



Independent learning

While schools are experiencing unprecedented circumstances, there is a lot more independent learning taking place. It is important to support students, so they have the motivation to engage with tasks and activities while they are on their own.

You should plan for independent learning online in a similar way to planning for the classroom. Make sure you provide appropriate levels of guidance for independent learning tasks so that your learners feel challenged, but can achieve the learning outcomes you want for them.

What do your learners have at home?

In order to set work that is achievable, it is important that you understand the circumstances in which your learners are studying. Consider the resources that they and their families may have at home.

Where do your learners do their work? What devices do they have access to? When and where do they have access to a computer and/or a printer? What software do they have access to? What parental support is available? What distractions will they experience?

This is an opportunity to engage our learners and to encourage them to take a more creative and personalised approach to learning using the resources they have in their homes.

'Scaffolding' independent learning

Scaffolding is when the teacher provides appropriate guidance and support to enable students to build progressively on their current level of understanding to acquire confidence and independence in using new knowledge or skills. Scaffolding independent learning will ensure that all your students will be able to engage with the learning.

Think about how you will break the learning into smaller, more manageable tasks and activities. To allow students to work more effectively and flexibly, you could offer tasks that slowly increase the level of challenge. Some learners may want to tackle the hardest option first whilst others may need more time to build to this level. Consider setting flexible time limits for completion, so that learners can adapt their learning pace to the task and the circumstances they are experiencing at home.

If you would like learners to write a longer, extended piece of writing or do an exam question then this is an opportunity to think about the skills they need to do this. Do learners need



a framework, or perhaps a model answer, for example? How do they construct a plan for their essay or extended piece of writing? You could provide some tasks to support learners in understanding command words and essay structure and think about whether learners need to revise important content before they attempt a more extended piece of writing. Providing opportunities for revision and planning means that learners can use prior knowledge in a more independent way.

How and where can your learners ask for help?

Think about how learners can ask questions if they are struggling. Will your students be able to email you or can you set up an online forum where learners can post questions? Make sure you give clear instructions on how and when they can contact you and how quickly they can expect a response from you.

If appropriate, it often helps to put learners into small 'self-help' groups and encourage them to ask each other for

Independent learning continued

answers before they ask you. If you find that many of the questions are similar or have common themes then it may be useful to email the whole class with a summary of the most frequently asked questions and answers.

Research-based activities

Think about the purpose and style of the independent learning. Is this task a research opportunity, where learners will eventually use what they find out in a bigger piece of work? If so, you could initially suggest some websites that may be useful. As learners get more familiar with independent research tasks, you can ask them to evaluate whether these websites are relevant. It may also be useful to host a webinar or create a PowerPoint about how to research successfully.

Give your learners choices. You can support learners to take ownership of their learning by encouraging them to make

decisions about what to study, which tasks to complete, and when. You could also ask learners to set their own goals for what they might want to achieve.

Project work

Consider setting project-based or investigation work. You can create a range of smaller tasks on a theme or topic that learners can engage with in different ways, such as creating posters, presentations, videos, as well as written pieces. This can also foster a sense of independence as learners decide which tasks to do first and how they will submit their completed work.

You can also use extension tasks to motivate your learners. This will give them opportunities to investigate a topic more deeply and discover different perspectives on an issue they have studied. Encourage your learners to be creative and curious with what they want to explore and how.

