



Forming Study Groups

Why form a study group?

- ⚙️ **Create a learning community -**
Students learn from each other and sharing knowledge is vital to successful research.
- ⚙️ **Create a support network -**
University can be a stressful and pressured time. A study group is great way of giving and receiving support for students in the same situation and motivate each other to keep going.
- ⚙️ **Explore diversity of views -**
Others may have ways of thinking or understanding that you haven't considered. Study groups allow you to exploit these and use them in your own learning.
- ⚙️ **Develop new ways of learning -**
Sometimes, stretching outside of your comfort zone can lead to wonderful things; even if you are reluctant to try. Other students may have talents that you can learn or take inspiration from.
- ⚙️ **Cohort effect -**
Students who study together tend to better in their academic work, as they can motivate one another to achieve and complete.
- ⚙️ **Transferable skills -**
Interpersonal skills and the ability to work effectively with others are highly sought by employers. A study group will allow you to develop these skills and apply them to a shared task; an essential for graduates.
- ⚙️ **Liven up your study -**
Studying can be an arduous process, especially if you are spending lengths of time in the library on your own. Studying with others can enrich your study experience. What's more, you can agree on a structure to make sure that you all combine work with breaks; and stick to it!

Things to consider

- ⚙️ **Who and how many?**
Whoever you like really! A good guide is for members to be like-minded individuals who are engaged with study, enjoy group study or group discussions. 4-6 members is a good starting guide; but be prepared for people to leave if they discover that the study group isn't for them (Slaymaker, 2019).
- ⚙️ **Where?**
Somewhere quiet and free from distractions and/or interruptions, with space to spread materials. You might consider booking a group study room in The Hub or The Library, if

it is sunny, then move the group outside or you might take it in turns to host the group at different locations. Decide on your preferred environment as a group; it can be as formal or informal as you like.

⚙ **When?**

You will need to consider everyone's schedules and where possible, agree on a consistent time. This will make the study group more of an event and members will make extra efforts to attend.

⚙ **How long and how often?**

This will be dictated by member schedules. You might decide to meet once a week, once a fortnight, and increase or decrease the number of meetings according to the academic timetable. The length of the session should be no longer than 1-2 hours, as the longer the session, the more temptation to socialise than use the time productively.

Ground rules

You will need to set some boundaries as a group, in order for your sessions to be productive, fair, ethical and supportive. Here are some of the issues you might need to negotiate:

⚙ **Leader/Chairperson -**

Decide early on if you want to select a leader for the group sessions; you might decide that the leader changes each week, so everyone has the opportunity. You should also decide upon the leader's role in the group, for example, responsibility for keeping the session on topic and ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to contribute.

⚙ **Unauthorised Collusion -**

This is the act of working with another person on an assignment or project and claiming the work as your own; intentionally or unintentionally. If group work is permitted on an assignment, then this will be explicit in the assessment guidance. Agree as a group that assignment writing is undertaken individually and avoid taking notes of exact phrases in sessions and using them in your work; these will be identified by your marker! For more information on this, consult the Study Skills section on Academic Integrity.

⚙ **Communication -**

Communication is comprised of active listening and speaking. Both are equally important for group study and a balance should be sought for each member. Agree that all voices should be heard, and feedback should be offered to confirm that the speaker has been listened to and understood. Agree that every member should participate in the session and that no one member should dominate the conversation. Give permission for others to intervene if this becomes the case.

⚙ **Non-attendance and latecomers -**

With busy schedules it might not be reasonable to expect every member to attend every session, so expect non-attendance. Agree on a procedure to be followed if a

member cannot attend and a procedure to follow if non-attendance becomes problematic. For lateness, agree on a time that each session should begin and stick to it, even if all members aren't present or logged on.

- ⚙ **Use of phones -**

Come to a decision as a group with regards to the circumstances that mobile phones can be used. Be respectful of other members of the group and don't use phones whilst another person is talking.

- ⚙ **Confidentiality -**

Agree that things divulged in the study group will be subject to confidentiality (within reasonable realms) and will not be mentioned outside of the group. Avoid messaging other members (or non-members) about discussed items.

What should we cover?

This will be generated through discussion with group members and guided by the level of formality in the study group sessions. You might agree to take on 'roles' within the group (for more on this see Cottrell, 2009, p. 176) or assume a different role at each meeting. You might want to structure your sessions thematically or create an agenda, so each member knows what they need to prepare and bring to the session (Slaymaker, 2019). Here are some general themes for study groups:

- ⚙ Tailor your study sessions to events in the academic calendar i.e. exams, assignments
- ⚙ Review recommended reading from lectures or seminars
- ⚙ Practice presentations or work on group assignments
- ⚙ Decode essay questions
- ⚙ Share understanding after a lecture or seminar

General tips

- ⚙ **Encourage others to join -**

Combine the various methods available at Marjon to promote your group and spread the message, such as: Marjon Hub, posters around campus, speak to your Course Rep, speak to your lecturer, e-mail your classmates or use social media.

- ⚙ **Be prepared -**

Make sure you turn up to each session prepared. Whether this is completing a task or attending with a list/summary of issues you'd like to discuss, prepare before the session to optimise the time with the study group.

- ⚙ **Be constructive -**

If a group member says something that you don't agree with, remember to reply constructively. This is a form of feedback to others that 'provides insights or suggestions that... encourage them in the right direction... [and] is offered in such a way that it does not belittle or undermine the recipients' (Cottrell, 2019, p. 181).

- ⚙️ **Divide and conquer**- Some activities are easily divided into manageable chunks. For instance, if you need to do some preparatory reading for a lecture, why not divide the article into sections and report back to the group with a summary of what has been read? This will save you time to go over other materials in more depth, as well as facilitate some natural discussion about the article in terms of the lecture.
- ⚙️ **Signpost to good stuff** – Be sure to tell your group about useful sources you find. You could create a social media group or use an online collaboration tool to post all of the helpful resources you find and continue the discussion outside of the study group.
- ⚙️ **Share your grades and feedback** – If you are happy to, then share your marked assignments and feedback with the rest of the group. You might benefit from the comparison of assignments in terms of marks, as well as the discussion of techniques used to craft the assignment.
- ⚙️ **Action learning** – This refers to a type of learning that is grounded in a group environment which values the contribution of each group member in equal measure. Allow each group member 5 uninterrupted minutes to discuss their current study problem/focus. The rest of the group then discusses potential solutions. This should be repeated for each group member (McGill & Beaty, 2001).
- ⚙️ **Allow time for socialisation** – It is likely that you will become friends with the people in your study group, but it is important to use the allocated time for study purposes. It might be difficult to stay on track because of this, so you could arrange going for coffee before or after the session to catch up. This should alleviate the need to 'socialise' during the group study session.

Online Study Groups

With the vast technology available, study groups are no longer confined to the demands of physical space; they can be conducted in cyber space too! This is particularly good if you are on a work-based learning course, or you don't come onto campus, as it allows you to engage no matter what. Here are some tips and useful tools for online study groups:

- ⚙️ **IDroo** – a free online collaborative whiteboard that allows you to draw, upload images and PDFs
- ⚙️ **Doodle Poll** – note your availability and find a time when you are all available to be online to study
- ⚙️ **Skype** – Use Skype and its many features, such as screen sharing, to hold group discussions
- ⚙️ **Study Blue** – Share flash cards, create custom quizzes to test each other's knowledge or access an online bank of study guides
- ⚙️ **Padlet** - Padlet is a free, collaboration tool that is great for brainstorming and/or expressing thoughts/resources on a common topic via a virtual bulletin board.

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