

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK WITH SCHOOL

CHAPTER 2



INTRODUCTION

Independent Study is a dynamic opportunity to engage young people in developing and applying 21st century, workforce, and college-readiness skills, including:

- Critical thinking
- Self-directed learning and responsibility
- Time management, productivity, and accountability
- Communication—including reading, writing, speaking, and listening

The core of Independent Study is active, structured learning from experience. Students may build upon work or projects they do outside of school, such as paid jobs, volunteer work, fulfilling family responsibilities, or clubs. Or they may choose to develop a project specifically for Independent Study, such as starting a film club, leading an environmental activity, or maintaining a blog on youth health issues.

From this core of experience, students identify a learning agenda, create an implementation plan, commit to a work contract, then carry it out. Reviews, check-in, reflections, study groups, and assessments develop the learning. Additional academic elements such as a research component may be incorporated.

Higher Level 21st Century Skills in Action (see page 4), details specific skills, and is used throughout the sessions to build students' vocabulary and understanding of these skills as recognized, important skills to develop.

To do Independent Study well, students and staff both must commit to the work, and to meeting the standards required for earning academic credit.

EARNING CREDIT

As in college, Independent Study is a way for students to earn credit for academic work and learning conducted outside the classroom. Different schools, however, have different ways of determining what is eligible for what types of credit.

Establish the meaning of 'credit,' and the standards and requirements for earning the credit, before launching Independent Study.



Before the program begins:

1. Secure buy-in from the school principal and teachers. Share the details of 21st century, college-readiness skills so teachers and leaders understand the value of this innovative opportunity for building skills and academic support.
2. Establish clear agreement on 'credit' among the principal, relevant teachers, and staff.
 - Is credit subject-based? If so, what will the teacher require?
 - Is credit equivalent to a certain number of points added to a grade? If so, how many points? What is required? Does it apply to a subject?
 - Is credit applied to electives?
 - Can Independent Study be used to fulfill service learning requirements? If so, what is required to make it apply?
3. Establish clear agreement among the principal, the teachers, and staff about the level of work that earns credit, the required elements, and the assessment.
 - Show teachers the elements of the Portfolio of Work, and discuss whether it aligns with the credit value.
 - Clarify and specify the number of Reflections to include, and/or how often they should be done.
 - Determine whether and what additional elements need to be included, such as a research or further writing component. For example, if subject-based credit will be awarded, should particular material be required? If credit is in English, should there be specified readings?
 - Show teachers the Assessment Rubric (template provided in Portfolio Documents). Discuss whether it provides acceptable criteria for assessing the work for the award of credit. If not, make additions or changes to align with school standards.
 - Discuss and establish whether the teacher or principal will conduct an additional assessment of the work, beyond that completed in the Independent Study project. If so, be clear about requirements.
4. Spell out the resources and supports available from teachers or the school, such as textbooks, consultations, reviews, computers, Internet access, or books. For example:
 - If students are required to do research, will they have access to the Internet? When?
 - If students are required to do particular readings, will the material be provided? When?
 - When will teachers be available for support, reviews or comments?
 - Will teachers attend presentations?
 - Will teachers review the Portfolio of Work?
 - How should communication be structured to ensure that students have the resources and support needed to be successful?



ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN COMMUNICATION

Independent Study is a coordinated partnership between school and afterschool that allows young people additional, expanded learning opportunities. Like all partnerships, this requires ongoing communication among those involved.

All parties must be clear about what each is bringing to the mix of supports for students' learning and development, and maintain open and ongoing communication.

- Establish points of contact for the project in the school and in afterschool.
- Determine the best way to communicate, whether on a schedule or as-needed basis.
- Concretize the understandings and commitments. Develop a contract (templates provided) among students, staff, and teachers, to demonstrate the adults' commitment to the student and to clarify expectations. The customizable contracts included in this Guide may serve as a basis for discussion; make changes as needed before printing and signing.

