

Accountability Groups Facilitator Guide

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Accountability Groups Facilitator Guide

What are Accountability Groups?

Accountability groups can be an effective strategy for getting work done by leveraging social support and creating structure for tasks that can be otherwise isolating or difficult to focus on. The social support is created by establishing group members that are committed to participating in regularly scheduled study sessions. An accountability group session includes small group intention-setting, focused individual work time, and encouraging collaboration with fellow students and peer leaders. Students that benefit from setting goals, sharing their progress, and planning next steps would be great participants of an accountability group.

Program Objectives

- Provide consistent, dedicated, structured time for students to study or work
- Increase productivity through group setting and use of goal setting and follow-ups
- Build community by maintaining accountability through attendance tracking and providing encouragement and support
- Use the group setting to review other learning strategies through resource and experience sharing
- Model effective facilitation and learning strategies and skills throughout group meetings

Student Outcomes

- Practice and demonstrate productive work time
- Learn how peer accountability can lead to success
- Establish connections with peers

Key Program Components

1. Consistent, Dedicated Work Time
 - a. Groups meet during their assigned time once per week for 90 minutes
 - i. 10 mins - Check in and goal setting
 - ii. 70 mins - Independent work time
 - iii. 10 mins - Debrief on goals, personal check in, plans for the week
 - b. Students are assigned to groups based on their availability
2. Peer Connection & Support
 - a. Consistent participation is key. An attendance policy will be implemented to encourage attendance for all group members.
 - b. Groups are facilitated by WISCIENCE STEM Immersion Peer Leaders

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3. Academic Skill Development
 - a. Goal setting for independent work time and reviewing at the end of each sessions
 - b. Resource and strategy sharing from facilitators and students

What is the role of the facilitator?

The facilitator is an essential part of the accountability group. The main roles of the facilitator are:

- Provide Structure- It is up to the facilitator to provide structure during weekly meetings. While most of the weekly meeting time will be independent work time, it is important for facilitators to guide the weekly meetings and smoothly transition between each part.
- Model – Model good habits during weekly meetings. Students will be watching the facilitator and it is important that you model the behaviors they are discussing. For example, facilitators should not be on your phone, have unproductive computer tabs open, etc.
- Resource Sharing – Facilitators have tons of knowledge to share with students! You can share your personal experiences, advice, and campus resources. However, you are not expected to have all the answers or solve student’s problems. Facilitators should reach out for help when you need support.

Program Application & Student Intake Process

Step #1 – Student Completes Online Application

Step #2 – Student is assigned to a group, added to a waitlist, or denied (if ineligible)

Step #3 – Coordinator emails student to notify them of their application status

Step #4 – Coordinator adds student (Name, Pronouns, & Email) to the group roster on the attendance spreadsheet

Step #5 – Facilitator sends welcome email to new student(s) – See ‘Communicating with Group Members’ for more information

Step #6 – Student attends their first group meeting

Communicating with Group Members

Facilitators’ communication with group members can be customized based on their needs. During the first meeting, facilitators should set clear expectations for how students should contact them and how they prefer to be contacted. There are two primary forms of communication with group members:

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- Email – should be used for sending official announcements and important information to group members
- GroupMe – facilitators can choose to set up a GroupMe for more informal group communication (meeting reminders, participant updates, check-ins, etc.)

Initial Welcome Email Template

Subject: Welcome to Accountability Groups!

Hello!

My name is [Your Name], and I am a STEM Immersion Peer Leader with WISCIENCE. I am excited to be your Accountability Group leader this semester, and I'm looking forward to getting to know you and working together.

Please join us for our first group meeting on [Date & Time of First Meeting] in [Group Location].

Important Information:

- Meeting Time: Our group will meet weekly on [Day & Time]
- Location: [Group Location] *feel free to add any instructions on how to find the room
- What to Bring: Bring your laptop, calendar/planner, and anything you will need to study that week (notes, textbook, flashcards, etc.)
- Attendance: While participation in accountability groups is voluntary, it is expected that you attend each week or reach out to me to let me know you will not be attending. Each of you is a valuable member of the group and we want everyone there so we can all keep each other accountable! We will discuss the attendance policy more in-depth during our first meeting.

Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions. I'm looking forward to meeting you!

