Keys to Forming an Effective Study Group

From the Academic Advising Office, Grinnell College

Research shows that study groups can be a very effective way to learn. If you want to form a study group for a class, doing it purposefully and carefully will go a long way to a group that thrives and individuals who find it useful.

1. **Start early and find members**
   It’s best to establish a group at the beginning of class before people go their own ways. A ‘group’ can even just be a pair of people, but limit study groups to no more than 5-6 people.

2. **Determine the group’s purpose**
   What does the group need to accomplish? Is this a group to work on homework problems together (make sure this is allowed by your instructor), or to review previously taught material in preparation for a test or quiz, or some other purpose?

3. **Set ground rules**
   - Decide how often the group needs to meet and set dates ahead of time; yes, this is a small campus, but people will quickly become busy!
   - Create a list of ground rules for how you will interact with each other in the group and then hold each other accountable

4. **Assign a leader/facilitator (and other roles)**
   - Every group needs a leader to provide direction and make sure the group meetings accomplish the desired task. The leader may also assign roles to other members depending on need, such as recorder, secretary, reflector/evaluator
   - Encourage members to shift roles over time, perhaps every session.

5. **Be active**
   - The sky is the limit with what you can do with you time. However you choose to run the group, make it active and interactive.
   - Some ideas:
     - Have each person write sample quiz or test questions; share with the group

6. **Combine content and process (what to learn with how to learn)**
   - Developing study skills is an essential part of the learning experience. Talk about how you learn, both as a group and when you’re working on your own.
   - Share study techniques with each other to discover what works and find new ways to study effectively.

7. **Allow time for reflection**
   - Students need time to think about the session and their own contributions
   - End each session with a closing activity, such as a short reflection on these questions: What went well? What didn’t go well? What is one thing you learned from the session? What do you need to do to prepare for next time?
   - Periodically reflect on the group learning experience as a whole. Have a discussion about how things are going and what could be done different or better.
   - Find a way to measure and celebrate success!

Ideas drawn from Darcie A. Sprouse, M.S., Academic Support Coordinator, Simpson College, Powerpoint presentation, October 6, 2010.