

No. 5: Study Groups

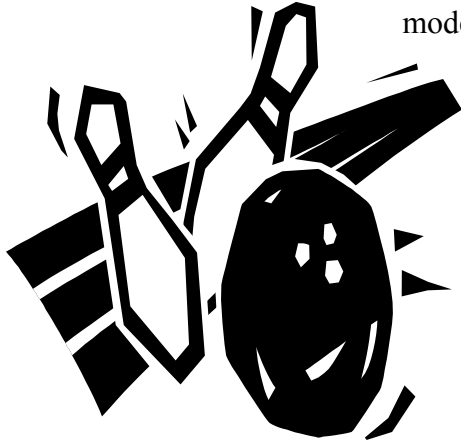


Study groups are a great way to learn. By creating a forum wherein you are responsible for sharing ideas with others, you quickly learn what you do and do not know. Talking through your ideas with friends helps you to solidify those ideas. You also might find out that you were mistaken about something and have ample time to make corrections before an exam or presentation.

Here are a few bits of advice about forming study groups.

- **Keep your group a manageable size.** I recommend four people as a maximum limit on membership. Trust me. From personal experience, groups of five or more become difficult to work with and some people develop an incentive to “slack off.”
- **Develop rules and expectations.** Everybody should participate and this must be made explicit up front. Group members who do not abide by the rules should be asked to leave the group. Although creating an explicit code of behavior may seem “unfriendly,” setting mutual expectations will prevent resentment between members in the long run. Some behavioral guidelines may include attendance requirements, responsibilities about sharing notes, answering e-mails in a timely fashion or rules about who is responsible for leading discussion. (Attendance requirements not only should include groups meetings, but attendance in class too. Who wants to always “cover” for someone who never attends class?) If everyone agrees to the rules beforehand, the group will be more productive.
- **Everyone participates.** For the group to be productive, it is necessary that everyone feel they have an equal role. If you are person who always likes to speak in class, it is important that you hold back and let others talk. Otherwise, people will get turned off and leave the group or not come to meetings as prepared as they would if they knew they were going to speak.
- **Respect one another.** Everybody says dumb things or asks stupid questions. This is part of life. Don’t make others feel embarrassed when they say something stupid. An important role for the group is mutual encouragement. Also, if a disagreement occurs, don’t let it get out of hand. Make note of the disagreement and then have a “nonpartisan” negotiate a solution or let each party have their say and then move on. Your group should be there for the long term. Don’t jeopardize that over a short-term spat. Also, respect each other’s privacy. Study groups are not a personal dating service.

- **Economize.** If possible, form a group out of people who are in several of the same classes. This may be hard at a large university and in large classes, but look around and see if you recognize people from your other courses.
- **Have fun.** There is no law about having fun during a study session. In fact, keeping things light will help make everyone feel comfortable and may result in a more productive session. (Remember, though, that you need to study. Don't have fun at the expense of accomplishing your academic goals.) Meet in a fun environment – coffee house, pizza shack – or plan an after session event – e.g., seeing a movie, going bowling, playing cribbage or “Chutes and Ladders,” build a model volcano. Also realize that ever since universities were created, students have had a duty to make fun of their professors and complain about their courses. You have my permission to goof on me.



LEGAL DISCLAIMER: “Dr. T’s Helpful Hints” are only suggested practices and do not guarantee academic success. You are responsible for making the choices that determine how well you do in school. Choose wisely.