Best,

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[Your Name]

First Group Meeting

First Accountability Group meetings look a little different from all other meetings throughout the semester. This meeting has more emphasis on community building and setting expectations. See below for first meeting expectations:

Step #1 – Introductions & Community Building

- Have all students make name tents (facilitators should collect and pass these out during each meeting)
- Have all students share their name, grade, major, hometown, and pronouns
- It is also fun to have students answer an icebreaker question or do some other get-to-know-you activity. This can really help build community and help students feel more comfortable in the group setting

Step #2 – Discuss Group Expectations and Review Accountability Group Agreement

- Review general expectations for Accountability Group (group meeting schedule, attendance policy, group structure, etc.)
- Discuss group communication preferences and expectations
 - Will you primarily communicate via GroupMe or email?
 - How do you prefer students to reach out to you?
- Discuss and decide on Group Phone Policy
 - Cell phones can be a major distraction and hinder productivity. There is no official phone policy for Accountability Groups, but it is important to set expectations are phone usage early
 - Ask group members to keep each other accountable (ex. If they see their neighbor using their cell phone for a long period during work time, they would remind them to focus back in on their task)
 - Some groups or group members may want to put their phones in a specific bin or location at the beginning of the meeting to avoid distractions
- Review & Complete Accountability Groups Agreement
 - During the first meeting, please review the Accountability Group Agreement with all of your

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group members

- Once you have reviewed it together, please have everyone sign and return to you
- Collect signed agreements and turn them into the program coordinator
 - *It is essential that ALL group members review & sign the agreement. If you have any students join your group late or miss the first meeting, please make sure to review it with them at the first meeting they attend

Step #3 – Set Intentions & Independent Work Time

- Before starting, explain that this is something you will do every group meeting. During normal meetings, there will be more time dedicated to this (see below for a sample timeline)
- All students should set a specific goal of what they'd like to get done during independent work time
- Give students time to work individually

Step #4 – Follow-up, Reflection, Resource Sharing, and Wrap-up

- Have each student share what they accomplished during independent work time
- If time allows, you can have students share their high/low from the week
- Discuss getting organized for the new semester
 - Possibly share the Semester at a Glance Handout
- Share any announcements or reminders to wrap up the meeting

General Group Meeting Outline

With the exception of the very first group meeting (see 'First Meeting' section), every group meeting follows the same structure and schedule each week. There are 4 essential components to every group meeting:

Step #1: Set Intentions for the Session

- Have students set a specific goal of what they want to get done during their independent work time
 - These should be specific, measurable, tasks that can be accomplished in the time frame of the group (ex. Read pages 1-10 for anatomy, create flashcards for phonetics, etc.).
 - Encourage students to use prioritization strategies when choosing tasks
- Students should share their intentions with the group. You can have them do this in a few different

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ways:

- Whiteboard- Have each student write their name on a whiteboard and list their goals for the session
 - Benefits:
 - Names are by each student which can help facilitate team building
 - Students can easily reference the task list so they can stay on track
 - Goals are visible to the entire group
- Sharing aloud – have everyone go around and briefly share what they'll be working on
 - Benefits
 - Encourages group discussion and connection
 - Take note of what each student says so you can check-in about it during the reflection time

Step #2: Independent Work Time

- This should make up most of the session. A minimum of 50 minutes should be dedicated to independent work time
 - All students should be quietly working during this time.
 - Give a 5-minute warning towards the end that students should start wrapping up.

Step #3: Reflection & Personal Check-in

- Have students popcorn to each other and share out how their independent work time went. You can also have them share how they're doing in general. Consider asking questions like...
 - How much did they accomplish during independent work time?
 - High/low from the week
 - Do they have tests coming up?
 - Are they stressed about a particular class?
 - On a scale of 1-10 how are they doing?
- During the check-ins, ask follow-up questions, celebrate student's wins, and empathize with stress. Encourage others to respond to each student's sharing.
- You are not responsible for solving student's problems. If students are struggling with something...
 - Share your experiences
 - Ask other students for their advice/experiences
 - Share resources

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- If you feel like they could benefit from 1:1 support, suggest that they sign up for a peer success coach or academic consultation

