in the group take the Felder’s Learning Inventory and compare answers at your first meeting. Keep the group at a reasonable size.

What will your group do at each meeting?

Set up basic rules at your first meeting. How will you communicate? Who will facilitate each meeting (and how will responsibility be shared?) What tasks will you focus on? How will you decide ahead of time and communicate that to the group? What technology works best for your group?

It is tempting to work on homework only—on application questions—but don’t neglect group work time on understanding the course material as well as completing it.

Other group tasks: discussing concepts, preparing study sheets, asking questions about material, reviewing and comparing notes, discussing readings, predicting test questions and practicing answers.

What will you do for your group?

- Prepare before the study team meeting (for example, do all the required reading or problem sets)
- Complete any tasks that the group assigns to its members
- Attend all meetings and arrive on time
- Actively participate during the sessions in ways that further the work of the group
- Help promote one another’s learning and success
- Provide assistance, support, and encouragement to group members
- Be involved in periodic self-assessments to determine whether the study team is working successfully (Is too much work being required? Is the time in study team meetings well spent?)

Staying strong with your group!

Ask about each group members goals and check with each member to see if they are meeting their personal goals and if the group is helping with that. Remind each other about your commitment to the group. Keep each other accountable!

Take time to socialize for a few minutes at the start of each meeting. Check in with everyone. Then, focus on your work. Take turns being responsible for explaining concepts. Rather than rely on one person to explain concepts, share that responsibility. Rotate having pairs of group members reviewing the week’s lessons and teaching each other in “mini-lessons.”

Constructive and Destructive Group Behaviors

Constructive Group Behaviors

Cooperating: Is interested in the views and perspectives of the other group members and is willing to adapt for the good of the group.

Clarifying: Makes issues clear for the group by listening, summarizing and focusing discussions.

Inspiring: Enlivens the group, encourages participation and progress.

Harmonizing: Encourages group cohesion and collaboration. For example, uses humor as a relief after a particularly difficult discussion.

Risk Taking: Is willing to risk possible personal loss or embarrassment for the group or project success.

Process Checking: Questions the group on process issues such as agenda, time frames, discussion topics, decision methods, use of information, etc.

Destructive Group Behaviors

Dominating: Takes much of meeting time expressing self views and opinions. Tries to take control by use of power, time, etc.

Rushing: Encourages the group to move on before task is complete. Gets “tired” of listening to others and working as a group.

Withdrawing: Removes self from discussions or decision making. Refuses to participate.

Discounting: Disregards or minimizes group or individual ideas or suggestions. Severe discounting behavior includes insults, which are often in the form of jokes.

Digressing: Rambles, tells stories, and takes group away from primary purpose.

Blocking: Impedes group progress by obstructing all ideas and suggestions. “That will never work because...”