

Independent Learning Strategies

Independent learning strategies help students build knowledge and skills to become self-directed, motivated, and independent learners. They provide opportunities for students to make decisions about their learning, investigate topics of interest in more depth, make discoveries about a new topic, and generate new thinking. In order to be effective independent learners, students must also master time-management and self-monitoring strategies.

The process of independent learning enhances students' motivation because they are active participants in controlling their learning. Independent learning strategies allow students to select the materials they wish to present and to develop appropriate presentation formats to demonstrate their learning – for example, portfolios and response journals. Independent learning provides students with opportunities for self-reflection – thinking about their own learning and evaluating and revising the material before submitting or presenting their work.

Independent learning strategies work well with the processes of inquiry and research, as students learn to use a variety of research methods and learning resources, structure their research questions, and pursue areas of investigation. The development of logical frameworks and information-seeking strategies involves skills that are transferable to all subjects as well as areas of personal interest.

Students who develop independent, creative, and critical problem-solving skills can apply those skills to meet current curriculum expectations and will use them in real-life situations throughout their lives.

Independent Learning Strategies

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Homework

Description

Homework is work that is completed by the student outside of class. Homework can involve review and practice of classroom learning or may be remedial in nature. It may be assigned to encourage students' responsibility for their own learning and their acquisition of specific skills or knowledge. Homework can also encourage students to pursue an in-depth interest in a topic and generate new thoughts on the topic. Homework may be assigned to individual students or to the class as a whole. It can be informal (for instance, personal reading) or formal (for instance, a specific task or set of questions) in nature.

Method

The teacher:

- assigns and monitors the homework on a continuous and regular basis;
- provides the structure for students to acquire independence in the management of their homework;
- communicates expectations regarding homework to both students and parents.

Considerations

Homework:

- requires differentiated supervision of students as they mature and accept responsibility for out-of-class work;
- requires consistent monitoring and review of the assigned work;
- requires coordination of teacher planning and parent/guardian support.

Illustrations

Elementary

- *analyse personal eating habits in a variety of situations* (6p6)

Students track their eating patterns for a one-week period in and out of school and prepare a summary sheet showing their findings and patterns.

Secondary

- *demonstrate an ability to negotiate and perform tasks related to meeting the needs of families* (SO3.03)

After classroom practice, students, at home, produce a healthy meal for their families to enjoy. Each student produces a written analysis of the meal's nutritional value.

Independent Reading

Description

In independent reading, students are given time to read material of their own choice on a regular basis. Students are encouraged to access a wide range of reading materials, forms, and genres in and outside the classroom, including at home and school and public libraries, on an informal basis. Independent reading may be used to provide students with the opportunity to practise reading, apply strategies, and pursue a favourite author or genre (for example, mystery or science fiction). It is an opportunity for teachers to observe students as readers, for students to view themselves and others as readers, for reading to be placed in an authentic context, and to demonstrate that reading is a valued experience.

Method

The teacher:

- shares what he or she is reading, and enthusiasm about particular authors;
- establishes a positive attitude towards reading;
- provides time for selection from a wide range of suitable reading materials;
- establishes routines for accessing and sharing materials;

- encourages parents to value time for independent reading;
- encourages reading as a lifelong habit;
- values personal reading choices by students.

Considerations

Independent reading:

- requires access to a wide range of materials;
- requires program coordination with the school and public library staff for material selection, visits, book talks, assessment, and promotions;
- encourages students to record the types and number of books they read individually or by class;
- requires opportunities for choosing books regularly;
- encourages students to make time in their own lives for reading on a regular basis;
- requires students to be responsible for returning books when due.

Illustrations

Elementary

- *read a variety of fiction and non-fiction materials for different purposes (3e29)*

Students maintain a reading log, listing a minimum of three books a month they have read outside of school.

Secondary

- *select and read text for different purpose (LI1.02P)*

Students independently read from the literature of a particular region or country, selecting materials that help them transfer curricular knowledge to personal recreational reading.

Independent Study

Description

Independent study is a strategy that develops, with teacher guidance, the student's ability to plan, explore, organize, and communicate a topic of interest independently and in more detail. It is also used to generate thoughts, review or research a topic, and extend personal learning within the framework of curriculum expectations. Independent study may provide opportunities to pursue individual variations to a topic/issue under classroom study or to provide an alternative assignment based on the student's needs and individual learning style. It makes students active participants in the learning process, thereby enhancing motivation and retention. Through independent study, students learn to make responsible choices and accept responsibility for their own learning. Students may also take school courses independently through distance learning, such as those offered in Ontario by the Independent Learning Centre.