Step #4: Resources & Academic Strategy Discussion

- Topics (i.e., time management, how to study, motivation, etc.) may come up naturally from the personal check-in discussion. If this is the case, facilitate discussion and promote sharing of ideas and resources.
- If topics do not come up naturally and you have time left in your meeting, choose a topic that you think would be relevant to your group. See the 'Suggested Resource & Academic Skill Development Topics' section below for ideas –
 - Ask suggested questions or come up with your own
 - Share a resource if it's appropriate Remember a resource is a tool, not necessarily a solution
- How do you facilitate a discussion?
 - Ask open ended questions
 - Actively listen
 - Redirect questions back to the group
 - Collaboration is important. Ask the group how they have handled similar situations. What has worked for them in the past?
 - Provide encouragement and refrain from judgment
 - Give people space to share remember sharing should always be optional

Meeting Timeline (Example)

The timing of every meeting may vary depending on group discussion, group members arriving on time, resource discussion, etc. Here is an example of what the timing of a group meeting could look like –

- 10 min – Welcome and Student sharing intentions/goals for independent work time
- 70 min – Independent Work time
- 10 min -- Follow up on intentions/Personal Check in/Topic Discussion

Facilitation Strategies

Here are some simple tips to help you facilitate group discussion and build community among group members. Remember – Some groups are more talkative than others, and that's okay!

- Make sure students know each other's names – You should make sure to collect and distribute students' name tents during each meeting. Name tents are a great tool to help students learn each other's names
- Ask Open-Ended Questions – When facilitating group discussion, try your best to use open-ended

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questions. This can be as simple as saying “Tell me about your upcoming exams” vs “Do you have any exams this week?”

- Actively Listen – As the group leader, it is essential that you exhibit excellent listening skills. It’s important for group members to feel heard and for you to be aware of what’s going on with them
- Redirect questions back to the group – Some group members may ask your opinion or want your advice on a particular topic. It is great to provide your perspective, but try to also redirect questions back to the group. Collaboration is an essential part of the Accountability Group and this is a great way for students to learn from each other
- Give people space to share – Sharing should always be optional. It can sometimes take students some time to process and think about what they want to share. Use wait time to provide them space to answer

Attendance Policy

The official attendance policy is outlined in the Accountability Group Contract that all students sign. If a student misses 3 or more group meetings without notice, they will no longer be able to participate in an Accountability Group.

Students’ attendance is tracked in a spreadsheet (more info below). Students are considered –

- Attended (1) – student showed up to the meeting
- Excused (e) – student let facilitator know that they wouldn’t be attending (reason for missing doesn’t matter)
- Unexcused (0) – student does not show up and does not communicate with facilitator
 - *Students are allowed 3 unexcused absences before being removed from the group

The attendance policy can be flexible based on the situation. It is designed to encourage participation and attendance, not punish students. Use your best judgment and ask the program coordinator if you have a situation you would like to discuss.

Increasing Accountability for Unexcused Absences

When students have an unexcused absence from group meetings, we want to hold them accountable and encourage their presence at future group meetings. We want to make sure group members know that they are a valuable member of the group and their presence was missed and noticed.

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Facilitators should create this accountability by always contacting students who miss meetings. Anytime a student has an unexcused absence, they should receive a message (email or GroupMe) from the facilitator within 24 hours.

Please see the email templates below. Feel free to customize this messaging as needed based on your relationship with the student or time in the semester.

Template Email for when student misses 1 group meeting:

Hi [Student Name]!

We missed you at Accountability Group [yesterday/today]! Just a reminder that our group meeting happens every week at [Date & Time] in [Location]. We do have the expectation that you attend group meetings every week or let me know if you will be missing. This policy is in place so we can help hold each other accountable!

I hope to see you next week! Let me know if I can do anything to support you.

Best,
[Your Name]

Template Email for when students misses 2 group meetings:

Hi [Student Name]!

We've missed you at the past [# of missed meetings here] Accountability Group meetings! I wanted to check in with you and see if you are doing okay. Are you still interested in being a part of the group? We do have the expectation that you attend group meetings every week or let me know if you will be missing. As a reminder, you are allowed 3 unexcused absences before being removed from the group. This policy is in place so we can help hold each other accountable!

Looking forward to hearing from you! Let me know if I can do anything to support you.

