

Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)

Study Group Support Guide

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Introduction to MOOCs

Studying a programme in a virtual format rather than face-to-face can be challenging at times. This challenge can be further intensified if you are studying the programme through a second language. Social support including face-to-face or virtual learning with your peers, where you have the opportunity to discuss questions in small groups may enhance your learning and outcomes. Group based learning is a strategy in which a small group of learners work together in a series of activities in order to achieve shared learning objectives. Forming a study group can help you to understand complex course material.

There are 4 key elements that study groups provide to support learning:

1. Community

Group discussion provides an opportunity to explore the questions asked in the MOOC from many different perspectives. It is this environment that provides for the development of a community allowing for students to openly share thoughts and help each other during the study group sessions, where students can collaborate and develop partnerships. In many cases those with more experience can provide mentorship and coaching opportunities for others within the group. Community also strengthens engagement in the programme and helps to reduce dropout.

2. Accountability

Study groups provide accountability, which can support students through the hardest parts of learning, and create a culture of high expectations for everyone involved. Relationships are an important part of this, and these develop through direct, meaningful interaction with people we respect. They tend to happen most naturally under challenging circumstances, with everyone rallying behind a shared goal. Knowing that others expect you to be prepared serves as an incentive to structure your time and complete assignments on time.

3. Interaction

Live interaction should be a key part of the study group and can be achieved both through face-to-face or virtual environments, depending on the needs of the group. Interaction allows sharing of ideas, interesting links, resources and allows for follow-up questions, and affirmation.

4. Impact

There are certain kinds of content that are more easily consumed on our own, such as background reading and how-to instructions. Study groups provide an opportunity for transformational learning, that is learning where we explore and challenge our views and then consider how we can incorporate what we learn into how we practise.

Considerations for Study Groups

Learning through a Second Language

If you are taking the MOOC in your second language, setting up a study group with other colleagues will allow you to support each other with translation and understanding of materials. Each member of the group can be responsible for translating different elements of the course that can then be shared with all group members. This allows for other group members to review translations completed and means that each person has less content that they will need to translate individually, which allows more time to engage in the content. The study group also provides the opportunity to discuss the content of the course in your primary language.

Limited Access to Internet or Technology

If you live in an area with limited internet access or technology, setting up a study group with other colleagues may allow you to support each other to gain access to course materials. Some MOOC programmes release content week by week, one person from the study group can travel each week to download all the materials for that week of the MOOC. The study group can then complete the elements for that week including discussion posts, which can be added to the MOOC discussion forums when the next person travels to download the next week's content.

Work Based Learning

Work-based learning is professional development that takes place within the work environment and is relevant to your current role. Much of this development should naturally take place as you gain experience, greater independence and responsibility and should be part of your Personal Development Plan. Developing a work based study group to undertake a MOOC together can be a great means of providing this work based learning. It can include colleagues at different levels, where those with more experience can help support and mentor those with less experience. This type of study group provides opportunity for interaction and discussion with other colleagues that

are relevant to your own work context and can also help support you to incorporate your learning from the MOOC and implement new ideas and practices into your own work context.

Global Based Learning

Global based learning incorporates people who may live in different locations or cultures, that engage in technology-enabled study groups to accomplish learning. Virtual learning has been increasingly used since the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic in 2020, and has become a well-recognised means of providing collaborative and interactive learning. Do not underestimate the complexity of arranging meaningful collaboration virtually. Planning and working around time zones, technology problems, and cultural differences can be difficult but can be very rewarding when it works out.

Benefits of Study Groups

Many students find that working together makes studying more efficient, effective and simply more fun. Forming study groups is a very effective strategy for enhancing learning. This is because groups share unique insights and learn from each other. Group members can also teach confusing concepts they understand to other group members. Study groups are particularly effective for completing MOOCs. Study groups offer several benefits and provide you with the opportunity to:

Create a Support System

When students work together in groups toward common goals of learning they can provide encouragement to each other to keep motivated toward the goals.

Generate Motivation and Commitment

As each member of a study group commits to participate fully in the group, students tend to stay up-to-date with course content and this helps to be well prepared and avoid procrastination.

Interaction

It can be very monotonous and draining to spend long hours alone somewhere. Joining a study group and studying in a group environment makes learning much more fulfilling and enjoyable. Through their cooperative but also competitive nature, study groups promote critical thinking and creativity as new questions and explanations within discussions and debates. Thus, this interactive environment ensures a much deeper learning of the material that would be missed with self-study.

