

Study Groups/Collaborative Learning

Why Participate in a Study Group?

Working with other students in small groups (3-5 members) outside of class proves to be one of the best strategies for success in academics, whether you're in your first semester or your last. The ability to work well with others is important for success in almost every profession, almost every human endeavor. Group study can help develop the collaborative skills that will make you a productive person, a successful professional, a good citizen. In his study, *Making the Most of College* (2001), Harvard education professor Richard Light along with his colleagues learned through interviews with university students that one of the strongest indicators of academic trouble is the tendency to study alone. Find a group, or study partner. Regardless of your predominant learning style (visual, aural, or kinesthetic), **collaboration**--whether in drill on verb conjugation or comparing understandings of abstract philosophical concepts--has proven the most beneficial to the most students. Consider this research schematic, reported by one education psychologist: students learn about 10% of what they read, 20% of what they hear...50% of what they see & hear, 70% of what is discussed with others, and 95% of what they teach. The activities of a study group (seeing & hearing, discussing, teaching) reinforce learning more efficiently than studying alone—provided, of course, that your group has set up some important ground rules.

How Do I Get Started? Whom Should the Group Include?

- Research and anecdotal evidence alike suggest that the most effective groups are teacher-assigned. If you are struggling in a class, or see others around you who are, you might approach your professor for help with making an announcement in class or recommending group members and study strategies.
- Invitations or statements of interest posted to Blackboard or online class discussions can also help identify others who might be interested. Approaching students you know to be conscientious or the friends of friends who are good students can often lead to the most effective groups.
- Your group should have three to five members. (Larger teams have difficulty in keeping everyone involved.)
- Diverse skill levels, backgrounds, and experience are important. Each member should bring a skill—whether it's the ability to get the group together and organized, the best notes from class lectures, or the greatest understanding of the material.
- Remember that learning from one another is important—and teaching (that is, having every member of the group responsible for presenting some of the material) is even more beneficial.

What Are the Ground Rules?

Your first study group meeting should establish some ground rules:

- Determine by whom and how your group will be convened.
- Set group communications and parameters--when, where, and how often you will meet. Making certain that all members have shared contact information (cell phone numbers, e-mail addresses) should be a starting point. Regular meeting times help ensure the success of the group.
- Summarize your objectives (for example, Drill, Review, Comparing Lecture Notes, Preparing for Exams, Follow-up to Class Discussion). Having each member independently write down 2 or 3 main objectives helps to generate this discussion. From there, the group should compare objectives and make a list of priorities.
- Determine the process for achieving these goals, assigning some role to each group member. Commitment of each member is vital. Make sure your group agrees to terms. (Is this group for the next test only or will it meet throughout the semester? Does missing a meeting without a good reason lead to "firing" from the group? Are there penalties for not holding up one's end of the bargain?)
- Common sense and good manners apply. Shared operating principles and responsibilities, defined and agreed to by each member, might include: (a) make a serious commitment to attend, and be prepared and punctual; (b) focus discussions on issues, topics at hand, not on personal criticism or on gossip; (c) take responsibility for your share of tasks and carry them out on time.

For further information about collaborative study, learning styles, and other study skill, contact the Academic Resources Center, 101 CUB, 386.822.7127, academicsupport@stetson.edu.