

Toolkit

Pedagogic Method

9 – Self-directed Learning

The Facilitator Guide



Self-Directed Learning

There are understood to be four key stages to independent learning, known as self-directed learning: being ready to learn, setting learning goals, engaging in the learning process, and evaluating learning.

The following will guide educators through the four stages.

Step 1: Assess readiness to learn

Students at the start of their course may need more support throughout a self-directed project than students at a more advanced level, who may be more confident to work independently. A set brief can be provided to students at a beginner or intermediate level, whereas more advanced students should define a brief for themselves, in consultation with their tutor.

Key signs of readiness for self-directed learning include being autonomous, organised, self-disciplined, able to communicate effectively, and able to accept constructive feedback and engage in self-evaluation and self-reflection.

It is important to give guidance to students to assist with organisation and self-evaluation, and if working in a team scenario guidance on skills for collaboration, such as communication and negotiation may also be necessary.

Step 2: Set learning goals

Communication of learning goals between a student and/or student group and the tutor is critical. As an initial activity students should outline the following:

- Aims and objectives for the project
- Structure and sequence of activities
- Timeline for completion of activities
- Details about resources/materials for each activity

This can be formalised as a learning contract which ensures both the students and tutor have a clear understanding of learning goals. Once created, contracts should be assessed by the tutor and questions about feasibility should be raised (e.g., what could go wrong? Is there too much or too little work? Is the timeline and evaluation reasonable?). This is an important tool for student organisation and time management and can be used as a reference point throughout the project to assess progress.

Please refer to the Student Learning Contract template.

Step 3: Engage in the learning process

Students need to understand their approach to studying:

- A deep approach to studying involves transformation and is ideal for self-directed learning. This approach is about understanding ideas for yourself, applying knowledge to new situations and using novel examples to explain a concept, and learning more than is required for unit completion.
- A surface approach involves reproduction: coping with unit requirements, learning only what is required to complete a unit in good standing, and tending to regurgitate examples and explanations used in readings.



- A strategic approach involves organization: achieving the highest possible grades, learning what is required to pass exams, memorizing facts, and spending time practicing from past exams.

Earlier academic work may have encouraged a surface or strategic approach to studying. These approaches will not be sufficient for successful independent study. Independent study requires a deep approach to studying, in which students must understand ideas and be able to apply knowledge to new situations. Students need to generate their own connections and be their own motivators.

Tutors should act as a guide or advisor through this process, rather than instructor. As such, contact throughout the learning process should take form as one-to-one or small group tutorials.

Step 4: Evaluate learning

For students to be successful in self-directed learning, they must be able to engage in self-reflection and self-evaluation of their learning goals and progress. To support this self-evaluation process, they should:

- Regularly consult with the advising instructor
- Seek feedback
- Engage in reflection of their achievements

Please refer to the Student Self-Evaluation template.

Responsibilities in the four-step process

Successful independent study requires certain responsibilities or roles of both students and tutors. The following is a brief list of the more important roles.

Students' roles:

- Self-assess your readiness to learn
- Define your learning goals and develop a learning contract
- Monitor your learning process
- Take initiative for all stages of the learning process — be self-motivated
- Re-evaluate and alter goals as required during your unit of study
- Consult with your advising instructor as required

Educators' roles:

- Build a co-operative learning environment
- Help to motivate and direct the students' learning experience
- Facilitate students' initiatives for learning
- Be available for consultations as appropriate during the learning process
- Serve as an advisor rather than a formal instructor

Adapted from [Centre for Teaching Excellence](#).