Cover More Material

Working in groups makes it possible to focus on more concepts since multiple people can review more material than just one. Many groups decide to assign topics to individual group members to research and study and then provide a summary for the group. This strategy allows students to learn a lot more, in a much shorter time, than if they were to study each topic on their own.

Promote Discussion and Communication

Study groups can help you develop as a student, person, and professional and encourage members to think creatively and build strong communication skills, which also help increase your

understanding and retention of material. It also allows you to make learning more personally relevant and intellectually stimulating by being able to share your own experiences with others.

Provide Structure

Provide structure to your learning by offering a specific schedule, place and time to work on the MOOC.

Learn New Study Habits / Skills

Study groups allow you to share learning strategies and observe a wide variety of study methods and techniques that you can incorporate into your study regimen.

Work Collaboratively “Two Heads are Better than One.”

Working in groups makes it possible to focus on more concepts since multiple people can review more material than just one. Students tend to learn faster working within a group as you have the opportunity to explain concepts, review material and exchange ideas with others. Working with your peers in a study group also provides an excellent opportunity to hone your people skills.

Different Perspectives

Each group member has different qualities, individual talents and unique ideas and insights to offer to the study group. Studying alone will always get you one perspective; yet, in groups, you may receive various viewpoints which can assist in helping you reach your own conclusions. Listening and asking questions will provide more food for thought while developing your critical skills. The group will allow you to develop abilities to express your own ideas and share your understanding of concepts and topics with others and explore differing views.

Fill In Learning Gaps

Study groups provide an excellent opportunity to fill in gaps in your understanding. By comparing notes with other students, everyone can check the accuracy of their own. They can fix errors, and fill in the details they may have missed.

Share Resources, Exploring The Best Ones

Sharing of resources, that can include websites, articles, online or print books, videos and much more will mean both saved time and increased motivation.

Teach Concepts

Teaching and explaining information and concepts to other group members will help you reinforce your mastery of the information and concepts.

Provide Language Support

Provide Language Support when participants are learning through a second language. Those more proficient in the language used for the course can support those in the group who have less experience of working through the language of the group.

Provide Technical Support

Provide technical support for individuals in the group who have limited digital confidence or competence

Types of Groups

Face to Face Group

If you are forming a local group allowing for face to face contact then it is important to choose a convenient, comfortable place to meet that has minimal distractions.

Virtual Group

A virtual study group is generally comprised of dispersed people in different geographical regions, who interact through some form of electronic communications. When you're meeting with a study group virtually, it is even more important to put effort into the group to make sure it works well. Since communication is not in-person, trust and good communication are crucial. Key to successful virtual groups are using collaborative communication platforms and apps that are easy to access for all group members and that allow group members to communicate throughout the course (See Appendix.1)

Mixed Group

May incorporate a mix of face to face and virtual meetings to allow for collaboration.

Developing an Effective Study Group

At the first meeting it is best to discuss expectations and determine goals for the study group. It is also vital to plan and get commitment for future sessions for the study group so that all members will be able to participate. Discuss how long you will meet each time, topics you might address and types of activities you might do based on the study guide for each week of the course in Appendix.2. The following are recommendations for forming effective study groups.

How Many

Group size will vary depending on the type of group. In bigger groups, some group members do not contribute as much and organisation can be a problem. It is more beneficial to keep the group to a small manageable number where everyone can contribute equally and schedules are easier to coordinate. Around 3-6 people are recommended for a productive, effective group.

Who

The most effective study is completed in study groups composed of members with the common goal. Depending on the subject matter, it can be very advantageous to select group members with unique talents or knowledge specific to the topic area to further support the groups learning. Experienced group members can help to facilitate the group and support or mentor those with less experience.

Where

It is best to study in environments without distractions, that are relatively quiet and conducive to learning and where group members can communicate freely. Studying in an open area can work, if your group isn't going to become a distraction to others.

How Long

It is best not to study more than 1-2 hours at a time when studying in a group. During long sessions, group members tend to socialise more and do not study as productively. However, study sessions under an hour tend to be rushed and unproductive since only a few subjects can be discussed.

When

Scheduled, regular, weekly study sessions are more effective and prevent disruptive latecomers, early departures, and no-shows. Where possible organise all sessions in advance. Having your study group at the same time each week allows students to fit it into their schedule at a time when they are going to be available throughout the course. Make a commitment to come prepared and the group will be much more successful.

