

Study Group Method Expands Learning

Some students find that the Study Group Method helps to learn some kinds of material faster and better. However, it requires a cooperative, systematic approach to be most productive. The following guidelines will help to plan and carry out the method in a way to ensure that it works for you.

1. The size of the group is important. It can involve as few as two, but a more desirable amount is between three and six. Members should be taking the same course, and be able to get together on a regular basis.
2. One person should act as Chair to see that the method is carried out correctly, without too much idle talk or one person getting excess "air time."
3. One person should act as Secretary. An agenda should be prepared for each meeting with each member responsible to report on or explain a section of the reading or to give the answers to selected questions.
4. All members must do their homework of preparing for the meeting, each preparing his/her assigned parts, and all becoming familiar with all of the material.
5. The group meeting should be conducted to cover all the reports within the planned time—from one to two hours depending on the agenda. Each person should make his/her presentation so good that it "teaches" the material to the others. Then the presentation should be questioned and discussed freely and thoroughly, with everyone participating. Finally, each should make brief notes on the important ideas that were brought out.
6. The next step is to take about five minutes to talk about the value of the session, and in particular to discuss ways in which each member could make it better next time.
7. The final step is to plan the agenda for the next meeting, after which members may reward themselves with socializing.

It may take two or three sessions to get the method working, but if you stick to it and follow the procedure, it will usually increase learning and make it more interesting. If it does not work, adapt it. If all fails, drop it. Always and only go with what works!