Best,
[Your Name]

Member Removal

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If you have a student who has missed 3 group meetings in a row without notice, please fill out the request for member removal Qualtrics form. This will notify the program coordinator that you have a group member that needs to be removed from the roster. Provide any relevant information in the form (i.e., I've never heard back from the student, etc.) The student will receive an email saying that they have been removed from the group based on the attendance policy.

The program coordinator will update your group's attendance spreadsheet to reflect this change. You will see the student on your spreadsheet, but they will be moved under the 'Removed' section.

Facilitator Administrative Tasks

There are a few administrative tasks that facilitators must complete.

- Tracking Attendance – It is essential that facilitators accurately track student attendance in the attendance tracking spreadsheet. This spreadsheet can be found in the *SOA Teams Accountability Groups Channel Files*.
 - Mark the student as attended (1), excused (e), or unexcused (0)
 - Cells should automatically change colors and count attendance totals

Academic Skill Development & Resource Sharing Ideas

Learning Support

If students are struggling with concepts related to their courses, direct them to the various tutoring services on campus. This is not a tutoring session and you are not expected to tutor them!

- [Site for all tutoring centers](#)
 - [Athletics Learning Center](#) – for student athletes that may need more personalized learning plans, academic advising, and other resources
 - [Academic Coaching to Thrive and Succeed \(ACTS\)](#) – provides peer-to-peer tutoring (through applying), academic support and resources to students in the Division of Diversity, Equity and Educational Achievement (DDEEA)
 - [Business Badger Study Cooperative \(BBSC\)](#) – An inclusive and supportive learning environment for students who need help with the mathematical tools and methods used in the core business

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courses

- Drop in hours usually 4–6pm every weekday, no registration required
- 2nd floor of Grainger (Learning Commons) room 2210U
- [Center for Academic Excellence \(CAE\)](#) – program for first generation college students or low income students that provides various programs and resources through College of L&S, must be a CAE student to apply for an academic mentor
- [Chemistry Learning Center \(CLC\)](#) – can apply to meet with a small group or an instructor, TA Help Desk schedule (various classes, times, and rooms), worksheets and flashcards for various classes
- [Computer Science Learning Center \(CSLC\)](#) – offers small group tutoring for beginning computer science courses, list of tutors for specific classes and study groups on website (doesn't start until Feb 11th), no need for registration
- [Greater University Tutoring Service \(GUTS\)](#) – student-run organization that provides academic, language, and study skill support services taught and facilitated by students, academic match (small group), drop in hours, study skills appointments, tutors for a variety of classes
- [Math Learning Center \(MLC\)](#) – all class small group tutoring, drop in hours, review sessions/resources, office hours, and more
 - Van Vleck B224 – Main Level
 - Mon–Thurs: 9am–9pm
 - Fri: 9am–1pm
 - Sun: 3pm–9pm
- [Nursing Learning Center \(NLC\)](#) – can submit a form if needing individual or small group tutoring/support, calendar of various career and wellness events for nursing students
- [Physics Learning Center \(PLC\)](#) – apply to access resources for introductory physics courses including small group sessions, worksheets, practice exams, study partners, and more
- [Statistics Learning Center \(SLC\)](#) – drop in hours for help in introductory statistics courses through one-on-one or group tutoring
 - Service Memorial Institute (SMI) room 133
 - Tues: 3pm–7pm
 - Wed: 5:15pm–7:15pm
 - Thurs: 3pm–7pm
 - Fri: 12:30pm–4:30pm
- [Undergraduate Learning Center, Engineering \(ULC\)](#) – multitude of different programs and academic resources for engineering students
 - PrEPS (Practicing Engineering Problem Solving) Lab Sessions – various times and

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classrooms

- Drop in tutoring - 3rd floor Wendt Commons, Sun-Thurs: 6:30pm-9pm
- Tutoring by request - fill out a form to be matched with a tutor
- Math and Study Interest Groups (SIGs) - access resources and apply to be in a SIG (first years only)
- [University Housing](#) - Chemistry, Math, and Writing tutoring offered in various residence halls
 - Various rooms, 7:30pm-9pm (Math and Chemistry), 6:15pm-9:15pm (Writing)
- [Writing Center](#) - many different resources and events for those looking for help with writing for a specific project, resumes, research papers, and more
 - Make individual appointments, attend writing workshops, access the writing handbook
 - Many different locations and times all across campus:
<https://writing.wisc.edu/hoursandlocations/>

Skill-based Resources

Semester Planning

Potential Discussion Questions:

- What steps can you take now to set yourself up for a successful semester?
- Does anyone have tips that have helped them get organized/be successful in the past?

