

# OPENING SESSION

# INTRODUCTION

## WHAT'S INDEPENDENT STUDY AND LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE?

**TIME** 30 minutes

### OBJECTIVES

- Students understand the concept, expectations and opportunities of the Independent Study process.
- Students understand how Independent Study will be judged by using a Portfolio of Work that documents learning, instead of by a written test.
- Students become conscious of processes of taking responsibility for their own learning.
- Students learn the strategy of handling complex projects by chunking them up into smaller parts.

### HANDOUTS

- What's Independent Study and Learning from Experience?  
What's a Portfolio of Work?
- Contract

## STEP BY STEP

### 1. OPENER

**Ask:** Has anyone worked on an Independent Study project for school? What?

**Explain:** Independent Study is common in college, but not as much in high school. It's a way to do work and learn on your own, in an area of your own choosing.

**Ask:** What does it mean to 'learn from experience'?  
People sometimes say, 'life is the best teacher.'  
Employers pay a great deal of attention to work experience. Why?  
**Discuss** learning from experience.

**Explain** that students will have the opportunity to use their experience as a basis for learning. They'll take work or activities they do after school, or an interest they have, pick an Independent Study focus, develop a project, and document it.

Be clear about whether, and how, satisfactory completion of the project will earn academic credit for the student. Explain how much credit, and that you will discuss criteria for satisfactory work.



## 2. PROJECT OVERVIEW: THE BIG PICTURE AND WHERE STUDENTS ARE HEADED

**Explain:** To turn the topic or activity into an Independent Study project, students will develop an Independent Study project plan, agree on the scope of work and sign a contract, keep records, and actively think about what they're learning. There may also be a research component, or other elements. In the end, students will submit a Portfolio of Work that shows what they've done, and will make a presentation to the group.

**Note** that this is a complex project with several parts. At college, in life, and at work, managing schedules, responsibilities, work loads, and deliverables, is complex. Being able to do this well demands sets of skills. By doing Independent Study, students develop and apply these skills.

**Explain:** A good strategy for handling a complex project is to break it into chunks. You give each chunk the time and attention it needs, and go step by step. That's what we'll be doing with this project. Over four or five sessions, we'll do the planning that's needed for completing the Contract, and go through the pieces needed for completing the Independent Study project. We'll start with the big picture overview, then get into the implementation and groundwork.

**Distribute** the handout, What's Independent Study and Learning from Experience? Tell students to review the top part on Independent Study, and to discuss it in pairs for a few minutes.

**Ask** if there are any questions or comments about the overall idea of Independent Study.

## 3. ASSESSING INDEPENDENT STUDY

**Ask:** In school, how do you know if you've learned a subject? How do teachers know if students are learning?

**Discuss** what it means to 'demonstrate learning.'

**Explain:** Tests can show whether you've learned some things. But what kind of test is there for experience or projects? How do you know if someone has learned to ride a bike or drive a car? [Allow time for responses.]

**Explain** that with Independent Study, the 'test' is the doing—which you show with the record and logs of time—and also the demonstrations of what you learned—which you show with a Portfolio of Work and a presentation to the group.

This would be like logging the number of lessons and hours you spent learning to drive, keeping a journal on how you were doing after each driving lesson, and then showing a video to the group of you driving a car.

For course credit, you might add a research paper on driving in different countries, how in some cultures women aren't allowed to drive, and different rules of the road.

**Tell students** to review the section of the handout, "What's the Portfolio of Work?" Give them a few minutes to read it and discuss in pairs.



**Ask and discuss:** Do you think the higher level 21<sup>st</sup> century skills listed are important? When you think about college, work, or careers, which skills do you think are most important? Why?

How do you develop these skills? Do you develop them in school? In classes?

How would you show an employer or a college admissions office that you have any of these skills?

#### 4. CHUNKING IT UP: NEXT STEPS

**Explain:** At the next session, you'll start brainstorming and planning for a project, using a Planner to help structure the thinking. You'll spend a couple of sessions on the planning, which then becomes the basis for filling out the Contract.

**Distribute** the Contract.

**Explain:** The Contract spells out the terms of agreement about what you'll do, how you'll document it, and what's expected for earning credit. This will be completed in a few weeks, based on the work you do over the next several sessions. The Contract then goes into the Portfolio of Work.

Ask if there are any questions.

Ask students to think about areas of interest, work, or afterschool activities for the next session.



# WHAT'S INDEPENDENT STUDY & LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE?

**G**et credit for real life experience by turning your activities or work after school into an Independent Study project. You choose your activity, work, or project. To show the learning, you create a Portfolio of Work. Do it well, and earn Independent Study credit.

