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Becoming A Successful Student

Creating A Study Group In College

A study group can be helpful when you are trying to learn information and concepts and preparing for class discussions and tests. Read to learn about the benefits of a study group. Then read on to learn about how to start a study group and the characteristics of a successful study group. Finally, be sure to read about the possible pitfalls of a study group.

Benefits of a Study Group

A study group can be beneficial in many ways. Here are the most important benefits:

- A support group can “pick you up” when you find that your motivation to study is slipping. The other group members can be a source of encouragement.
- You may be reluctant to ask a question in class. You will find it easier to do so in a small study group.
- You may become more committed to study because the group members are depending on your presentation and participation. You will not want to let them down.
- Group members will listen and discuss information and concepts during the study sessions. These activities add a strong auditory dimension to your learning experience.
- One or more group members are likely to understand something you

do not. They may bring up ideas you never considered.

- You can learn valuable new study habits from the other group members.
- You can compare your class notes with those of the other group members to clarify your notes and fill in any gaps.
- Teaching/explaining information and concepts to the other group members will help you reinforce your mastery of the information and concepts.
- Let’s face it – studying can sometimes be boring. Interacting with the other group members can make studying enjoyable.

Getting a Study Group Started

Study groups don’t just happen. Here is what you should do to get a study group started:

Get to know your classmates by talking with them before class, during breaks, and after class. When selecting a classmate to join your study group, you should be able to answer YES for each of the following questions:

- Is this classmate motivated to do well?
- Does this classmate understand the subject matter?
- Is this classmate dependable?

- Would this classmate be tolerant of the ideas of others?
- Would you like to work with this classmate?

Invite enough of these classmates to work with you in a study group until you have formed a group of three to five. A larger group may allow some members to avoid responsibility, may lead to cliques, and may make group management more of an issue than learning.

- Decide how often and for how long you will meet. Meeting two or three times a week is probably best. If you plan a long study session, make sure you include time for breaks. A study session of about 60 to 90 minutes is usually best.
- Decide where you will meet. Select a meeting place that is available and is free from distractions. An empty classroom or a group study room in the library are possibilities.
- Decide on the goals of the study group. Goals can include comparing and updating notes, discussing readings, and preparing for exams.
- Decide who the leader will be for the first study session.

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Managing Stress: Guide for College Students

Stress is a part of life, but the healthier you are, the better able you are to manage stress when it happens. Chronic stress can impact your immune system, which lowers your resistance to getting sick. Approaching stress management from a wellness lifestyle approach can give you “money in the bank” when it comes to preventing stress, and can give you the energy you need to handle stress when it happens. The following com-

ponents are part of a wellness lifestyle approach.

Attitude: “Attitude is everything.” What does that mean? The way you think about things can make all the difference in how you react to events. Explore how you can change the way you think in order to reduce stress.

Healthy Eating: Good nutrition and healthy eating habits can help

you through your stressful times now, not just prevent a heart attack 30 years down the road. Eating well will increase your physical, mental, and emotional stamina. Fueling yourself with nutrient dense foods can boost your immune system, help you maintain a healthy weight and help you feel better about yourself.

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Developing Math Study Skills

1. Read what the instructor will be lecturing on before you go to class. Read slowly. Reading mathematics is not like reading a novel or even history. Speed reading techniques are not appropriate. Every word and symbol is important to the meaning. Do not skip the symbolic part of the text. This is often the most important part. If you do not understand a symbol, look in the glossary or in the earlier part of the text. Symbols are often explained when they are first introduced. If you still can not find out what a symbol means, ASK! Read with a pencil in hand. Every time the author does a problem, do it on your own—either before or after you read his or her explanation. If there is something you do not understand, try to formulate a question about it. Often if you can ask a specific question, you can answer it yourself. If you can't answer it, you know what part of the instructor's lecture requires your complete attention. Your question is ready if the lecture does not clear up your misunderstanding.

