

# El Camino College Supplemental Instruction (SI) Program

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<https://www.elcamino.edu/support/resources/supplemental-instruction/index.aspx>

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### What is Supplemental Instruction?

Supplemental Instruction (SI) is a series of weekly review sessions that provide academic support to courses that are historically difficult. SI is available to all students who want to improve understanding of the course material. The sessions are facilitated by a peer SI Coach. The SI Coach is usually a student who has a high level of verified course knowledge and is trained in group facilitation.

SI sessions provide a time for classmates to come together in an informal environment in order to compare notes, discuss important concepts, develop effective strategies for studying the subject, and to check for understanding before taking the exams in class. However, SI is not a typical study session and we are proud of this! While the SI coach will come with a session plan of what to discuss, students can bring questions of their own and as a group decide what to work on. Rather than the coach simply re-lecturing, students are encouraged to work collaboratively to solve problems and explain material.

SI sessions are a popular source of academic support because the sessions provide a relaxed atmosphere in which to learn. The small group setting provides a more comfortable environment for taking risks when asking questions and working toward finding answers. In addition, SI sessions give students the chance to get to know other students enrolled in the course.

### Who are the SI Coaches?

SI coaches are peers who have a solid background in the course material and a strong desire to help other students excel. Coaches are usually college students who have a high level of verified course knowledge and are trained in group facilitation. Unlike teaching assistants, SI coaches do not have access to student data or grades, and they do not help the instructor take attendance or make decisions about the course. SI coaches will be in lecture every day, hearing what students hear and reading what students read. They do not re-lecture. Instead, they facilitate active learning of the course material to prepare students for course quizzes, exams, and homework.

## SPECIFIC INFORMATION FOR INSTRUCTORS

### What is the Instructor's Role in Supplemental Instruction?

SI is not intended to create additional work for faculty. The primary role of the instructor in the Supplemental Instruction (SI) program is to promote the SI sessions to the students. There are several ways that the professor can demonstrate support for the program. The SI sessions should be mentioned in class on a regular basis, and the students should be reminded and encouraged to attend them. These brief announcements can be made by the instructor or the SI coach. SI coaches should be allowed to promote the SI sessions in class throughout the semester. Faculty should avoid the suggestion that only those who do poorly will benefit from SI. SI is for everyone in the class, either to understand concepts or reinforce them.

The working partnership established between the instructor and the SI coach is important and can be mutually beneficial. The SI coach has extensive contact with students and is able to gain a unique perspective into the students' class experience. In the past, professors have requested feedback from the SI coach to learn more about how students perceive the information presented in lecture. Please feel free to ask the SI coach about the sessions. The SI coach will also be required to meet briefly with the instructor on a regular basis to discuss SI session plans. This meeting should be accomplished in a few minutes time.

## **What is the SI Coach's role in my class?**

The SI coach is required to attend all scheduled class times, unless a different arrangement has been made. During class, the SI coach exemplifies a model student by arriving on time, taking appropriate notes and listening attentively. To increase visibility of your SI coach, you may request that he/she help with class demonstrations or discussions. SI Coaches will not be responsible for taking attendance, grading student work, or 'covering a lecture' for an instructor. TA's may be available to help instructors with those duties.

## **How will students know about SI?**

An SI schedule will be available for students in the SI Office (MBA 329) or online <https://www.elcamino.edu/support/resources/supplemental-instruction/index.aspx> before they register so they know which section to enroll in. Additionally, during the first week of class the SI coach will make a brief presentation to the class about SI. At this time, students will receive the SI promotional material that provides them with relevant information regarding SI sessions. The instructor is strongly encouraged to promote SI throughout the semester as an excellent resource for students who want to strengthen their understanding of course material.

## **How often are SI Sessions held?**

SI sessions are held two times per week, with each session lasting approximately 60 minutes. Typically, sessions are held right after or right before the SI supported class takes place. There may be times when the SI coach chooses to hold an additional session(s) the week before an exam.

## **Can the instructor observe an SI session?**

Instructor observations of SI sessions are not encouraged. We have found that when faculty members observe SI sessions the tone of the session changes. Students hesitate to ask questions, the SI coach feels nervous, and the focus is on the instructor rather than on the SI coach. Instructors are instead encouraged to keep open dialogue with the SI coach about SI sessions, including student questions and areas of confusion.

## **Can I find out which students are attending SI sessions?**

Instructors are strongly discouraged from receiving updates as to who is attending SI sessions because it could create a bias in the instructors' perception of the student. Biased grading can occur with the influence of perception, rather than that of performance. Attendance at SI is preferred to be voluntary and confidential. In the case that extra credit is given for attending SI sessions, an attendance report is available from the SI office at the end of each semester.

## **Can I recommend students to become SI Coaches?**

Instructors are encouraged to recommend students they think would be effective SI coaches for the course. SI coaches must be knowledgeable in the subject and meet the minimum requirements for the position. The requirements are posted online on the El Camino College SI webpage.

