One of the hardest parts of dealing with COVID-19 is the isolation. Of course, staying at home is crucial to stemming the spread of the virus, and most people are willing to do what it takes to flatten the curve—but humans are social creatures, and being home alone for two weeks (or more) is not something that most of us are built for. So it’s important that we use the technological resources at hand to connect with others, even if from a distance. If you have a regular study group, it’s important that you keep up with it, even in these times. And if a study group isn’t normally your “thing” this might be the perfect time to try something new with your study schedule. Everything else about this semester is new, after all, and maybe a virtual study group is just the thing to shake up your routine. Let’s go over some tips for creating a group and how to use it effectively.

**Choose the Right Platform.**

A group chat might be a good way to figure out everyone’s preferred schedule, but it’s probably best that you then move your study group discussion to a different platform. For discussing readings and other chat-based study sessions, try Discord. While it’s perhaps most popular among gamers as a
way to chat while playing, it’s a really great general-use voice-chat program and a relatively streamlined way to get everyone on the same page. But, if you’d like to see your fellow study group members’ faces, Zoom has been getting a ton of buzz as one of the go-to video conference services.

You’ll also likely need to share documents—notes, outlines, etc., and how you do that depends on what works best for you. Google Drive is always a great option for collaborative work, and Dropbox can give you a common storage place for any PDFs, scans of your textbooks, and other document types that may not translate easily into Google programs. There are a multitude of scanning apps that can help you share notes and annotations. One of these is called Simple Scanner which is, you guessed it, pretty simple to use. Your study group needs will vary depending on the subject matter and form of the class, so discuss with your group members what you all want to get out of the study session, and choose your program wisely.

Set an Agenda.

This is really the best piece of advice for a study group, especially a virtual one. Decide well ahead of your scheduled meeting time the material that you want to discuss, who’s going to lead the discussion, and what readings or assignments should be completed before starting—or which you’re going to work on during the session. This will help prevent people from showing up to the meeting without knowing how to proceed, which can eat up your study and discussion time. There’s nothing worse than showing up for that group meeting and realizing that no one knows how to proceed, so be sure to choose your topics in advance.

Rotate Responsibilities.

There’s nothing that can induce rage and resentment quite like forcing one person in the group to act like “team mom.” It shouldn’t fall on one person to remind everyone to show up to the study session, to prepare any materials, or to remind everyone to get back on track during the session. One way of sharing this responsibility is to rotate who’s going to lead the discussion. For example, break out your readings into sections, and have everyone take ownership of a section or, if they’re ambitious, an entire study session. Whoever’s leading can create an outline, study guide, or PowerPoint for the rest of the group to use. By sharing leadership responsibilities, you can avoid group-project resentment while also taking charge of your studying.

Strike the Right Balance.

Let’s face facts—sometimes, study groups devolve into social time. That’s just what happens. Frankly, in this time of isolation, catching up with your classmates is probably a good thing. However, don’t let your study session become entirely social—otherwise, why even have a study group? Take some time at the start of your session to check in with everyone, see what they’ve been up to, and then pivot towards your study time. That way you get some non-school social interaction, but work still gets done. Don’t worry if the session devolves to a hangout at some point—just be aware, and then step up to steer the discussion back to the work. Eradicating chit-chat entirely will be impossible, so just try and make sure it doesn’t take over the session completely.

This is a tough time, everyone—especially for students. Now is the time, though, to band together (from a distance) and get through this thing however we can, without compromising the education that you’re working so hard for. Stay safe and healthy, everyone!