

## Study Groups

Study groups can be helpful when you are learning information and concepts for class discussion and for tests and exams. Studying with others in a small group is helpful to everyone because you think out loud, share ideas and learn from one another. Below are some major benefits of study groups, guidelines for putting them together, and some ideas for how to get the best out of the group.

### The main benefits

- A support group can "pick you up" when you find that your motivation to study is slipping. Other group members can be a source of encouragement.
- You may find it easier to ask questions in a small study group.
- You may become more committed to study because the group members are depending on your preparation and participation. You often do not want to let them down.
- Group members will often listen and discuss information and concepts during the study sessions. These activities enrich your learning experience.
- One or more group members may understand something you do not. They may bring up ideas you never considered.
- You can learn valuable new study habits from group members.
- You can compare your class notes with those of the other group members, to clarify your notes and fill in any gaps.
- Teaching/explaining information and concepts to other group members will help you reinforce your understanding.
- Interacting with other group members can make studying more enjoyable.

### Starting a study group

- Get to know your classmates by talking with them before class, during breaks, and after class. When selecting a classmate to join your study group, you should be able to answer YES for each of the following questions:
  - is this student motivated to do well?
  - does this classmate understand the subject matter?
  - is this person dependable?
  - would this classmate be tolerant of the ideas of others?
  - would you like to work with them?
- Form a group of three to five. A larger group may allow some members to avoid responsibility, may lead to people forming cliques, and may make group management an issue.
- Decide how often and for how long you will meet. Meeting two or three times a week is probably best. If you plan a long study session, make sure you include time for breaks. A study session of about 60 to 90 minutes is usually best.
- Decide where to meet. Select a meeting place that is free from distractions. An empty classroom or group study rooms in the library are good study places.

- Decide on the goals of the study group e.g. comparing and updating notes, discussing readings, and preparing for exams.
- Decide on a leader for the first study session. Also decide whether it will be the same person each session or whether there will be a rotating leader. The leader should be responsible for meeting the goals of that study session.
- Clearly decide the agenda for the first study session and the responsibilities of each group member for that session.
- Make a list of all group members that includes their names, telephone numbers, and email addresses. Make sure each group member has this list and update the list as needed.

### What makes a successful study group?

- Each group member contributes to discussions.
- Members actively listen to one another without interrupting. Only one group member speaks at a time.
- Group members come prepared to work.
- The group works towards its agreed goals.
- Group members show respect for one another.
- Members feel free to constructively criticise one another. This can encourage group members to strengthen their own weaknesses.
- Group members feel free to ask questions of each other.
- At the end of each study session, an agenda including specific group member responsibilities is prepared for the next session.
- Above all, the positive attitude that "we can do this together" is maintained.

### What can go wrong?

- A study group can be a very positive learning experience. However, there are some things to be avoided. Do not let:
  - the group get distracted from its agenda and goals.
  - the study group becomes a social group. You should socialise at other times.
  - group members attend unprepared. To stay in the group, members should be required to do their share.
  - the session becomes a negative forum for complaining about tutors and courses.
  - one or two group members dominate. All members should have an equal opportunity to participate.

To access other useful Learning Services resources and handouts, use the StudySmart tab on the My Ara homepage – <https://myara.ara.ac.nz/pages/academic-support/learning-resources>.