INDEPENDENT STUDY: HIGHER LEVEL 21ST CENTURY SKILLS IN ACTION

CRITICAL THINKING

1. Reason effectively. Use different kinds of thinking, drawing on different kinds of evidence. Find similarities, patterns, differences, compare, make observations, draw develop concepts, ideas, and conclusions.
2. Collect and consider range of views. Gather, listen to, evaluate, and integrate into analysis of diverse points of view.
3. Question effectively. Develop and ask significant questions that clarify information, deepen understanding, and lead to greater knowledge or better solutions.
4. Analyze. Consider, test, weigh, and evaluate evidence and information, including facts, contexts, arguments, and opinions. Determine how pieces interact with and affect each other.
5. Reflect on experience. Draw on evidence from lived practice and experience to inform thinking, new learning, and processes.
6. Make reasoned judgments and decisions. Assess information, form opinions, draw conclusions, and make decisions.
7. Solve problems. Identify and recognize problems; apply reason and strategic thinking to address and solve problems.



INDEPENDENT STUDY: HIGHER LEVEL 21ST CENTURY SKILLS IN ACTION

INITIATIVE, SELF-DIRECTION, AND LEADERSHIP

1. Develop goals and outcomes. Set goals with short, medium, and long-term time frames, and identify criteria for success, targets, results, outcomes, and/or products associated with different time horizons.
2. Work independently. Define, prioritize, monitor progress, and complete tasks without direct oversight.
3. Manage time. Balance short, medium, and long term goals, analyze time requirements to reach results, and manage workload to reach maximum results efficiently.
4. Develop knowledge and skills through self-directed learning. Actively and independently expand and deepen learning and experience to gain greater knowledge and understanding, to master skills, and to advance personally and professionally.
5. Guide, lead, and inspire others. Identify and use strengths of others to accomplish shared goals, demonstrate by example the highest standards of work and achievement, and use interpersonal and problem-solving skills to influence, inspire, and guide others to achieve outcomes.
6. Demonstrate accountability as a leader. Adhere to the highest ethical standards, use influence and power for the benefit of achieving the best possible results, and act responsibly in the interest of the larger community.

PRODUCTIVITY, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND RESPONSIBILITY

1. Manage projects to achieve goals. Prioritize, manage time, and align efforts to achieve goals, whether single or multiple projects.
2. Fulfill responsibilities. Follow through with agreed-upon work and schedules, adhere to highest standards of ethics and professionalism, fulfill responsibilities to teams, and demonstrate reliability and punctuality.
3. Commit to achieving goals and results. Assume appropriate responsibility and accountability for reaching goals, outcomes, and results, whether in individual or team projects.
4. Conduct oneself professionally. Work respectfully, positively, collaboratively, and cooperatively, and present oneself with the appropriate etiquette for the culture and situation.



INDEPENDENT STUDY: HIGHER LEVEL 21ST CENTURY SKILLS IN ACTION

1. Express thoughts and ideas clearly in diverse contexts. Use written, spoken, non-verbal, media, and technology-mediated methods appropriately, skillfully, and effectively in a variety of settings with diverse (including linguistically) populations.
2. Listen effectively. Listen carefully, respectfully, and analytically to understand information, viewpoints, values, emotions, and intentions.
3. Communicate purposefully. Understand the purpose of communication (to inform, instruct, motivate, inspire, persuade, etc.), and use appropriate content and methods.
4. Interact effectively. Know when it is appropriate and useful to listen and when to speak, monitor and assess processes and results of communication, and use technology-mediated interaction skillfully.
5. Work with diverse teams. Work productively and respectfully with people of different cultures, with different beliefs and viewpoints, and from different backgrounds.
6. Collaborate effectively. Assume shared responsibility for outcomes, listen and contribute respectfully and effectively, demonstrate flexibility and ability to compromise, and leverage different contributions to create, innovate, and lead to high quality results.