2. Understand the concepts. Don't be satisfied with vague ideas about how to work problems. Do the examples yourself, understand the concept illustrated, then try making up your own examples. Keep in mind that the questions on the exam may be very different from the example in the book.

3. Practice. Be sure you understand the concepts before you practice. Then practice will help you remember and give you confidence in your mastery. Force yourself to remember the methods as you work problems; don't look back in the book.

4. Keep up with assignments (graded or not). The pace is much faster in college and keeping up to date with assignments helps you to better understand what is going on in class. Mathematics is not a spectator sport. The only way you can learn mathematics is by doing it.

a. Understand the purpose of homework. Homework in mathematics classes is assigned to help you understand certain concepts and to help you build certain skills. Homework is not assigned to you because it is important to get the right answers. Your instructor already knows the answers.

b. Try to understand the process, not the specific problem. Classify problems in the assignment by problem type. Do each assigned problem and then check it in the back of the book. Try to figure out why you missed the ones you did instead of

just working toward the answer. A similar problem may be on a test or quiz.

c. Mark homework problems you still do not understand and get help with them before the next class. The next lecture may build on a concept or skill you did not understand in the homework. When you do get help, make notes on what you learned, so that you can study them for the test.

d. Before closing the book, look back over the assignment and try to explain to yourself what the assignment was about, what each kind of problem was asking, how you got the answers and what the answers tell you. This process will help you understand the material and will help you discover what you don't understand.

e. Keep your homework in a convenient and neat notebook so that you will be able to find questions or difficulties you have quickly and easily. This will also provide an invaluable study guide for tests.

f. Ask questions. Do not hesitate to ask questions. Ask your instructor for help after you have tried to pull class notes and textbook explanations together for review and still don't understand. Write down specific problems so you have them ready; don't be vague and say you just don't understand.

g. Don't hesitate. Get help right away. Tutoring and help sessions are available. The longer you wait before getting help, the harder it will be to get caught up. Most of the time when you feel lost, it is just one concept that you are missing, so get help quickly. One missed concept in a math class will make the rest of your math career a hardship.

Preparing for and Taking Math Tests

1. Keep a list of things to remember - problems stressed by the instructor, definitions, terms, diagrams and graphs, formulas.

2. Keep up with the work - some courses can be passed by cramming, but math isn't one of them. Practice.

3. Study copies of old exams, chapter tests from the book, or make up your own. Then practice them with the same limits as the real exam.

4. Get a good night's sleep before the test so that you are rested and alert; a quick review before the test should be a summary only.

5. Arrive at the test early so that you can be relaxed when the exam begins.

6. Quickly look over the test and budget your time - don't spend too much time on any single problem or section of the test.

7. Do some work on each problem - try to work at least part of each problem because partial credit is better than none.

8. Check your answers and look for careless mistakes during the last few minutes of your test time (budget this important time).

Suggestions for Word Problems

Solving problems is a practical art, like swimming or playing the piano; you can only learn it by imitation and practice. The major goal in solving word problems is to translate the written words into a mathematical equation that we know how to solve.

1. Read the problem for a general sense of what it is about; sometimes putting it into your own words will help.

2. Then reread it to pick out specific information:

a. What you are asked to find? Usually you choose a variable to represent one unknown and other unknowns will be represented in terms of the first.

b. What information is given? Make a list, then organize it into a diagram, picture, or chart.

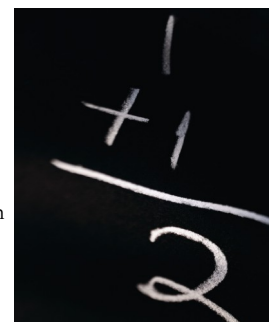
c. What are the relationships among the information given and the information to be found? Sometimes it helps to think of similar problems from arithmetic and the formulas needed there.

3. Translate the information into an equation - get into the habit of doing this for easy problems. The longer problems will not seem as difficult.

