

# Attendance numbers at SI/PASS sessions – how do they affect learning conditions?

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**Abstract.** Are there any constraints on the number of participants allowing viable conditions for collaborative learning at a Supplemental Instruction (SI) sessions? The SI manuals give little or no guidance in this regard and there seems to be no consensus amongst practitioners. In the literature, furthermore, the number of participants at typical SI-sessions is very rarely reported. As SI-leaders often are paid and good candidates may be hard to find, it is often tempting to maximize the number of attendees at an SI-session. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to assume that the students' learning experience may suffer if the number of participants is too great. The conditions for good collaborative learning may also suffer if the number of participating students is too low. The aim of the present study is to address the range of participants to allow for good collaborative learning conditions at an SI-session in particular and at other teaching and learning activities in general.

The research questions are the following:

1. When does the number of attendees become too small or too large for fruitful sessions with respect to student learning? And why is that so?
2. Is there an optimum number of attendees at an SI/PASS session with respect to student learning?

To answer these questions we conducted a survey and received answers from approximately 200 SI-leaders and SI-participants. The results show that the lower limit for a viable group size was estimated at roughly 4–5, and the upper limit at 16–19. The optimum size was estimated at 10–12 attendees. Both attendees and SI-leaders feel that an attendance below 4–5 students may affect student learning negatively. Why is that so? Not surprisingly, the main reason from both groups is that the discussions may suffer. There may be too few points of view or too little combined knowledge. Furthermore, some SI-leaders express concern that they become too prominent in the discussions, which may affect the students' active learning negatively.

It is also apparent that both participants and SI-leaders feel that there is an upper boundary in number of attendees to have a fruitful SI-session. According to participants, the two main obstacles for fruitful SI-sessions when the number of attendees become too high are 1) a noisy environment with a lack of order and 2) hindering active participation from attendees. The second reason is echoed to a high extent by SI-leaders. According to SI-leaders, the difficulties they experience to obtain a good structure and overview of a crowded meeting may also impact the students' learning experience negatively.

The presenters will open the session with a discussion on why the number of participants at SI-sessions is of importance. Thereafter the presenters will illustrate their findings with a case study at Lund University.