Method

The teacher:

- assists the student as a guide and a facilitator, making sure the requisite skills (e.g., research, Internet use, time management) are in place for success;
- poses questions to further and deepen the study;
- schedules regular progress conferences with the learner to maintain focus;
- monitors student progress and decision making during the study;
- models the skills associated with self-directed learning;
- provides support with organizational strategies, time lines, and sources for information;
- helps the student narrow the area of study (e.g., a study of “the Great White Shark,” or “Sharks,” instead of “Undersea Life”);
- establishes access to equipment and resources;
- intervenes as required to maintain student confidence in the self-directed learning;
- monitors the student’s ability to assume greater responsibility;
- assists with structures for self-assessment and peer evaluation of the study;
- provides a forum and feedback for the presentation of the study.

Considerations

Independent study:

- requires careful assessment of the student’s degree of independence in order to assist the student with goal-setting and choices for independent study;
- requires coordination among teachers to monitor student work load;
- requires coordination among teachers to prevent overlap of assigned skills and/or knowledge;
- builds in a sliding scale of student supervision as students demonstrate growing independence;
- requires coordination with information sources in the school (e.g., school library, guidance services) and community (e.g., public library, government archives) to facilitate access to information.

Illustrations

Elementary

- *compare works (of art) on a similar theme from various periods and cultures and discuss the impact of time period and location on style (5a42)*

Students choose three works of visual art by different artists on a similar theme (e.g., animals, family life, and religion) and make some comparisons. Independently, students research the artist’s background, geographic location, and historical time period. They relate this information to the works of art and communicate their findings to the class through an oral presentation.

Secondary

- *analyse how a changing society affects individuals and families (DIV.01)*

Students design and complete an independent research project studying the change in a family (e.g., customs and cultural aspects), or the change in one particular member of the family, when they move to Canada.

Learning Contract

Description

A learning contract is a negotiated plan of intent between teacher and students to meet the learning needs and interests of an individual or small group. A learning contract gives students a role and responsibility in shaping the learning experience because the student(s) and teacher develop it collaboratively. Learning contracts outline clear goals and processes for the learning experience. For example, a learning contract may abridge or extend specific learning activities, or modify time frames and learning conditions according to student needs, interests, and the expectations of the curriculum.

Method

The teacher:

- selects an appropriate range of options and frameworks for learning contracts;
- may need to elicit parental agreement and support;
- assists students at frequent predetermined checkpoints;
- monitors student progress regularly in following the contract.

Considerations

Learning contracts:

- work particularly well with individual students because they have made a commitment;
- require considerable supervision by the teacher;
- require a high level of structure, focus, and organization;
- may require outside resources/personnel (e.g., for supervision or assistance);
- require consideration of the student's maturity and sense of independence.

Illustrations

Elementary

- *incorporate time-management and organizational skills in the goal-setting process* (5p39)

Students design an individual plan related to physical activity or personal fitness in order to address individual physical fitness needs. Each student develops the plan in collaboration with the teacher to encompass both curriculum expectations and the student's personal fitness goals. The negotiated contract includes a time line and self-assessment of achieved goals.

Secondary

- *produce and evaluate learning plans* (LS3.08)

Students use their portfolios and evaluation reports, with the assistance of their teacher, to develop, review, and revise any goals and plans in meeting their performance expectations in a particular subject area. Each student's plan includes a scheduled conference to present evidence of achievement.

Learning Log/Journal

Description

The learning log/journal is a sustained, written reflection on the process and content of learning. Learning logs/journals require regular entries, but may be used at different points in a unit or topic (at the beginning of a lesson to focus learning and make connections to previous lessons, or during the lesson to consolidate learning and ensure understanding). They can be used to record observations (for instance, monitoring plant growth, recalling classroom discussions), to track learning through independent study, and to assess progress and attitude to learning. Learning logs require the reflective participation of the student. The teacher may respond to student reflections orally or in writing, in both formal and informal ways.

