

What is SI?

Supplemental Instruction (SI) is a voluntary academic support program that utilizes peer-led group study to help students succeed. SI sessions are facilitated by SI leaders, students who have previously completed the targeted course and have demonstrated competency. SI leaders are paid to attend the targeted class, to model successful student behavior, and to design collaborative SI sessions based on class lectures. Each week, SI leaders offer at least three regularly scheduled SI sessions in designated classrooms. Students are not required to participate in these sessions, but the SI leader and course instructor promote the sessions as guaranteed study time for students. During a typical SI session, students compare and clarify lecture notes, review textbook readings, work through sample problems, and discuss key course concepts.

Supplemental Instruction, SI, was developed by Dr. Deanna Martin in 1973 at the University of Missouri – Kansas City to improve performance and increase retention of students in high-risk classes. Data collected by UMKC’s International Center for Supplemental Instruction over the past four decades supports the efficacy of the model, revealing that students who regularly participate in SI sessions have higher course grades than students who do not participate.

According to the international model, SI is typically offered in 100- and 200-level core curriculum or “gatekeeper” courses that are historically difficult for students. Historically difficult courses are typically defined as those in which thirty percent of students either withdraw or earn a final grade of D or F; however, at WCU, the SI model has been modified to suit the needs of our students.

Why SI?

The goal of SI is to help students become independent learners. SI benefits students in three primary ways:

- 1) Models effective learning and study skills that students can continue to use when studying independently. Students often find that the study strategies learned in SI are transferrable to other classes and learning contexts.
- 2) Offers a non-threatening, low-risk environment where students can ask questions that they might not ask during lecture and gain problem-solving experience through trial and error. As students develop confidence in SI sessions, they often become more actively involved in the classroom and more willing to seek clarification from instructors outside of class.
- 3) Encourages content-based discussions among students. SI provides a structured setting in which students can share what they know, ask questions, and solve problems together. Students who attend SI learn the importance of establishing study groups and are more inclined to seek out group study opportunities for other classes.

FAQ

1. Will SI leaders help students complete their homework?

SI is intended to supplement what students do on their own time. After attending SI sessions, students should be better prepared to work problems alone, to write a clear paper, or to prepare for an exam. When students pose questions in SI sessions, the SI leader is responsible for helping students find the answers to their questions rather than providing the answers for them, thereby modeling successful problem-solving strategies that students can imitate when studying on their own.

2. *Is SI a remedial program?*

SI is not a remedial program for two important reasons:

- All students enrolled in a targeted class are encouraged to attend SI—not just those who are struggling.
- SI starts with the first day of classes and continues to the end of the semester. Participation in SI sessions is encouraged from day one.

3. *How are SI leaders trained?*

SI leaders receive 12-15 hours of training prior to the start of classes. The training is intentionally designed to be interactive and collaborative, thereby modeling many of the strategies the SI leaders will use in their sessions. Topics covered in training include collaborative learning techniques, informal (formative) assessment strategies, study skills, assertive communication, and university policies. Once classes begin, SI leaders meet weekly as a team for additional training and idea sharing. Each SI leader is observed by an SI Supervisor at least twice per semester and receives individualized feedback on strengths and areas for improvement.

4. *What goes on during SI Sessions?*

A typical SI session is a 50-minute long meeting in a classroom on campus and might include a collaborative review of lecture notes, group work and discussion, problem-solving and critical thinking activities, or a mock exam. The SI leader's primary focus is to assist students in understanding the course material while helping them to develop study skills that are applicable to the content. The SI leaders will never structure SI sessions as a forum to re-lecture to students who missed class.

5. *Isn't SI simply a test preparation study group?*

While some students may attend SI prior to an exam, national data suggests that students who regularly attend SI improve their class standing by one-half to one whole letter grade. SI leaders constantly promote SI as guaranteed study time, encouraging students to participate in SI on a weekly basis.

6. *What does the SI leader do in my class?*

The SI leader's class attendance has a twofold purpose:

- To model effective classroom behavior by arriving on time, listening, taking lecture notes, reading assigned chapters prior to lecture, completing required assignments, and observing what's happening in the classroom. SI leaders are encouraged not to dominate classroom discussions, but they may occasionally ask or answer questions in class as a way to model engaged student behavior.
- To gather information that will help him/her gain a sense of what you expect from your students regarding the concepts and ideas you emphasize in lecture. It also helps the SI leader to process the information he/she will use during SI.

