

Bureau for Student Counselling & Career Development
Study skills pamphlets

Managing Isolation

Being isolated and removed from your lecturers and fellow students is often one of the major disadvantages of distance education. This apparent problem of distance education can be solved by forming and maintaining an effective study group.

Unisa students in particular can gain a great deal from working in a study group because they get no person-to-person tuition.

Benefits of belonging to a study group

The benefits of belonging to a study group are the following:

- study groups offer opportunities to discuss problems
- students can check how their own understanding of a subject compares with how others understand it
- students have the opportunity to link new subject matter to sections of the work they've already mastered.

Forming a study group

It is very important for the effective functioning of the study group that you carefully consider who you invite to join your group. Specific factors should receive your attention and you can ask the following questions:

- Do I like or respect this student?
- What will the ideal size of the group be?
- Who should be chosen as group leader to organise the group?
- Where will group meetings take place?
- How can we ensure that each member makes a personal commitment to contribute to the group?
- How can we ensure that the study group activity does not replace individual study?

Rules for group meetings

Specific rules should be laid down to prevent group meetings wasting time or turning into social gatherings. All group members should:

- bring writing material, textbooks, study guides and notes to each meeting.
- share information and help to make sense of the course material. The main aim of the group is to enhance group members' knowledge, to give one another support and to act as troubleshooters for one another.
- help establish a free and supportive environment where all can raise problems and concerns without feeling nervous or embarrassed.
- meet regularly, preferably once a week, throughout the academic year.

Making contact with possible group members

Unisa students who want to form study groups can get help from the University. You can write to the Registrar (Academic), Unisa, PO Box 392, PRETORIA, 0001, or speak to someone at the following telephone number: (012) 429-4131.

Whether you write or telephone, you'll have to provide the following information:

- your student number
- your course codes
- the name of the area in which you live

The University will let you have a list of students in your area who are enrolled for the same course(s). You can then contact these students to find out whether they would like to form a study group.

Alternatively, you could join any of the subject-specific discussion groups currently part of Students-on-line.

Forming a study group in remote areas

Students who live in remote areas often experience feelings of isolation. They are not only physically removed from the University but have discovered that there are no other students in their area who are registered for the same course.

What can these students do?

A practical solution is to form a support group consisting of all the Unisa students in a particular area. A group of students should take the initiative of organising a support group for all Unisa students in the area. Information about this support group should be advertised in the local newspaper. The group can then decide to work through a study skills publication or listen to audio cassettes to gain knowledge about the specific study skills. This knowledge will then be applied individually to each course.

The benefits of belonging to such a support group are vast. The group members will be able to counteract feelings of isolation, overcome difficulties in obtaining prescribed books, share general information about Unisa studies and assist each other during difficult times when motivation seems lacking.

Academic support is important to the study process, and it will help you enormously if you can arrange to get support from fellow students (and give them support as well).

This document is available on-line at: <https://sol.unisa.ac.za/counselling/>.

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