

# Better student performance with peer learning

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Engineering students with average grades from upper secondary school can manage difficult courses just as well as students with high grades. At least, if a group of them meet an older student once a week during the first semester to discuss and solve maths problems and other difficult exercises from their courses.

This is shown by a new evaluation from the Faculty of Engineering at Lund University of the 'peer learning' sessions, or SI (supplemental instruction), as the method is also known.

The SI method is also used at universities in the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, the UK, Switzerland, Ireland and Norway, but has not been evaluated in this manner before.

The report, in which the authors compare SI participation and performance, also shows that first-year [students](#) with high attendance at the SI sessions on average pass 30 per cent more credits in their first year than students who do not attend the SI sessions. The SI students also do better in other courses, probably because they have developed their study technique and study strategy with the help of SI.

"This shows that many students can achieve more than they think. But they have to practise in order to develop their critical and abstract thinking abilities, which is exactly what the SI students do. They don't have to worry about their performance being assessed, because there is no lecturer present, rather they can reflect on their own learning on their

own terms. This 'silent knowledge' also strengthens students' self-confidence", says Leif Bryngfors, head of the SI Centre at the Faculty of Engineering.

"Another important conclusion is that the students' performance is largely controlled by what happens after they arrive at university. Mediocre secondary school grades are not the end of the world", he adds.

Joakim Malm, who supervises the older students who lead SI, emphasises that SI benefits all students.

"Regardless of whether students have top grades or lower grades from upper secondary school, they benefit from attending SI sessions. The more sessions a student attends, the better his or her results on the course and during the whole of the first year", he explains.

All types of students participate in the SI programme. However, it particularly attracts female students and those from families without a tradition of academic study – both under-represented groups at the Faculty of Engineering. Attendance at SI for first-year students is around 50 per cent during the first half of the autumn semester, and around one third after that.

Provided by Lund University

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