

## Using Study Groups to Increase Learning

Some students find that the Study Group method helps to learn some kinds of material faster and better. However, it must be used in a particular way, otherwise it is frustrating and a waste of time.

The following guidelines will help to plan and carry out the method in a way to ensure that it works for you.

1. The size of the group is important. It can involve as few as two, but a more desirable number is between three and six. Then if one cannot make the meeting, the group can still carry on. Members should be taking the same course, and be able to get together on a regular basis.
2. One person should act as Chair, to see that the method is carried out correctly, without too much idle talk or one person getting excess "air time". The role of chair can rotate.
3. The first task is to find out what you have to learn and know from the course. For this, look at previous year exams, or get sample questions from the professor. This will tell you what to focus on learning whether definitions, distinctions, descriptions, processes, analyses, or what, and the kind of questions you will get (e.g., multiple choice, fill in, short essays, or what).
4. An agenda should be agreed on for each meeting, with each group member to prepare several questions on the lecture, chapter or section of the text. And each member prepares good answers to his/her questions.
5. The agenda is each member's homework. He/she should also be familiar with the whole chapter, lecture, etc.
6. At the weekly group meeting, each member hands his questions to the next person, who writes his answers and passes the questions to the next person. Once the questions are around, each member announces the answers to the questions he/she prepared. Members should discuss any differences about the questions or answers, and refer to the text if necessary.
7. The final step is to plan the agenda for the next meeting, after which members may reward themselves with socializing.

It may take two or three sessions to get the method working, but if you stick to it and follow the procedure, it will usually improve learning and make it more interesting. If the method suits your learning style and the course material, form a study team and give it a fair trial. If it doesn't seem to work, see a counsellor and adapt it. If that fails, drop it. Always and only, go with what works best for you.