



# SELF HELP GUIDE TO STUDY GROUPS

## FAQs

### What is a peer study group?

Peer study groups are a way of learning in a group with other students. By studying together you are more likely to perform better in your subject area, establish routines and network with other people at VUW.

Research has shown time management, motivation, and avoiding isolation are key factors in student success especially in first year.

Peer study groups can help you:

- establish these important skills
- develop critical thinking
- explore deeper understanding of subject area
- learn valuable group or team skills

### What will I be required to do?

In a word – COMMITMENT, both physically and mentally.

Physically you need to meet with your group as often as agreed. It is your responsibility to the rest of the group.

Mentally you need to be committed to the ground rules and schedule that you all agree to.

### What will I get out of being in a group?

Basically, you get what you (and your fellow group members) put in and more! You can expect at least some of the following:

- develop study skills
- meet people
- learn group facilitation skills

- improve communication skills
- reinforce and clarify course content
- get more out of studying at VUW
- learn new ways of learning
- study for exams
- improve interpersonal and 'team-work' skills
- maximise personal potential

Not only are these valuable skills in terms of academic study, most are lifelong skills valued by employers.

### Who runs the study group?

There is no tutor as such. All members of the group take responsibility for the running of the group. In the 1996 pilot study at VUW, 90% of the students taking part found the equality approach very successful.

### What can you do in a study group?

Study groups can be used for just about anything. Here are some examples:

- Going over lectures/readings/tutorials
- Preparing for tests and exams
- Repeating, recalling key points in subject material
- Sharing the reading load
- Meeting new people at VUW
- Checking you are on the right track
- Learning group facilitation and problem solving skills
- Learning different ways to study
- Questioning, exploring, finding answers
- Sympathetic setting for feedback on ideas and issues or aspects of the course you are studying
- Finding and realising your own talents



#### Related resources:

Suggested Study Routine  
Week Planner

#### Student Learning | Te Taiako

[wgtn.ac.nz/student-learning](http://wgtn.ac.nz/student-learning)  
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- Teaching someone else part of your topic! It will help them and reinforce your own understanding.

**NB** The motives of those entering study groups need to be transparent. Study groups will not work where individual group members expect to “freeload” from others time and effort.

## Getting Started

The following is ONE way of running study groups.

### Getting the people

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About 4 people is ideal to start a group. These people can be friends already, although we have found that people prefer to be in groups with people they do not know well – it can be less distracting and a way to meet more people. Groups of three and five work well also, but experience shows that when a groups grows bigger, more problems arise.

You can advertise for people to join a group by using notice boards in your department (make sure you ask the secretary) or ask your lecturer/tutor to make an announcement in class/tutorials. As well Student Learning Support Service keeps a register of names, subjects and contact numbers of possible keen study group people.

### Establishing ground rules and goals

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Each new group needs to set the ground rules for the group so that you make sure that you are all working together and from the same starting point and with similar goals for the group. Below is a list of ground rules which you might like to use as

a springboard for your own discussion and decision.

- |                        |                             |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ○ respect              | ○ offer only                |
| ○ have fun             | constructive                |
| ○ have a plan          | criticism                   |
| ○ it is OK to be wrong | ○ do not take over          |
| ○ trust                | ○ listen to others          |
| ○ have a purpose/use   | ○ confidentiality           |
| ○ be encouraging       | ○ try to contribute         |
| ○ honesty              | every week                  |
| ○ support              | ○ try not to be judgemental |
|                        | try not to interrupt        |

**NB** In conjunction with these ground rules it is probably a good idea to think what you all wish the study group to be used for. Do you all have a common GOAL?

Students in the past have noted that setting and agreeing to ground rules are the most important parts of group building time. We suggest you use this time productively and expect to spend a minimum of half an hour working on the list together.

Each member of the group should sign the rules you have agreed on and retain a copy of them.



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## Group building time

You need to ensure that you can meet regularly (once a week at least) at a mutually convenient time and place.

Some suggestions:

- book a room in the library
- ask in your department for possible spaces
- find quiet spots in corners around campus

A lot of time can be taken up getting to know each other, when you should be studying instead. Attending your Study Group should be as routine as attending lectures/tutorial/etc. If you arrange to study for an hour at a time, maybe arrive half an hour earlier in order to get to know each other.

