

Forming a study group



Uni can be quite intimidating, and the amount of study you have to do can be quite overwhelming. Many students rely on study practices that have served them well in the past – doing it all by themselves, sitting alone at a desk doing all the reading/problem solving, and if they get stuck, hoping that somehow the answer will come to them.

The trouble is, this can make for a very isolated existence, especially given the amount of work you have to do. It makes sense to vary your study methods and come up with new ways of working with people.

Why form a study group?

- Less isolation, more engagement with the discipline/course.
- More effective study.
- More chance of identifying exactly where your problem with the material lies.
- Greater motivation to study.
- An additional, and different study method.
- Different ways of seeing the same issue and/or different approaches to solving a problem.
- More confidence in discussing your academic work so you can maximise your tutorial participation.
- Sharing 'street knowledge' – ways of doing things, approaches to problems, what resources exist to assist you, who is approachable, what is coming up...

How might you go about organising a study group?

1. Identify 2-3 people who are as motivated and serious as you, but who also have a sense of humour.
2. Set regular meeting times. Concentrate on the agenda for 45 minutes, with five minutes at the beginning to warm up, and five minutes at the end to debrief.
3. Set some ground rules for meeting. How you would like members to be: prepared? punctual? co-operative? focused?
4. Make sure there is an agenda – easily set by email/SMS. If there is no agenda, there is no focus, and ultimately you will end up just chatting.
5. At the end, think ahead to what is coming up, and what the next agenda might be.

What might your study group agenda be?

Economics

It could be that you agree to schedule a regular meeting midway between tutorials. You would tackle the questions yourself before the meeting and work out which questions you can and cannot do. At the meeting you would identify your particular areas of difficulty, and articulate what steps you would take to solve the problem.

Literature

It may be that there is a set reading, a piece of poetry, or a chapter that you have to read prior to the tutorial. By

meeting and discussing aspects of the literature – for example, theme, tone, characterisation, plot, use of metaphor
rhythm – you can test your own understanding and develop a deeper appreciation of the work.

Law

It may be that there are problem scenarios to be discussed in the tutorial. A study group agenda could be to identify what legal issues apply – in order of priority – what law and why. Using the issue, rule, application and conclusion (IRAC) method, you might outline your approach to dealing with the matter, and compare that with the approach of other group members.

Languages

Languages are alive and need to be spoken and heard. Meeting regularly you can each go over spoken aspects of the language, while other group member's benefit from listening. You can use quizzes, or practise short talks. All this helps you to speak more naturally and automatically – very important in oral and aural assessment.