Method

The teacher:

- describes the expectations, purpose, and structure of a learning log;
- provides continuous and sustained time for the process;
- leads discussions about what the students are learning;
- provides prompts, if necessary, to encourage recording and reflection;
- may conference with students about their individual learning;
- provides support when students are in the process of writing.

Considerations

Learning logs/journals:

- require a teacher to respect the confidentiality of a student's entries/responses while carefully considering thoughts and emotions to which he/she may be compelled to react;
- take time to develop self-reflection;
- are suited to all program areas, but can be less effective when a log/journal is required in every subject.

Illustrations

Elementary

- *demonstrate an understanding of factors contributing to change in a society* (8h38)

In small groups, students record major social events on a time line created to look like a river. Groups discuss the causes and effects of each change/event. Individuals reflect on the experience in learning logs.

Secondary

- *record personal thoughts and observations in diaries, journals, and logs* (WR1.28)

The teacher discusses the importance of journal writing, shows examples of effective journal entries, and develops the journal evaluation rubric with the students. Students keep a journal, adding an entry after every drama class, using the vocabulary and structures they have learned in relation to successful journal writing and specific to drama activities.

Memorization

Description

Memorization is a mental, oral, or written rehearsal of content or skill that enables the material to be recalled quickly for further development or transfer to other contexts. It is a means of mentally organizing words or concepts in order to connect them to the objects, events, actions, or qualities that they represent. Memorization is an individual activity and is highly dependent upon the learner's capacity to recollect information. It is particularly relevant when a foundation or base of knowledge needs to be recalled quickly or as a base for further knowledge and transfer (for example, the alphabet for dictionary skills). By memorizing basic facts, poems, or lines, the mind can be free to concentrate on other skills (for instance, making an oral presentation). Memorization includes both short-term and long-term recall and can be improved through practice.

Method

The teacher:

- provides visual and auditory supports to assist with the recall of information;
- communicates a purpose and application for memorizing;
- supports and encourages students;
- sets time lines and guidelines for the amount of information to be memorized.

Considerations

Memorizing:

- should accommodate the way the method of memorizing (e.g., mnemonics or visual organizers) impacts on individual learning styles;
- may involve games, chants, and songs;
- requires a variable amount of time for individual students;
- requires that material to be memorized is relevant, transferable, and applicable to other life situations.

Illustrations

Elementary

- *recall multiplication and division facts to 81 (4m26)*

The teacher asks students to orally rehearse and then write out the multiplication tables, from 1×1 through to 9×9 , to demonstrate their ability to memorize and recall these number facts for subsequent application in solving mathematical problems.

Secondary

- *describe the basic process of cell division, including what happens to the cell membrane and the contents of the nucleus (e.g., stages of mitosis – prophase, metaphase, anaphase, and telophase) (BY1.01)*

Students orally rehearse what is occurring at each stage of mitosis using a series of photographs depicting the stages as a visual cue. Then they repeat the exercise without the cues.

Note Making

Description

Note making is a method of recording and organizing information in one's own words from a variety of sources for comprehension and transfer. This skill may be used for a number of purposes, such as recording information acquired in the inquiry process, recording information obtained when listening to a speaker or a teacher-directed lesson, or organizing ideas in the early stages of the writing process. Making effective notes actively engages students in the listening or research process. Students can use a variety of forms or structures (maps, webs, and outlines) to make the information clear and personally meaningful. Note making ensures better recall of information, encourages inferences and interpretations, and helps identify and synthesize what is important. It is appropriate at all grade levels and subject areas.

Method

The teacher:

- models a variety of strategies and forms for note taking;
- introduces students to methods used by speakers and authors to give cues about the main idea (e.g., headings, signal words, repeating an idea);
- demonstrates to students how to use and create their own short forms when listening and recording;
- introduces techniques for summarizing in one's own words;
- illustrates a variety of note-making forms, such as two-column notes, herringbone/fishbone notes, maps and webs, charts, outlines (see visual/graphic organizers in the Thinking Skill Strategies section of this guide for further information).

Considerations

Note making:

- requires explicit teaching from early grades;
- cannot be assumed as a skill that students have in content areas;
- is a thinking skill, not just a language skill, and is useful in all subject areas;
- may be supported by providing frequent opportunities for students to summarize orally.

