

# Setting up a study group

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To continue engaging in your study and learning, you may find it helpful to set up a study group with some of your peers. A study group is a proven way to help you and your peers learn together, and to keep yourselves on track when studying remotely.

- [What is a study group?](#)
- [Guidelines for organising a successful study group](#)
- [Suggested study group activities:](#)
- [Tools for 'Meeting' remotely](#)

## What is a study group?

A study group is a small group of learners who regularly meet to discuss their learning.

These groups are useful for addressing specific learning questions and goals, and drawing on the different strengths and abilities of group members to explore learning together. A great opportunity for developing and learning new study skills and tips, you will learn a lot by peer teaching, discussion and collaboration. Study groups can be a safe space for group members to ask questions that you might not feel comfortable sharing in a larger group.

## Guidelines for organising a successful study group

- **Size:** form a group of 4-8 people.
- **Set ground rules:** agree on some ground rules and guidelines. This will develop a shared understanding of members' needs and expectations, and how you can support each other to achieve these.
- **Goals:** agree on collective study goals for your study group. Decide what you all want to get out of it.
- **Allocate Roles:** allocate roles to members to ensure study group sessions happen regularly, and make best use of time. Essential roles might include scheduler, time-keeper, note-keeper, and a facilitator to keep everyone focused and on-track during a study group session.

- **Time:** use your study-group time wisely so you can realise your group goals. Short regular study group sessions are much more effective than long irregular sessions. Try to keep your study group sessions focused and not longer than 60-90 minutes.
- **Schedule:** agree on a regular meeting time that best suits you all, and schedule those regular appointment times in advance. You should ideally aim for 1-2 meetings per week.
- **Be prepared:** prior to each study group meeting be clear on what preparation study group members are required to have done prior. E.g. read a weekly reading, locate a resource to share, formulate questions before meeting, prepare a page of notes each on a theme etc.
- **Minimise distractions:** if people are working from home with children and animals it may be difficult to eliminate distractions entirely. However, where possible try to find a quiet time or place for group sessions, and minimise unnecessary distractions during meeting times (e.g. checking phones, emails or social media, tv, etc).
- **Review:** spend the last 10 minutes of a study group session to recap what you have covered together that day, and identify any remaining questions you may need to work through further, or seek advice on. Set your plan, goals and agenda for the next session.

## Suggested study group activities:

If your lecturer or tutor has suggested study groups, they may be able to supply you with a plan or guide. However, study groups also work well when your group members agree to meet their own learning goals. Here are some ideas for running your study group.

**Divide and Conquer!** Divide readings between group members and task each group member with doing a close-reading of their reading. Then each group member can present the reading back to the group orally, or in mind-map, notes, or illustrated form. For greater depth consider a couple of critical questions relating to the reading for discussion with the group.

**Question yourselves.** Formulate questions for each other based on study materials or relevant literature, or use questions from old course exams ([available online from the library](#)) or textbooks as a basis for group discussions.

**Shared reading.** Work through a reading together - making notes on each paragraph and discussing these as you go. A useful approach is to read through individually to get an understanding of the article, and then read through together to clarify your understanding, ask questions about the reading, and to form connections between the reading and other ideas you have explored in your course.

**Be responsive.** Undertake a needs check in the group to determine if there are any particular areas group members would like more help with in that session.

**Compare notes.** Compare notes from a lecture event or reading. This is a great way to check understanding and pose questions, and you may find others have captured ideas you missed or developed questions you may not have considered.

**Mnemonics.** Develop or share mnemonics together to help remember key ideas. Acronyms, poems, pictures, songs are all great memory tricks to help you remember and recall material and ideas you have covered.

**Go deep.** Try to spend time to identify and understand more difficult concepts, and not just memorise content.

**Practice a skill.** Decide on an academic skill you would like to improve together and use your course content or research material to practice that skill e.g. summarising and paraphrasing, contributing to annotated bibliographies, giving oral presentations, exchanging peer feedback on academic writing.

**Peer teach.** There is no better way of checking your understanding of a concept or idea than teaching or explaining it to someone else. Take turns teaching an aspect of research or study.

## Tools for 'Meeting' remotely

There are many tools you may choose from to organise your study groups. These tools could include social media and communication apps (e.g. WhatsApp, Messenger, Skype, Google Hangouts) as well as collaborative documents and organisational tools. Use the technologies that work best for your group and are available to all your group members. The University of Auckland provides access to some useful group collaboration tools – including Zoom and Google Apps.

## **Zoom**

Zoom is a collaboration tool that allows groups to work together at the same time. It allows for video or audio meetings, and participants can also join by telephone call if they do not have wifi or data available. Zoom sessions can be recorded and participants can share screens and documents, make annotations, and use text chat.

## **Google Apps**

Every University of Auckland student has access to a google email account (@aucklanduni.ac.nz). This account also gives you access to a range of Google tools including Google Drive file storage, Google Documents, Slides and Sites, Hangouts and Blogger.

For more information on accessing and using the above listed tools for Study Groups, see the following quick-start guides and help resources:

## **Zoom**

[Getting started with Zoom](#)

## **Google Apps**

[Google Drive and Collaboration Tools](#)

[Google Apps - Help links](#)

## **More at the University of Auckland**

[Tools for Group Collaboration](#)