

## **The Benefits of Group Study**

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Group study is typically resisted by students until they are exposed to, understand, and experience its benefits. Group study involves sharing of: ideas, personal and collective time management, and task preparation; cooperation amongst group members; collective responsibility both for the group task and for each other's welfare; and a willingness to be an active group participant. These attributes are needed for truly successful group participation.

Group study has benefits that fall into the cognitive [what we think and know] and affective [how we feel and express our feelings] domains. Such study enhances student social skills, helps bolster student confidence, and helps students practice assertiveness. Group study skills are transferable to other tasks. Learning quality group study skills prepares students to enter expanding work arenas where teamwork is demanded.

Group study requires students to articulate what they know to fellow group members. It also requires students to listen to fellow members' ideas. These group activities sharpen members' communication skills as well as enhancing their cognitive skills. Well prepared group members likely will have read, observed, or thought about assignments in variant ways. Such diversity awareness, tolerance, and acceptance is another group study benefit. Being aware of, understanding, and applying diverse learning styles and learning outcomes implicitly prepares students for later vocational and community realities.

Group study validates what students really know if they are required to articulate in the presence of others what they have learned. When they are able to clearly articulate what they know, are able to answer probing questions about their knowledge, and are able to withstand challenges to what they know, their knowledge is reinforced and verified. Such validation lessens stress related to examinations by lessening self doubt about what they know.

High quality group study involves rotating study assignments within the group. Members should be assigned, at varying times, the following task dimension duties: goal setting and adjusting, data gathering and organizing duties, summarizing group tasks, procedural and outcome assessment and probing responsibilities, and the agenda setting job. The following group maintenance duties also need to be rotated so as to broaden each member's group skill repertoire: giving each member a fairly equitable opportunity to participate, focusing/refocusing on tasks, recognizing and breaking group tension, mediating member disagreements, celebrating success on tasks/subtasks, and caring for individual needs.

Students who want to form successful groups need to find classmates who possess the following traits/characteristics: (1) their major reason to join a study group is to learn; (2) they are responsible and will attend group meetings regularly, on time, prepared, and in the mood for work; (3) they are willing to and able to actively participate in group work [groups cannot

afford to carry non-participating members; this burden causes eventual resentfulness and slower progress]; and (4) they can be tolerant of others' ideas, learning styles, and conclusions drawn from group study. Successful groups normally do not exceed five members; exceptions can occur. Too large a group invites unfair and debilitating labor divisions, allows some members to shirk full responsibility, promotes subgrouping [cliques], and makes group management too high a priority for this type of group activity.

Unsuccessful study groups occur due to: (1) incompatible member goals; (2) group study sessions deteriorate into social "bull sessions;" (3) clear group goals remain unstated, vaguely or ambiguously stated, or change frequently; (4) members do not come to sessions fully prepared; (5) some members participate unequally; and (6) all members do not fully respect each other.

Group work is rewarding when it functions well. Not all tasks are appropriate for groups to accept. Some tasks are simple and short enough for individuals to do. Groups work best when idea diversity is needed/wanted, when division of labor is called for, and when feedback from fellow members is desired and useful. I recommend students seek out classmates and form a serious [but fun] study group. Your learning will improve with a quality study group; you will learn more this way, will learn more quickly, and will retain more of what you learn.