

SESSION 1

INDEPENDENT STUDY PLANNER

STEP 1

BRAINSTORMING EXPERIENCE AND TOPIC

TIME 35 minutes

OBJECTIVES

- Students brainstorm and start to identify experience and/or topics as the basis for their Independent Study.
- Students understand steps and processes for systematically developing a project by using the Planner.
- Students build critical thinking skills, and practice explaining ideas and giving rationales.

PLANNER/HANDOUTS

- Complete Planner OR Handout, Independent Study Planner Step 1
- Thinking it Through: Experience and Topics

STEP BY STEP

1. OPENER

Ask if any students have jobs after school, or if they belong to any community organizations, do volunteer work, or take care of siblings.

Discuss what they do, and what they feel they learn from it.

2. PLANNING APPROACH

Explain: Over the next few sessions, you'll turn that experience into Independent Study by getting deliberate about what you're doing, how much time you're putting in, and what and how you're learning from the experience. To work it through, you'll use a Planner which guides through brainstorming, developing a topic, and detailing implementation.

Distribute the Planner. Give students a few minutes to look it over. (If you are using only handouts, distribute Handout Independent Study Planner Step 1.)



3. DEVELOPING TOPICS AND PROJECTS

Tell students: Look at the Planner. The first part asks what kinds of things you already do that you might like to build a project around. The second block gets you started thinking about interests and projects.

Distribute handout, Thinking it Through: Experience and Topics.

Explain: The handout gives two examples, one based on work or experience—in the example, it's taking care of younger children—and one based on digging into an interest area—in the example, it's the environment. Discuss the examples; ask which sounds more interesting, and why.

Ask: Are there areas you want to learn more about, like issues in the community, issues related to young people, college, or career explorations? Maybe you're interested in film, and would like to lead a film club. Or perhaps there are school or community issues you'd like to address, and you'd want to conduct surveys and create an action website.

Tell students: Take 5 minutes to make notes on the Planner with ideas for experience or work-based projects, and/or interest-based projects. Think about projects as learning experiences, and make notes of what you could or would like to learn. After a few minutes, you'll be discussing it with others, and explaining your thinking (that's one of the higher order skills).

4. DISCUSS AND EXPLAIN IDEAS

Ask students to compare notes with others. Give approximately five minutes for students to discuss with each other in pairs or threes.

Ask and discuss: Did anyone come up with experience or interest project ideas? What?

Ask students to explain their ideas and what they might learn.

Discuss: As students give their experience project ideas, ask for comments about what might be learned from the experience, and what other students might like to hear more about. This generates more ideas, and gives students practice thinking critically and explaining reasoning.

Note for students that this is what is meant by "critical thinking, using reasoning, and communicating and explaining thinking,"—all higher level 21st century skills. (Refer to Independent Study Higher Level 21st Century Skills)

5. COMPLETE NOTES FOR DEVELOPING IDEAS; ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO DISCUSS AND BRAINSTORM TOGETHER

6. CHUNKING IT UP: NEXT STEPS

Explain that at the next session, students will begin translating the idea into implementation steps—what to do and the amount of time. From there, they'll get more specific about the learning agenda.

Ask students to think more about their ideas, pick the one they like best, and how it can be fleshed out into a project.



INDEPENDENT STUDY PLANNER

STEP 1

What will you do for Independent Study? Use this worksheet to help generate ideas, pick a direction, and plan the work. Talk it through with other students and the Independent Study Coach.

Keep this worksheet as part of your Portfolio. It shows thinking and planning skills!

TYPE OR AREA OF EXPERIENCE AFTER SCHOOL

Are you involved with afterschool clubs or do you have a job? Do you have family or household responsibilities? Are there projects or volunteer opportunities you'd like to be involved with?

EXPERIENCE AREA	WHAT I COULD LEARN	WHAT I COULD DO (describe more specifically)
Work		
Family		
Clubs/Sports		
Community		
Other		



INTEREST AREA PROJECTS

Make afternoons more interesting by creating an Independent Study project. Lead a film club for other students, write a grant for program funding, or take leadership in making improvements in the school or community.

PROJECT OR TOPIC AREA	WHAT I COULD LEARN	WHAT I COULD DO (describe more specifically)
Film Club		
Grant writing		
Website development		
Environment		
Create a vegetable garden		
Write a guide for immigrant students and parents		
Other		



THINKING IT THROUGH

EXAMPLE 1: KID CARE

WORK OR ACTIVITY: I take care of my little brother and sister

HOW MUCH TIME: About 10 hours a week

WHAT COULD YOU LEARN?

- How to be a good sister or a good parent
- How children grow and what they need to grow up well
- Child development
- Nutrition and health

WHAT COULD YOU DO?

- Learn more about child development or child psychology
- See if I can tell what stages and behaviors my sister and brother show
- Give examples of what I should do as a good parent or good sister or brother to help them grow up well
- Find out what other people my age think good parenting, big-sistering or big-brothering is
- Prepare a position paper on, what young adults should learn and know about little kids and how to raise them
- Do a set of skits on little kid behavior and parent or sibling responses

EXAMPLE 2: ENVIRONMENT

INTEREST AREA TOPIC: Taking care of the environment

HOW MUCH TIME CAN YOU PUT IN?

About 10 hours per week

WHAT COULD YOU LEARN?

- How to clean up the environment
- Things to do in my neighborhood that would make a difference
- Why it's important to take care of the environment
- Which organizations or companies are committed to this cause
- What is already in place
- What materials are considered "green" or environmentally safe

WHAT COULD YOU DO?

- Learn more about causes of pollution
- Organize a group of my friends to clean up a park
- Make and distribute flyers about the importance of recycling
- Prepare a research paper that reflects my position on cleaning up the planet
- Give a PowerPoint® presentation of neighborhood areas showing environmental distress, and areas that are positive for the environment.