## **How do I request SI for my courses?**

Contact the SI Program Coordinator at [lbarrueta@elcamino.edu](mailto:lbarrueta@elcamino.edu). 310-660-3593 ext 3612. Requests for SI sessions should be made a semester in advance to ensure adequate time to recruit, hire, and train qualified SI Coaches. All requests may not be able to be met due to possible budgetary constraints.

## **When do SI sessions start?**

SI sessions normally begin during the second week of classes and are held throughout the semester. Each SI coach holds two to three sessions per week. It is recommended that students attend as many sessions as possible since each session will focus on new material. SI sessions are informal; students should bring their notes, textbooks, and questions when they come to an SI session.

## How do my students benefit from SI Sessions?

Annual SI success data continues to prove that in general, students who attend SI sessions tend to earn a higher grade in the course. By attending SI sessions, students develop a better understanding of the course content as well as more effective ways of studying. The skills and techniques learned in SI will help students in other courses as well.

## What are the differences between SI and tutoring?

There are several key elements of SI that differentiate it from group tutoring and other forms of academic support:

Tutoring sessions	SI Sessions
Tutor leads discussions/examples	Leader begins discussions or examples but hands over duties to students
Tutor writes on board and demonstrate example	Students write on board and leader sits backs and checks for understanding
Tutor tends to do most of the work and students watch	Students do much of the work and Leader watches
Usually one group or one-on-one where tutor helps students	Usually many small groups(pairs) that collaborate and help each other
Students engage with tutor	Students engage with each other

- The SI program is attached to specific courses which are historically difficult for students.
- The SI coach attends every class sessions and knows exactly what is expected of the student.
- The SI coach is trained in specific teaching/learning theories and techniques.
- The SI program is supervised by a professional coordinator.
- The SI sessions are conducted regularly throughout the entire semester and
- The SI sessions integrate course content with learning strategies.
- The SI coach facilitates and encourages the group to actively process the material rather than acting as an authority figure who lectures to participants.
- The SI program is evaluated at the end of every semester and success data is provided.

## SPECIFIC INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

### What are the Academic Benefits of SI?

- Better course grade and a higher GPA.
- The material you master is valuable in other courses.
- Learn the language (jargon) of the course by talking with other students.
- Encourages understanding of the course material through multiple student perspectives.
- Learn to study more effectively and efficiently to increase 'free time'.
- Veteran student perspective gives students insight into questions the professor may ask.
- Learn study skills to help with current and future courses.
- Knowledge stays fresh in your mind, and review of information is ongoing.
- Able to ask questions about course material to a small group of peers instead of in large room of students.
- Learning and studying with others helps you recognize and learn important information that you may have missed or not understood before taking an exam.
- Being in a relaxed environment where the information is discussed in an informal manner.

## **What are the Personal Benefits of SI?**

- Opportunity to meet other student in class, form other study groups, and network with peers.
- Opportunity to talk with SI coaches, about how to be a successful student.
- Improve communication and inter-communication skills.
- Get motivated to take responsibility for your own learning and personal development.
- Increase your self-confidence in academic and social interactions.

## **What are the Cognitive Benefits of SI?**

- Attain a greater understanding of the course material.
- Develop higher-level thinking skills.
- Test and reinforce your knowledge of the material before class quizzes and exams.
- Increase awareness of and tolerance for ambiguity or complexity.
- Gain understanding of multiple perspectives by working with a diverse group of students.
- Practice critical thinking skills in the context of the course material.

## **What are the Career Benefits of SI?**

- The ability to learn collaboratively is a vital skill that employers look for in employees.
- Learn how work in an integrated team environment.
- Interaction with SI coach and other students can help you learn about possible internships, research opportunities, scholarships, and graduate school

## **How do I know if I'm enrolled in a course that has SI support?**

Ideally, you enrolled in a class with SI because you checked the SI schedule and knew beforehand that it would have SI support. If this is not the case and you are enrolled in a course that has SI, your instructor and SI Coach will introduce the SI program to you at the beginning of the semester.

## **What if I can't attend all of the SI sessions?**

It is recommended that you still go to one session a week and/or attend the mock exam and the finals-review sessions.

## **What if I can only attend a portion of the SI sessions?**

That's OK! You can still come. Even if you arrive once the session has already begun or have to leave early, you can still benefit from the session during the time that you are there.

## **How do I become an SI Coach?**

Contact the Supplemental Instruction (SI) Office for an application and job description. You can also visit SI online at: <https://www.elcamino.edu/support/resources/supplemental-instruction/index.aspx>

A typical work week for an SI Coach involves:

- 3 to 5 hours attending class lecture in targeted course
- 1 to 2 hours planning SI sessions and meeting with instructor
- 2 hours facilitating SI sessions
- 1 hour attending SI staff meeting/training