

# Tips & Tools for Online Study Groups



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## **Keep it small**

Try to keep the group to a small manageable number where everyone can contribute equally and schedules are easier to coordinate. Around 3-5 people is recommended for a productive, effective group.

## **Keep it short**

If a course has extensive material or a looming deadline, it may seem like a good idea to do marathon sessions. However, regular, weekly study sessions (no longer than 45 to 60 minutes) are more effective and prevent disruptive latecomers, early departers, and no-shows. Make a commitment to come prepared and the group will be much more successful.

## **Keep it focused**

Online study groups benefit from having a moderator (members can take turns) to manage sessions and keep everyone's attention focused on the subject at hand. This person can set a group agenda for the session and steer the group away from tangents. Set session goals.

## **Keep it quiet**

Log in from somewhere that's relatively quiet and conducive to learning, such as a bedroom or home office as background noise like you will find in a café can distract group members. Also resist the urge to check e-mail or engage in similar distracting activities.

## **Keep to a plan**

Decide as a group what you would like to cover in a session (via an e-mail facilitated by the moderator ahead of time or at the end of your meetings). It's easy to focus on just completing practice questions or remediation questions, but also take time to identify and understand key concepts that are more difficult.

- Pick a certain unit to review (e.g., pharmacology), divide among members past lectures that apply to that unit and have each member provide a page of bulleted notes/questions on the most challenging material that can be shared online. Members can work together to answer these questions for the first half of the session.

Adapted from:

Duke Academic Resource Center. (n.d.). How to form a successful study group: tips and strategies. Retrieved from: <http://duke.edu/arc/documents/How%20to%20Form%20a%20Successful%20Study%20Group.pdf>

Littlefield, J. (n.d.). 5 Internet savvy study tips for online learners. Retrieved from: <http://distancelearn.about.com/od/studyskills/a/StudyOnline.htm>

Moran, J. (2011). Channeling Jeff Winger: Create your own "community" online study group. Retrieved from: <http://www.schools.com/articles/create-your-own-community-online-study-group.html>

## **Online Conferencing**

### **[Microsoft SharedView](#)**

This free downloadable program (albeit for Windows PCs only) lets up to 15 people connect together to view each other's PC screens, share access to software, and with permission, take control of each other's computers. SharedView also allows up to 25 files to be distributed to the group and permits collaborative editing of Microsoft Word documents.

### **[Mikogo](#)**

With Mikogo's software (available for Windows or Mac; only the person who sets up a meeting needs to download it) up to ten people can meet to share files, a whiteboard, or access to each other's computer screens. Of note, Mikogo also has the ability to record sessions, giving those who couldn't attend a meeting the option to play it back later.

### **[Skype](#)**

Skype, which is available for Windows, Mac, and Linux, as well as for iPhone/iPod and Android smartphones, lets you communicate via text or voice and send files of any size to an entire group at once (especially handy for files that are too large for e-mail). Skype also lets three or more people participate in a group video call, as long as one member of the group has a \$9/month Skype Premium subscription, or buys a \$5 day pass.

### **[Vyew](#)**

Vyew works through a Web browser--so no software to install--and gives up to 10 people (any more requires a paid subscription) access to a virtual meeting room where they do things like share PC screens, upload files, draw on a whiteboard, and communicate via audio and videoconferencing. The room remains online at all times, so it's available any time a member of the group wants to use it.

## **Information sharing and document collaboration**

In addition to the online meeting services listed above, the following tools allow your group to collect, organize, and centrally store information, such as class notes and other research material.

### **[Online Flashcards](#)**

Create online flash cards with an online flash card maker. These websites allow students to create, share, study, and print cards from their computers. Check out Flash Card Exchange, Flash Card Maker, or The Amazing Flash Card Machine.

### **[CiteULike](#)**

CiteULike, which you can sign into via your Facebook account, offers a place to store, organize, and share (with your own group or an existing one) links to academic papers you come across when doing online research.

### **[Diigo](#)**

With Diigo you can set up a group knowledge repository, fill it with pages gathered from around the Web, then highlight and/or annotate information via on screen "sticky notes" placed right atop the relevant area. A group's administrator has the option to enforce use of organizing tags from a defined list to ensure consistency among members.

### **[Springnote](#)**

Via a word processor-like interface, Springnote allows you to create a group notebook, organize it by dragging-and-dropping pages, and give others the ability to view and/or edit the notebook's contents. The service imposes no limit on the number of pages in a notebook and offers a spacious 2 GB of file and image storage.

### **[Wikidot](#)**

Free for educational use only, Wikidot lets students build a class wiki with pages that can include various forms of information, including items such as notes, documents, images, mathematical equations, and links to audio and video.

### **Writeboard**

With Writeboard, multiple students can work together on a text document (such as a research paper). The site keeps close track of all additions or changes so you can see who edited what--and when--and easily go back to any prior version.

### **Google Drive/Hangout/Chat**

One can share google drive documents and instant message one another as you are working on a shared google text or Excel document. There are group texting and group video/voice chatting features.