7. *What is the SI leader NOT permitted to do?*

It's important for the SI leader to maintain his/her peer status among the students in the class; therefore, the SI leader is not expected to:

- Grade exams, papers, or assignments
- Distribute graded exams, assignments, or papers to students
- Lecture for you or lead the class in the event that you must be absent
- Proctor exams

8. What if I have concerns about the SI leader?

Contact the SI Coordinator to discuss your concerns: Katie Pierce, Assistant Director, Writing and Learning Commons, piercek@wcu.edu, 828-227-2149

9. What should I tell my students about SI?

Please include the following statement in your syllabus so your students will be aware of the SI program. On the first day of class, allow your SI leader to make a brief introduction to the class about the SI program.

Supplemental Instruction (SI) utilizes peer-led group study to help students succeed. Students who regularly participate in SI Sessions earn final course grades that are one-half to a full letter grade higher than students who do not participate. Your SI leader is a student who has successfully completed this course and has been recommended by professors for this position. The SI leader attends class lectures each week and works closely with me to design SI session activities that focus on the most important concepts covered in class. During a typical SI session, you can expect to work with your classmates to clarify lecture notes, review textbook readings, work through sample problems, and discuss key course concepts.

Each week, you have the opportunity to attend one or more SI sessions. Your SI leader will keep you updated about session times and locations.

10. What's in it for the SI leaders?

Working as an SI leader is a great part-time, on-campus job. SI Leaders not only receive valuable training, but they also have an opportunity to solidify their subject knowledge and core understanding of course concepts. Secondary benefits for SI leaders include:

- Improved interpersonal, communication, problem-solving, leadership, and time management skills
- Increased awareness of the campus culture and student resources
- Opportunities to form personal and professional networks
- Enhanced connection with the University

11. Can I come to SI Sessions?

If instructors attend SI sessions for their courses, the group dynamics change. Students tend not to deliberate over course content with each other if they have the option of asking the professor for information or answers to questions. Furthermore, SI sessions are designed so that students feel free to ask any question and to reveal any weakness in understanding or in learning skills. The presence of instructors may inhibit students from revealing weaknesses and risking attempts at answers.

12. Can I give extra credit for SI attendance?

Our goal is to promote SI as a beneficial activity for students without the enticement of extra incentives. A few reasons that the SI model discourages the use of extra credit as an incentive include:

- The SI Program attempts to analyze the effects of SI participation on students' success in the class, so any incentives that might artificially enhance a student's grade are not recommended. If there is a positive correlation between SI participation and grades, we would like to be able to say with confidence that the correlation is a result of what the students experience during SI.
- To prevent the possibility of unintentional bias, course instructors do not receive reports of students' participation in SI sessions until the end of the semester. This practice also helps to ensure that students

who are reticent about seeking help feel comfortable doing so, knowing that SI is a safe place where they can ask any question.

- In a traditional semester-long course, some students may not be able to attend SI because of schedule conflicts; as a result, these students would have no way to participate in the extra credit.
- Students who attend SI solely for extra credit are often not the most engaged students, and this lack of engagement can have a negative impact on the overall functioning of the session.

13. What are some ways that my SI leader and I can promote SI participation to students?

- Allow your SI leader to provide a 5-10 minute introduction to SI on the first day of class. Give your leader an opportunity to practice his/her introduction with you before presenting it to the students.
- Work with your SI leader to create a worksheet with mock exam questions. The SI leader can distribute the worksheet to everyone but announce that the worksheet will only be discussed in the next SI session.
- Provide time in class to regularly encourage SI attendance.
- Meet once a week with your SI leader and ask to see his/her session plans and supplemental materials. By aligning his/her plans with your expectations for the class, the SI leader will ensure that students are truly benefitting from content covered in the SI sessions.
- Encourage your SI leader to have students predict possible test questions during SI sessions. Select one or more of the predicted questions to include on the next test.
- Work with the SI leader to report the number and/or percentage of test questions covered in SI sessions.
- Allow the SI leader to write regular reminders and announcements on the board before class. Possible announcements could include:
 - The SI session schedule for the week.
 - Anonymous feedback from SI participants about how SI has helped them.
- Allow the SI leader to sit in different locations in the classroom throughout the semester. This allows the SI leader to engage with different students and to serve as a role model for everyone in the class.
- For courses with lab components, inform lab instructors about SI and ask for their help to promote SI in lab.
- Use data from previous semesters to report differences in final course grades, based on students' participation in SI sessions.
- Post one difficult question, concept, or problem on the board at the beginning of class and announce that the question, concept, or problem will be discussed in the next SI session.
- If SI attendance is routinely low, contact the SI Coordinator.