Illustrations

Elementary

- *communicate information, using media works, oral presentations, and written notes and descriptions (2z35)*

The students watch a video on trees in Canada. Before the second viewing, the teacher models using point-form notes and quick sketches for recording data. Students are then asked to take their own notes on the video.

Secondary

- *compare electrical energy production technologies, including risks and benefits (PH3.03)*

The teacher presents information on the generation of electricity from various sources – tides, hydro, wind, nuclear, heat, solar, geothermal, fuel cells, biomes, and fossil fuels. Students make notes on the topics as a starting point for research on the conversion of energy to electricity.

Portfolio

Description

Portfolios are authentic collections of student work that demonstrate a student's efforts, progress, and achievement over a period of time. Portfolios can have a specific subject or curriculum focus or can be used more generally to collect examples of best performance either in print, media, or electronic format (booklet, photographs, video, computer disk). Portfolios encourage collaborative assessment with the teacher and develop students' abilities to critically assess their own growth and development. They are a valuable resource for the preparation of anecdotal reports, for parent-teacher interviews, and for assessing program delivery and needs. They also provide consistent opportunities for one-on-one conferencing between the student and teacher. Parents can also become part of the conferencing and goal-setting process with the student and teacher. Portfolios contribute to self-esteem by allowing students to "show" a collection of what they have achieved. (Also see "Portfolios" in the *Assessment Companion: Assessment Strategies*)

Method

The teacher:

- models the components and format of a sample portfolio;
- provides time and encouragement for students to organize their inclusions;
- uses the portfolio for performance review, assessment, and evaluation;
- sets up a regular time to conference with the student to review the contents and set goals;
- assists students in establishing and applying criteria for assessing and evaluating their work.

Considerations

Portfolios:

- require time to be allotted and scheduled for maintenance of the portfolios and for peer and teacher conferencing;
- require solutions for storage (e.g., year by year and over several grades).

Illustrations

Elementary

- *use appropriate vocabulary to describe their inquiries and observations (6z33)*

At the beginning of the unit on Japan, students construct a folder/portfolio in which they keep their completed work, with annotations and reflections for each major component. From the completed work, they choose three pieces to describe to the class.

Secondary

- *outline key aspects of physical, social, emotional, and moral development in adolescence (SO1.01)*

Students prepare an autobiographical project of their life, by using a portfolio to collect photographs, record discussions with family members, and write reflectively about themselves.

Reading Response

Description

Reading response is a strategy whereby students make thoughtful, personal connections with the ideas, language, emotions, and experience in a literary text. Reading response enables students to articulate links to personal experience and to form generalizations from the text for deeper meaning and understanding. It allows students to participate emotionally, intellectually, and reflectively in the reading experience. Although student talk is an important component of the processes of reflecting, connecting, comparing, and challenging assumptions, other forms of response are also encouraged (for example, illustrations, sketches, student questions, letters to the author).

Method

The teacher:

- makes diverse literary experiences available to every student;
- encourages dialogue and discussion after reading;
- allows students to share responses;
- models his or her thoughts and feelings in demonstrations of the various forms of response (e.g., a word collage, significant questions for the author);
- helps students make connections with other ideas, experiences, and texts;
- suggests timely opportunities to respond (e.g., three times throughout the first section of a novel, rather than at the end of each chapter).

Considerations

Reading response:

- requires planning to arrange for discussion and reflection by all students;
- requires additional support for some students;
- encourages students who share similar background knowledge to learn from one another when grouped appropriately;
- can link students personally to literature in ways not possible with other strategies;
- require a teacher to respect the confidentiality of a student's entries/responses while carefully considering thoughts and emotions to which he/she may be compelled to react.

Illustrations

Elementary

- *demonstrate an understanding of the social, political, and economic issues facing Aboriginal peoples in Canada today (6z3)*

Students reflect, relate, and retell George Littlechild’s story “This Land Is My Land” by recording their feelings through writing and drawing.

Secondary

- *explain the factors that contribute to effective business leadership (e.g., vision, goal setting, power, personality traits) (HR1.01)*

Students read three articles that explore the lives and contributions of effective business leaders. Students then discuss their responses to the articles and record their thoughts and questions in their journals for further analysis.