Suggested Resources:

- [Semester at a Glance](#)
- [Organize Your Syllabi](#)

Goal Setting

Potential Discussion Questions:

- Why are goals important to set?
- What barriers have prevented you from achieving your goals in the past?

Suggested Resource:

- [Goal Setting Worksheet](#)

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Time Management

Potential Discussion Questions:

- Have students rate their time management on a scale of “could use some work” to “crushing it”
- Why do you struggle with time management?
- What time management strategies do you use?

Suggested Resource:

- [Weekly Schedule](#)
- [Daily Time Tracker](#)
- [Due & To-do](#)
- [Priority Matrix](#)
- [Prioritizing Your To-Dos](#)
- [ABC To-do List](#)

Time Management Tools:

- Planner
- Online calendar
- Shovel app
- White board/to-do list
- Outline of day – no times attached to non-scheduled activities
- Set timer for different tasks
- Set reminder each morning/night to look at planner or make schedule
- Prioritize to-dos

Motivation/Procrastination

Discussion Questions:

- What do you do when you don't feel motivated?
- Describe what it feels like to “feel” motivated.
- What is the driving force behind your procrastination? (is it fear based?)
- What strategies do you use to overcome procrastination?
 - Emphasize accountability can help

Suggested Resources:

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- [Due & To-Do](#)
- [Priority Matrix](#)
- [Prioritizing your To-Dos](#)

Motivation Tools:

- Use a timer and try to focus for a set amount of time (Pomodoro)
- Motivate yourself with an incentive
- Motivating activity – what gets you pumped up/in a good mood?
- Daily schedule – make it a habit, not a choice
- Change environments
- Limit distractions
- Consistent sleep schedule
- Intentional breaks (throw ball at wall for 5 minutes, walk, go outside, etc.)
- Break things down- tackle 1 small thing first and then use that momentum
- Don't wait to "FEEL" motivated. You can start things and that motivation feeling might follow.
- Write goals on a sticky note and put them somewhere you see them everyday

Overcoming Procrastination Tips

- Stressing about a task and putting it off still wastes mental energy. May as well just do it.
- Start with a super easy task
- Use timer and rewards
- Ask for help
- Imagine your future (short term- how will you feel when you're done with the task? long term-how will your future life look?)
- Reframe task (as a challenge)
- Give yourself permission to avoid uncomfortable task
- Forgive yourself- don't continue to feel guilty

Limit Distractions

- Put cell phone across the room/don't bring it with you
- Turn cell phone off
- Do not disturb mode
- Set up desk area with just needed materials

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- Consider headphones if people talking distract you
- Put computer away if don't need it
- If you think of something you want to look up/don't want to forget- write it down for later instead of acting on it.
- Make a tick mark on paper every time you get distracted to track
- Change environments

Studying

Discussion Questions:

- Do you feel like you learned "how to study"?
- What are your favorite study strategies?

Suggested Resources:

- [The Study Cycle](#)
- [Create A Study Schedule](#)

Exam Preparation

Discussion Questions:

- How many days in advance do you typically start studying?
- Have you ever started studying too late and not done well on a test?
- What challenges do you face around exam prep?
- What are your favorite study strategies?

Suggested Resources:

- [5-Day Study Plan](#)
- [4 Steps to Exam Prep](#)
- [Exam Planning Worksheet](#)
- [Understanding Test Anxiety](#)

Studying/Self- Test Strategies:

- Flashcards- handwritten or quizlet
 - Remind students flashcards can be used for more than just memorization
- Rewrite/organize concepts on whiteboard

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- Reorganize and summarize notes – consider handwriting if usually type
- Write out summary
- Ask someone to quiz you
- Try to teach info to someone
- Practice exams
 - recreate test environment as much as possible, always review and retry questions missed
- Talk/read out loud
- Use ALL resources (notes, lecture slides, past homework, lab, handouts, textbook, etc.)
- Rework homework problems-especially if you missed something the 1st time
- Memorize all equations needed and when to use them
 - Mnemonic devices for memorization
- REPETITION