## The first meeting sets a pattern

The objectives of your study group meetings can be:

### a) SUBJECT RELATED

- questions on lectures
- assignments
- understanding concepts
- doing examples/problems (maths/law) etc.

To plan these sort of objectives use your course outline as a guide - it should contain all assessment criteria; lecture outline and reading requirements.

OR

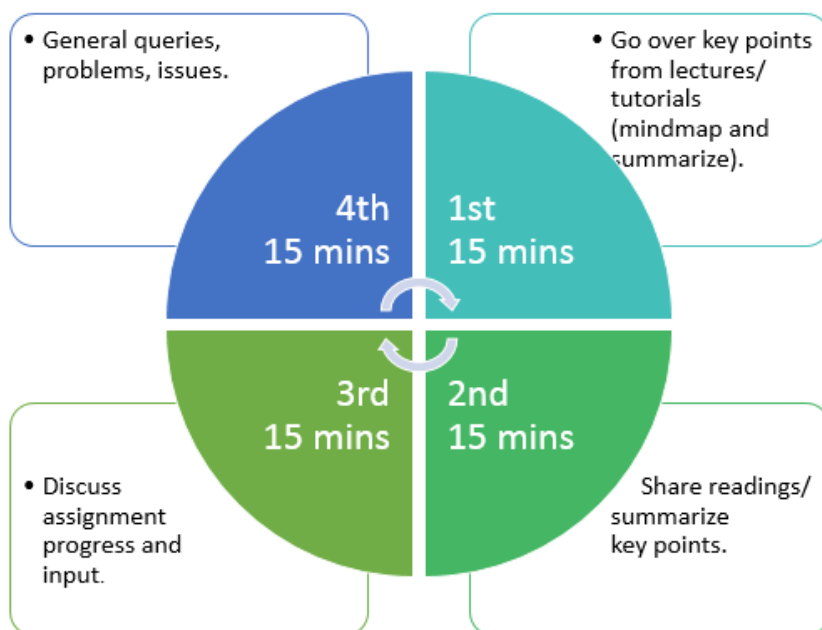
### b) LEARNING ISSUES

For example: finding better ways to cope with reading

- taking clearer notes
- overcoming exam nerves
- putting down in writing the clear arguments you can state orally

Most often your meetings will cover BOTH aspects.

For instance, sessions may follow a regular pattern like this:



As pressures of time exert themselves, be prepared to be flexible about timing, spending longer, when necessary, on assignments, tests, exams, etc.

**NB** Always make space for FEEDBACK - i.e. time for group members to raise issues they don't understand or need to explore further.



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## Group maintenance

It is a good idea to regularly review your goals and ground rules to make sure that you are on track. These things are not set down in concrete and may change as you go. Regular “feedback” time is useful for this.

If you find that you are having problems in the group, the best thing to do is to discuss what is going on within your group. If you

feel you cannot do this, then come to Student Learning and discuss the issue with the staff there.

Don’t give up on your group at small hurdles — problem-solving is a wonderful lifelong skill — make the effort and learn from it.

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## Get others involved

If you find group study helps you - tell others

## Any hints for study group participants?

- Be positive about the whole thing – don’t let minor hassles deter what is potentially a dynamic learning concept.
- Good groups tend to be a mixture of personalities, skills and abilities. Willingness and responsibility, openness honesty and mutual respect are key for success.

## If we get stuck - what is available?

1. Ask within your group or other study groups you know. The talents of other students are immense.
2. For Subject-Related Issues:  
See your tutor, course co-ordinator (refer to your course outline) or a senior student in your subject area. You need to UNDERSTAND - don’t leave things - ASK while it is still fresh in your mind and pass on the info to the rest of your group or come to the tutor with a set of questions raised by your group. (N.B. Staff are usually delighted to see the “active” learning process!)
3. Student Learning *Te Taiako* provides:
  - contacts for setting up groups in subject areas.
  - guidance in getting a group underway.
  - resources – Student Learning has books, tapes, handouts on just about every writing, study skill there is.
  - 1 to 1 guidance on problems/issues that might arise (an objective approach can sometimes clarify things).



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