Reflection

Description

Reflection is a thinking process that involves taking time to consider information and making sense of it in light of previous experience. Reflection also involves looking back to evaluate previous experience and learning and to identify possible problems and likely opportunities ahead. It is part of the metacognitive process and, as such, is a complex process that enables deeper thinking. Keeping a journal or response log is a reflective practice that provides opportunities for students to synthesize their thoughts, document their thinking, and become aware of their decision-making and learning process.

Method

The teacher:

- provides time for students to reflect on their learning;
- establishes criteria for students to think through a process or project;
- models thoughtful and reflective teaching practices;
- incorporates wait time (e.g., three to ten seconds) before students respond to a question;
- encourages student to think of the how and why of what they are learning;
- provides structures for students to share their progress, thoughts, perceptions, and behaviours;
- encourages reflective evaluation of strategies, group interactions, and processes used in the classroom.

Considerations

Reflection:

- may foster creative application of learning into students’ everyday lives;
- requires time and opportunity to practise;
- may be the last subtask in a unit after an assessed culminating task.

Illustrations

Elementary

- *describe the significance of drama and dance in their lives (7a74)*

At the beginning and at the end of a unit, students write reflections on their aesthetic experiences in a journal, and compare how their views on the significance of drama and dance in their lives have changed.

Secondary

- *reflect on learning by maintaining a journal and/or practice log to record progress (MA2.03)*

Students reflect on comments written in their art journal, and answer two essential questions: “What does my art say about me?” and “Why is art important to me?” They use vocabulary specific to the art form in their reflective writing.

Report

Description

A report is a text of varied length that is written to document and communicate information on a topic. It is often based on findings as a result of an investigation, inquiry, or research. Reports are used to organize, present, and classify factual information. The content must be expressed in a clear, concise, and objective style using formal and precise language. When reports are about a technical or scientific topic, they contain vocabulary specific to that topic. Reports may be presented orally, but should retain the logical organization and clear language characteristic of a formal written text.

Method

The teacher:

- explains the purposes and forms of reports and how they differ from other kinds of writing;
- models the appropriate format required for the specific type of report;
- provides a context or subject for the report;
- assists the students in determining the audience for the report;
- provides opportunities for writing and editing initial drafts.

Considerations

Reports:

- are effective when they have a clear focus on a specific topic;
- require that students have access to relevant and appropriate information about the topic.

Illustrations

Elementary

- *describe the history, construction, and use of an instrument (7a33)*

Students research a musical instrument of their choice and prepare a brief oral report to present to the class that will address the specific expectation. In the report, students include a sample of music featuring the use of this instrument and a description of their findings.

Secondary

- *identify the human and financial resources necessary to create a venture* (EP2.04)

Students research and produce a written report answering specific questions on the human and financial resources required to create their chosen entrepreneurial venture.

Response Journal

Description

A response journal is a form of writing in which students make thoughtful connections to texts, activities, and experiences. A response journal provides sustained opportunity to explore, analyse, question, interpret, or reflect in order to gain new insights and enriched appreciation or understanding. Response journals may be used in any subject area where students encounter interesting or powerful content, experiences, and ideas. A response journal is the personal processing of the student rather than a restatement or recounting of text. Reading, viewing, or listening to material that has interest to the student, stimulates the use of response journals.

Method

The teacher:

- models and demonstrates by showing and reading published responses;
- instigates discussion after reading or viewing that leads to student thinking and reflection;
- responds to student journal entries;
- arranges for use of student responses in group discussions.

Considerations

Response journals:

- have a designated audience who give validity to the undertaking;
- may defeat their purpose and reduce student interest if overused or too highly structured;
- may be presented in alternative forms (e.g., tapes, pictures, newscasts, films);
- may follow oral discussions and explorations;
- require teacher assistance in connecting and expanding ideas;
- may include illustrations, collage, and sketches;
- require a teacher to respect the confidentiality of a student's entries/responses while carefully considering thoughts and emotions to which he/she may be compelled to react.

Illustrations

Elementary

- *demonstrate an understanding of voice and audience by speaking and writing in role as characters in a story (4a54)*

In their response journals, students write in role as one of the characters from the story. The teacher also responds in role.

Secondary

- *describe information, ideas, opinions, and themes in print and electronic texts they have read during the year (LI1.01D)*

Students prepare a personal response journal on literature, focusing on a particular region or country, specific culture, time in history, theme or motif. They later review their journals and choose one author to profile as an example of a writer whose work has been influenced by his or her background.