Identify a Moderator

Having someone responsible for keeping the study session on track is a good way to keep the group focused on the task at hand. When discussing a topic that people are passionate about, it can sometimes be difficult for everyone to get their opinions heard. Sometimes you have the opposite problem and the conversation needs to be nudged into starting. Either way, a moderator can help direct the flow of the conversation to make sure everyone has a chance to talk about their ideas. If you have a recurring study group, then each member might take a turn being the moderator for a given session.

Set an Agenda and Keep to Plan

In order to prevent people from showing up to the group without being prepared, decide as a group ahead of meeting an agenda that everyone should receive a copy of. The agenda should include;

- Who is going to moderate the session and lead the discussions
- What readings should be completed before the session
- What material that you want to discuss during the session
- What you are going to work on specifically during the session.

Example Agenda: Concept-Focused

1. *Icebreaker/Warm-up (10 Minutes)*

This can be a true icebreaker in the first session, and more informal afterwards - but some groups like to do a real icebreaker each session.

2. *Review Video Lecture or Reading from the week (30 Minutes)*

The group can walk through video lecture outlines, or assigned readings, defining terms, rephrasing in their own words, and making connections among concepts.

Discussion structure can vary (see below): full-group work, pairs discussing and feeding back to the group, one student at the board guided by others, etc.

3. *Individuals Share Points of Confusion / Questions, and Group discusses them (30 Minutes)*

Group members can bring questions ahead of time, and/or add questions that come up during discussion. Adhere to the “no dumb questions” rule.

4. *Create Overview of Material for Coming Week (10 Minutes)*

Look ahead to prepare group members for the next week's topics.

Create a basic outline of ideas in the next class(es).

Discuss upcoming assignments.

Group Discussion Formats

Full Group Discussion

Free-form conversation, or structured, for example by going around the circle for questions and ideas.

Clusters or Break Out Discussions

Members are divided into smaller groups and share back to the whole group. It helps to switch up the groups occasionally, so you can get to know different people and gain different perspectives.

Partner Discussions

This works best when members are already familiar with concepts and don't need to preview/ or review a lot. Partners can explain their steps and thought processes to each other.

Assigned Discussion Leader

One person presents on a topic or leads the discussion. This works best when everyone has a chance to lead at some point. The leader does not need to be an expert on the topic, but has responsibility for doing some prep ahead of time and facilitating the discussion.

Think - Pair - Share:

Give people a specific amount of time (e.g. 5-10 minutes) to think about a topic individually. Then have people discuss it in pairs, and finally, have the pairs share out to the group.

Address Questions

Address questions that require various levels of thinking. Use [Bloom's Taxonomy](#) as a guide.

Rotate Responsibilities

To be successful, responsibility for the group should not fall to just one person. Rotate the moderators or determine specific tasks for each individual. For example, break readings into sections, and have everyone take ownership of a section. By sharing responsibilities, you can avoid group resentment.

Take Breaks

Studies show that taking short breaks between focused studying sprints is an effective way to keep your brain focused and refreshed. You might try the Pomodoro Technique, in which you study for 25 minutes, take a 5 minute break, then repeat. You can also do this for 50 minutes with 10 minute break intervals. Here are two examples of pomodoro timer apps that you can use.

- [Pomofocus Timer](#) (Web Browser Based) or [Forest](#) (Smartphone Based)

Stay Positive

Stay patient, encourage one another, maintain a good attitude to keep the group focused on the goal.

Study Group Ground Rules

The single most effective way to avoid problems down the road in a study group is to set up initial ground rules. And the best way to do that is to create them collectively. Spend a good chunk of time in your first session developing ground rules that everyone agrees to, and then type them up and send them to all members. Here are some suggestions and ideas that you might incorporate;

- Make a personal commitment to come prepared and to actively contribute to the group.
- Be willing to make mistakes, and encourage your groupmates to do the same.
- Have questions about material ready to discuss
- It's always OK to say "pass" or that you don't know.
- Respect differences in people's background preparation and thinking styles.
- Assume that everybody in the group is doing their best and working to progress.
- Make sure everyone gets a chance to participate, the opportunity to speak and ask questions.
- If you have been speaking a lot, step back and give others a turn.
- Be an active listener: listen fully and ask for clarification if needed.
- Help others clear up confusion productively, focusing on points of confusion and not the person.
- At the end of each meeting, summarise what you've covered, and set an agenda for the next meeting.
- During the week, follow up on questions and discussion.

Suggested Study Group Activities

The study group can decide as a group what type of activities they would like to incorporate to best meet their learning needs. The following provides some ideas and suggestions for activities that can promote a positive learning environment.