4. Solve the equation you have written and label your answer - then find any other quantities to be found.

5. Return to the original problem and check your answer (s). Do they make sense in the original problem and answer the question posed in the problem?

Adapted from:
On Your Own in College by William C. Resnick and David H. Heller.



Stress Management Continued from page 1...

Physical Activity: Physical activity provides immediate stress relief as well as long-term stress management. Just 20-30 minutes of walking a day, for example, can give you more energy, help you put things in perspective, improve your sleep, sharpen your mental productivity, and boost your self-confidence. Our bodies are made to move and everyone can find some type of activity that is enjoyable.

Relaxing Your Mind and Body: There are a number of relaxation techniques (i.e. breathing, muscle relaxation, visualization) that can help you manage stress and also improve your concentration, productivity and overall well-being.

Sleep: Consistent sleep is critical for a healthy life. Although we all need varying amounts of sleep, if we do not get enough sleep, everything from our immune system to our ability to learn and remember information will be negatively affected. Sleep is as important as nutrition and exercise when preparing for peak performance.

Healthy Relationships: Changes in relationships can be a source of stress for many students, as can feeling socially isolated. At the same time, talking with a supportive friend or family member can be helpful in coping with stress.

Time Management: Sometimes all the things we have to do can seem overwhelming and impossible to accomplish. Learning how to be a good time manager is a skill that you can use throughout your life, which can make work, play and studying more manageable, more productive and less stressful.

Alcohol and Other Drugs: Alcohol and other drug use can lead to many problems that can add stress to our lives. High-risk use can lead to poor decision-making, impaired abstract thinking, injury and legal problems. By understanding your overall risks, you can make healthier choices.

Tobacco: Tobacco can impact your sleep, ability to fight infection and overall health. These issues can create stressful situations. Tobacco use by some, however, is seen as a stress reducer. In order to achieve a healthy lifestyle, it is important to learn strategies to deal with stressors and to understand that quitting tobacco use takes time and practice.

Money Management: When you consider that the average credit card debt of an undergrad is \$2,748, it's no wonder why finances are a common stressor for college students.

Spirituality: Spirituality means finding personal meaning in your life; it doesn't mean just following a particular religious dogma.

Visit the Counseling Center located on the Augusta Campus, Building 1300 or call 706-771-4068/4067 to meet with a counselor to discuss how you can better control the stress of college.

University Health Center, UGA

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Also decide whether it will be the same person each session or whether there will be a rotating leader. The leader of a study session should be responsible for meeting the goals of that study session.

- Clearly decide the agenda for the first study session and the responsibilities of each group member for that session.
- Develop a list of all group members that includes their names, telephone numbers, and email addresses. Make sure each group member has this list and update the list as needed.

Characteristics of a Successful Study Group

Once started, a study group should possess the following characteristics to be successful:

- Each group member contributes to discussions.
- Group members actively listen to each other without interrupting. Only one group member speaks at a time.
- The other group members work collaboratively to resolve any concern raised by a group member.
- Group members are prompt and come prepared to work.

- The group stays on task with respect to its agenda.
- Group members show respect for each other.
- Group members feel free to criticize each other but keep their criticisms constructive. This can encourage group members to reveal their weaknesses so that they can strengthen them.
- Group members feel free to ask questions of each other.
- At the end of each study session, an agenda including specific group member responsibilities is prepared for the next session.
- Above all, the positive attitude that "we can do this together" is maintained.

Possible Pitfalls of a Study Group

A study group can be a very positive learning experience. However, there are pitfalls to be avoided. Here are some cautions:

- Do not let the study group get distracted from its agenda and goals.
- Do not let the study group become a social group. You can always socialize at other times.
- Do not allow group members to attend un-

prepared. To stay in the group, members should be required to do their fair share.

- Do not let the session become a negative forum for complaining about teachers and courses.
- Do not allow one or two group members to dominate the group. It is important that all members have an equal opportunity to participate.