Independent study is common in college, but not in high school. Take advantage of this chance to build skills for success now—and for later!

- Gain valuable school credit
- Learn from doing, not just reading about it
- Build your resumé
- Have fun working with friends

## WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO DO? STEP BY STEP....

1. Identify afterschool activities that you learn from, such as a job, sports, clubs, child care, volunteering, or other. Or, think of issues or topics you're interested in, such as the environment, social justice, immigration, music, technology, sports, health, etc.
2. Spell out a learning agenda and develop a plan of action
3. Create and sign an Independent Study Contract that details what you'll do
4. Document what you do and the hours you spend
5. Meet with the Independent Study Coach or a peer study group once per week
6. Keep a Portfolio of Work with required documents
7. Submit the Portfolio for review for credit
8. Demonstrate and present your Independent Study learning



## WHAT'S THE PORTFOLIO OF WORK?

The Portfolio is a compilation of documents and records that show what you've done, from the beginning planning stage, to the reviews, to the final presentation.

The Portfolio shows your ability in the **higher level 21<sup>st</sup> century skills** needed to succeed in college and to advance in careers. These include the ability to:

- Think creatively
- Develop a project, plan it, and follow-through independently
- Think critically about how the work is going, what you are getting out of it, and what may need to change
- Direct and lead your own learning, time, and effort
- Critically assess with others the quality of your work
- Take initiative
- Be accountable for deliverables
- Provide clear explanations, evidence, opinions, and rationales in writing and in presentations
- Use various means of communication effectively

## WHAT'S IN THE PORTFOLIO OF WORK?

The contents of the Portfolio will be determined by the project, but would typically include some or all of the following, which will be agreed upon and noted in the Independent Study Contract.

- Independent Study Planner, showing initial brainstorming, thinking, and planning processes
- Independent Study Contract, showing commitment to the project, ability to clearly define the project, allocate time, specify tasks and activities, and understand requirements and accountability
- Time Logs, showing actual hours spent, with sign-offs as appropriate, demonstrating effort, reliability, and consistency, as well as accountability
- Reflections showing development and extension of learning beyond the doing of the activity, as well as ability to think critically about progress and revisions, if needed
- Research Component, with evidence of deepening the learning, and demonstrating ability to find reliable and relevant sources of information
- Mid-point Assessment documenting an assessment meeting, and showing self-assessment of progress, critical review with others of the project and the quality of work, and the ability to receive and use feedback
- Assessment Rubric showing application of judgment criteria to the work
- Plan for the demonstration or presentation to the group
- Other items you select to demonstrate work, learning, or skills, or other items required by the school for awarding credit



# INDEPENDENT STUDY CONTRACT

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Homeroom (class designation or ID #): \_\_\_\_\_

## 1. INDEPENDENT STUDY WORK, ACTIVITY, OR PROJECT

Description \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

## 2. AMOUNT OF TIME

Total hours and schedule \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

## 3. LEARNING AGENDA

Objectives (knowledge, skills to gain) \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

Research question(s) \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

## 4. DEMONSTRATION OF LEARNING

---

---

---

---

### INITIAL IDEAS FOR DEMONSTRATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

This should be revisited and can be changed at the mid point assessment.

---

---

---

---

---



## AGREEMENT LEARNER

I agree to complete the above outlined work to the best of my ability.

I understand that to qualify for credit, the Portfolio of Work must contain (complete where applicable):

ITEM	TARGET DATE	COMPLETED
1. Planner (Handouts Step—)		
2. Time Log (specify frequency)		
3. Record of check-ins with dates and notes		
4. Mid-point Assessment plus reflection		
5. Reflections (specify number of frequency)		
6. Notes from study group		
7. Assessment		
8. Other Items		

### INDEPENDENT STUDY COACH AGREES TO:

- ☐ Be available to discuss work/project/portfolio conditions, progress and problems
- ☐ Provide guidance for Portfolio pieces or other records
- ☐ Review experience and learning with learner on agreed schedule and as needed
- ☐ Attend the presentation
- ☐ Assess the quality of the work with the student
- ☐ Communicate with classroom teachers as needed
- ☐ Provide classroom teacher with recommendations for the award of credit

### TEACHER AGREES TO:

- ☐ Establish clear requirements and standards for the award of credit
- ☐ Establish the amount of credit
- ☐ Provide supporting materials needed to complete requirements (e.g. texts, readings, computer access)
- ☐ Provide, as possible, feedback and support for student learning
- ☐ Maintain communication with Independent Study Coach

### AGREED BY:

_____	_____	_____	_____
Learner	Date	Independent Study Coach	Date
_____	_____	_____	_____
Teacher		Principal	