- Review, expand and discuss course notes and assigned readings.
- Raise questions and address areas of confusion.
- Quiz each other by asking and answering questions.
- Brainstorm topics, questions or essays that might be on an exam.
- Review for quizzes.
- Generate or discuss course topics.
- Share study methods and strategies.
- Share alternative ways to organise and map information.
- Review translations.
- Report back to the group on topics covered.
- Teach concepts to each other.

Addressing Conflict within the Group

Some level of disagreement is natural in a study group, because you're working with different individuals who bring their own personalities, values, expectations, perspectives. And it can even be useful, because it can allow the group to explore diverse ideas and opinions. But if the disagreement rises to the level of conflict that is interfering with the group's productivity, try these approaches:

- Try to identify the source of the conflict.
 - Is it about group processes?
 - Communication Styles?
 - Differing expectations or priorities?
 - Identifying the root cause will help you work toward a solution.
- Keep your group's core goals front and centre. Your purpose is to help everybody learn better and succeed in the MOOC.
- Return to your ground rules, and ask group members to consider whether they're being followed, or whether they should be updated.
- Try to have an open conversation about the conflict, and create ground rules for this conversation for example, listening actively, avoiding interruption, focusing on issues and not people, etc.
- The following resource provides more information about [addressing group conflict](#).

Appendix.1 Collaboration Tools for Groups

There are now plenty of platforms and apps available online for free that you can use to collaborate and communicate with your study group and store all the relevant files for the group to work on together. It's a good idea to decide together as a group which platform you want to use to communicate with each other, be sure to investigate their privacy, security policies and features to select one that all group members are happy with. You can learn more about some of the common platforms and apps below that can support your face to face study group outside of group meetings or can be used to collaborate online more efficiently and effectively.

ReLAB-HS Rehabilitation Community Platform and App

The Rehabilitation Community is the collaborative effort of [ReLAB-HS](#) and [Physiopedia](#) and is a place where you can meet, connect, and exchange information virtually with other rehabilitation professionals both within your own networks and from across the globe. The community discussion groups and forums can be used to:

- Solve Problems
- Generate Ideas
- Share information and knowledge
- Offer, as well as receive, support and guidance
- Develop best practices and share lessons learnt
- Collectively reflect on personal experiences and celebrate successes

The Rehabilitation Community has the ability to link geographically dispersed practitioners and build a sense of community under circumstances where it may otherwise be difficult to do so.

The Rehabilitation Community is not only a place for discussions and sharing resources, but also a place to propose action plans, gain feedback and implement positive changes in your practice.

The Rehabilitation Community is open to anyone with an interest in advancing rehabilitation services and strengthening the integration of rehabilitation into health systems around the world.

To join the Rehabilitation Community you will need to [register](#) and [create an account](#). To do this, you will need your email address, password, name and username of your choice. Once you have

entered your details, you will receive an email with further instructions on how to activate your account. Check out the [Get Started](#) guide on how to create an account for more details.

The Rehabilitation Community app is available on both Apple iPhones and Android.

- Google Play (android):
<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.physiopedia.rehabcom>
- Apple (iOS, iPhone):
<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/rehabilitation-community/id6446223908>

Alternative Collaboration Platforms

A collaboration platform is a space where you can meet online with others to work together. It provides a wide variety of functions to support group work, such as instant messaging, video conferencing, and file sharing. Some platforms allow for integration with third party applications, whilst others provide their own suite of applications.

- [*Microsoft Teams*](#)

This is a collaboration hub that combines chat capabilities, video conferencing, file storage, collaborative document editing and integration with various apps. Using Microsoft Teams will allow you to keep all the group documents and conversations securely in one space.

- [*Facebook Groups*](#)

Facebook groups can be used as a digital collaboration space to post text, share files, pictures, video, schedule events and conduct polls. You can also use Facebook messenger to chat and video conference. You will need to create a Facebook account to access Facebook Groups. Ensure you set your Facebook Group to 'closed' and review your own personal Facebook privacy settings to make sure you're comfortable with the level of information you're sharing.

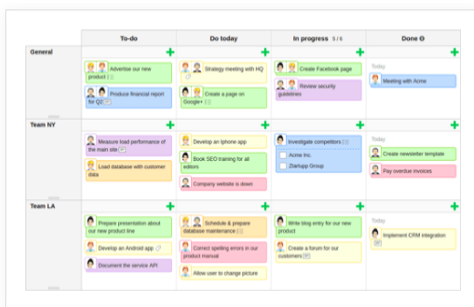
- [*Slack*](#)

Slack is a digital collaboration space that allows you to share text posts, chat, voice calls, video calls and file sharing. There's also a wide variety of other collaboration service integrations you can choose from to add extra functionality to your Slack such as video conferencing and more.

