

Be AGILE Strategy: Study in Groups

What does it mean to study in a group?

It would be more accurate to say “learn in a group”, since the term “study” often is perceived to be a solo activity. Some students think that “study groups” are about working on a one-time project together, while others believe it means gathering in the same room to “study” at the same time with each person working on their own. However, as an active learning strategy, studying in a group means meeting regularly with others from the class to teach each other concepts, ask challenging questions, predict exam questions, and debrief an exam.

What are the benefits?

Studying in groups is one of the best active learning strategies! The benefits include:

- Scheduled “time-on-task” for each class to supplement individual efforts
- Positive accountability, as group members expect each other to be present and prepared
- Experience of teaching concepts to others, building confidence as well as awareness of what areas need more review and practice
- Sharing and discussing different ideas and perceptions, which deepens critical thinking and understanding

How do I use this approach?

Here are the steps for incorporating group study into your learning efforts:

- Start as early in the semester as possible. Group study is most productive when it is ongoing, not just the week of an exam.
- Invite a manageable amount of people to participate, typically between 3-7 students.
- Establish a meeting time that will work for everyone in the group, at least for most weeks.
- Aim for a manageable amount of time for each meeting; typically learners begin to get fatigued by the two-hour mark, a tipping point for being productive.
- Choose your location. There are several locations on all three USM campuses for groups of students to work together. WHERE.
- Set a goal for each study session. A goal means determining SPECIFIC content to be reviewed or concepts to be discussed.
- Agree to the expectation that EVERY MEMBER will be fully prepared and committed for the study session. This involves each group member completing the assigned reading, taking and reviewing notes on the reading and during class, and coming to the session ready to explain concepts to other group members.
- Be interactive throughout the study group meeting. Make sure that each group member participates for an equal amount of time. Take turns teaching each other pre-assigned amounts of the chapter/concepts.

**REMEMBER: IF YOU CAN TEACH THE INFORMATION EFFECTIVELY AND ACCURATELY,
THEN YOU KNOW IT!**

Are there any related technologies?

To keep track of the plan for each study session and to share information together throughout the semester, Google Docs is a great option, as every USM student has a Google account. Another aspect of group study that can be assisted by technology is the challenge of distance. Consider meeting via Zoom. Much like Skype or Google Hangout, the Zoom platform provides a way to connect live with audio, video, screen sharing, and document sharing, all with the ability of having several people working together at once. Every USM student has free access to Zoom through the MyUSM portal. The entire study session can also be recorded for later review, or to share with a study group member who could not attend that meeting.



Where can I get more information?

The approach of studying in groups is similar to working with a tutor, as all tutors at USM's Learning Commons are trained to engage students in the process of self-testing and explaining concepts. Consider scheduling a tutoring appointment, or inviting a tutor to join one of your first group study sessions. If it would be helpful to have someone show you how to use Google Docs or Zoom, you can schedule a time with a Technology Assistant via the Learning Commons website. There are also "how to" video modules in UMS Academy, which is a "Quick Link" in your MyUSM portal.



What does it mean to be AGILE?

We want to help you, as a USM student, avoid common learning challenges, and instead increase your memory, understanding, and academic performance. These strategies will involve self-testing, active practice, making connections between ideas, all of which will maximize your academic time both inside and outside of the classroom.

The mantra we want you to remember is: "Be an AGILE learner" (Academic Gains through Improved Learning Effectiveness).

At first, some of these approaches may seem like "more work", but that's normal! Any time we try a new behavior with any area of our life, it takes more thought and effort. By practicing these strategies, you will see improvements very quickly, and soon these habits will become your "new normal".

For more detailed information on this active learning strategy, visit: usm.maine.edu/AGILE.