The information you just read will help you decide when a study group is appropriate for you and will help ensure its success.



How-to-study.com

What Is Test Anxiety?

Too much anxiety about a test is commonly referred to as test anxiety. It is perfectly natural to feel some anxiety when preparing for and taking a test. In fact, a little anxiety can jump start your studying and keep you motivated. However, too much anxiety can interfere with your studying. You may have difficulty learning and remembering what you need to know for the test. Further, too much anxiety may block your performance during the test. You may have difficulty demonstrating what you know during the test.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE TEST ANXIETY?

You probably have test anxiety if you answer **YES** to four or more of the following:

1. I have a hard time getting started studying for a test.
2. When studying for a test, I find many things that distract me.
3. I expect to do poorly on a test no matter how much or how hard I study.
4. When taking a test, I experience physical discomfort such as sweaty palms, an upset stomach, a headache, difficulty breathing, and tension in my muscles.
5. When taking a test, I find it difficult to understand the directions and questions.
6. When taking a test, I have difficulty organizing my thoughts.
7. When taking a test, I often "draw a blank."
8. When taking a test, I find my mind wandering to other things.
9. I usually score lower on a test than I do on assignments and papers.
10. After a test, I remember information I couldn't recall during the test.

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT TEST ANXIETY?

Here are some things you can do *before*, *during*, and *after* a test to reduce your test anxiety.

1. Maintain a positive attitude as you study. Think about doing well, not failing. Think of the test as an opportunity to show how much you have learned.
2. Go into the test well rested and well fed. Get enough sleep the night before the test. Eat a light and nutritious meal before the test. Stay away from junk foods.
3. Stay relaxed during the test. Taking slow, deep breaths can help. Focus on positive self-statements such as "I can do this." Don't panic even if you find the test difficult.
4. Don't worry about other students finishing the test before you do. Take the time that you need to do your best.
5. Once you finish the test and hand it in, forget about it temporarily. There is nothing more you can do until the graded test is returned to you. Turn your attention and effort to new assignments and tests.
6. When the graded test is returned to you, analyze it to see how you could have done better. Learn from your mistakes and from what you did well. Apply this knowledge when you take the next test.

You have to know the material to do well on a test. You have to control test anxiety to show what you know.

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Visit the Counseling Center
Building 1300
706-771-4068 or 4067
www.augustatech.edu

Students As Critical Thinkers

Critical thinking has many components. Life can be described as a sequence of problems that each individual must solve for one's self. Critical thinking skills are nothing more than problem solving skills that result in reliable knowledge. Humans constantly process information. Critical thinking is the practice of processing this information in the most skillful, accurate, and rigorous manner possible, in such a way that it leads to the most reliable, logical, and trustworthy conclusions, upon which one can make responsible decisions about one's life, behavior, and actions with full knowledge of assumptions and consequences of those decisions.

Here are some of the characteristics of such a thinker:

- uses evidence skillfully and impartially
- organizes thoughts and articulates them concisely and coherently
- distinguishes between logically valid and invalid inferences
- suspends judgment in the absence of sufficient evidence to support a decision
- understands the difference between reasoning and rationalizing
- attempts to anticipate the probable consequences of alternative actions
- understands the idea of degrees of belief
- sees similarities and analogies that are not superficially apparent
- can learn independently and has an abiding interest in doing so
- applies problem-solving techniques in domains other than those in which learned
- can structure informally represented problems in such a way that formal techniques, such as mathematics, can be used to solve them
- habitually questions one's own views and attempts to understand both the assumptions that are critical to those views and the implications of the views
- is sensitive to the difference between the validity of a belief and the intensity with which it is held.
- is aware of the fact that one's understanding is always limited, often much more so than would be apparent to one with a non-inquiring attitude
- recognizes the fallibility of one's own opinions, the probability of bias in those opinions, and the danger of weighting evidence according to personal preferences

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