- [Padlet](#)

Padlet allows for creative collaboration using a range of different mixed media sources. In real-time or across time zones, students can contribute videos, images, comments on a virtual corkboard. Each student can comment or reply to the work of another student or add a new strand on the topic that is introduced.

- [Kanban Flow](#)



Kanban Flow is a great, free project management tool that is simple to use and gives you an excellent overview of group tasks. You can create to-do lists and assign tasks to individuals. Being able to visualise your work in a study group can simplify communication and improve productivity.

Live Communication Platforms

If your study group decides they would prefer to communicate and work in real-time only, there are many tools you can use to communicate with each other. Most instant messaging apps and communication tools are available for desktop and mobile and allow video chat and conferencing. The following tools all have free accounts available allowing your team to communicate in real-time and maintain communication for the duration of the MOOC.

- [Skype](#)

Skype is a video chat app that makes it easy for groups to meet virtually. Get all your study group together in one place for a group video chat on Skype and share your work via screen share.

- [Zoom](#)

Zoom is a popular video communication app which offers video, audio and screen sharing experience and some collaborative features such as live chat and a screen annotation feature.

- [Cisco WebEx](#)

Cisco WebEx is another popular video communication app which offers video, audio and screen sharing experience and some collaborative features such as live chat and a screen annotation feature.

- [WhatsApp](#)

WhatsApp is a popular instant messaging application that also allows you to message privately, start group chats, video and voice calls, and video conference calls for up to four participants.

- [Facebook Messenger](#)

Facebook Messenger is an instant messenger application that allows you to private message, start group chats, video call and video conference. On a video conference call you can see up to six people at a time.

- [Google Meet or Google Chat](#)

Google Meet is a high quality video calling app. It's free, simple and works on a range of devices including android phones, iPhones, tablets and computers, while Google Chat is a communication software developed by Google built for teams that provides direct messages and team chat rooms, along with a group messaging function that allows Google Drive content sharing.

File Management

If your group has opted to use a stand-alone application to communicate instead of a collaboration platform, you'll need to decide how you're going to store and share files with each other if you need to. There are many services available to store files online where you access them virtually from anywhere through the internet and most offer a free version with a maximum amount of file uploads.

- [Google Drive](#)

You can use Google Drive to store, share and collaborate on files using inbuilt Google programs such as Google Docs and Google Sheets. Basic free Google Drive account provides 15 GB of storage to anyone with a Google account. Simply use it online or download OneDrive to your mobile or desktop and create a sign in for free.

- [OneDrive](#)

OneDrive is designed for individual use, with the occasional sharing of files. OneDrive free version gives you 5GB of free storage and links well with the Microsoft Teams. Simply use it online or download OneDrive to your mobile or desktop and create a sign in for free.

- [Box](#)

You can use Box to store, share and collaborate on files. The basic free Box account comes with 10GB of storage. Simply use it online or download Box to your mobile or desktop and create a sign in for free.

- [Dropbox](#)

You can use Dropbox to store, share and collaborate on files. The basic free Dropbox account comes with 2GB of storage. Simply use it online or download Dropbox to your mobile or desktop and create a sign in for free.

Translation

A web translation system is a web-based service that provides translation between two or more languages. Although they rarely produce perfect translations, especially between languages that are not in the same language family, they can help give a rough idea of the basic content of the text.

- [Google Translate](#)

Google's free translation service that can instantly translate words, phrases, and web pages between English and over 100 other languages.

- [Apertium](#)

Apertium is another free translation service that can translate words, phrases, and web pages focuses mostly on Latin-based European languages.

Appendix 2. MOOC Overview and Study Planner

Weekly Individual Learning Questions

Each individual group member should consider the following questions, while they complete their own independent study for the MOOC. This will help them to reflect on the work they have done each week and ensure they are prepared for each individual group learning session.

- What work did I do for MOOC learning?
- What are the difficulties that I encountered?
- What have I learned?

My Learning Objectives for the MOOC. (Identify at least 2 - 3)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

The topics that I want to discuss and share with group members. (Identify at least 1 - 2 each week)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

What I learned from this week's study group. (Identify at least 1- 2 each week)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.