



Independent Learning Policy

At Isaac Newton Academy our aim is to equip every student with the knowledge, learning power and character necessary for success at university and beyond. Supporting students through a comprehensive and effective independent learning programme

- provides students with opportunities to refine and extend their knowledge, skills and BRIDGES characteristics
- helps them to acquire the habits of mind needed to study and learn independently (as required in higher education)
- increases students' chances of securing top examination grades (research suggests that the more independent learning a student does, the better their achievement)
- teaches students the benefits of application, self-motivation, initiative and resourcefulness, essential in all walks of life
- enhances the classroom experience for students and teachers.

Effective and routine Independent Learning is essential for ensuring a continuous, positive loop whereby the classroom experience sparks curiosity, leading to independent learning which informs the next lesson. Once the cycle operates seamlessly, students acquire knowledge, learning power and character.

At KS5 for every hour of class learning, students will be set at least one hour of independent study. This equates to at least five hours of independent learning outside of the class per subject per week. In addition, students should review their notes and learning on a daily basis. Independent learning tasks will include research and note-taking, essays, practice exercises, practical tasks, practice exam questions and note taking. It will also include specific preparation/reading work to be undertaken before the next lesson.

The nature of tasks set

Teachers give careful consideration to the tasks they set and their purpose. Independent Learning tasks are never set as an after-thought; they are an integral part of the week's lesson planning. Activities set are never just "finishing off" tasks (although they may be completion of activities started in class if this is pre-planned.)

It is the role of the teacher to explain the exact purpose of an independent learning task to the students and to ensure that it is recorded by them in their student organisers. The Independent Learning is then used by the teacher as a springboard for the next lesson's learning.

Researchers recommend that Independent Learning tasks are varied and that, where possible, choice is offered, for example in the task undertaken or the way that research is presented.

Four common and effective types of independent learning are:

1. **Preparation:** Some independent learning is designed to prepare the student for the next lesson, for example the teacher may get students to research the concept of global warming prior to systematically studying it in class or a group may be required to read the next chapters of a novel in preparation for a Harkness discussion. This type of independent learning is crucial to the practice of students playing a proactive role in and having responsibility for the effectiveness of the learning activities of lessons. At Isaac Newton Academy all students are expected to come to every lesson fully prepared for the discussion and tasks to be undertaken, having completed any pre-reading, being fully equipped with the information required for activities they will participate in and having given thought to the concepts that will be further explored (see Teaching and Learning Policy). For their part, teachers come to every lesson prepared to draw out from students the lesson learnt from their Independent Learning.
2. **Practice:** Some independent learning tasks provide students with an opportunity to practice a skill. These tasks are designed to provide the opportunity for increasing speed and improving accuracy and fluency. When independent learning is assigned for the purposes of practice, it should be structured around content with which the students have a high degree of familiarity. Practising a skill with which a student is unfamiliar is not only inefficient but might also serve to habituate errors or misconceptions. Skills should be learnt to the level that students can perform them quickly and accurately. To facilitate skill development, students should be encouraged to keep track of their speed and accuracy. Research tells us that it is not until students have practiced upwards of about 24 times that they reach 80% competency. Practice needs to be deliberate, focused practice to ensure mastery. Hattie (2011) calls this 'overlearning': this is 'what happens when we reach a stage of knowing what to do without thinking about it, reducing the load on our thinking and cognition, allowing us to attend to new ideas.'
3. **Elaboration** on what has been learnt in class. This type of independent learning is designed to apply and reinforce knowledge gained & concepts learnt in class to ensure that the student processes the information in order to deepen their understanding. It enables the teacher to gauge the level of the student's confidence with new information and depth of understanding.
4. **Exploration:** This provides an opportunity for students to explore topics of their own interest and delve into an area of study in more detail than time allows for in the curriculum, so broadening their knowledge. It affords students the opportunity and space to become expert researchers and to report back to their peers is important. It is excellent preparation for students to take the lead as 'teacher' in lessons e.g. conducting an experiment or giving a demonstration. Exploration tasks allow teachers to stretch students (and themselves!) and encourage them to engage in further reading and teacher challenges. They are an excellent way to extend students towards A and A* grades.

Teachers are expected to give careful thought to differentiation of independent learning tasks to maximise their impact on students' progress and learning. Activities should be challenging and serve to stretch students, but not so difficult that they cannot be completed independently with a relatively high success rate. Activities must be accessible to students at differing attainment levels.

Increasingly, students will be expected to extend their learning around their subjects. There should be access to an abundance of high quality reading and further study relevant to the subject at A level standard and beyond, for instance, research papers, journals, literary criticism and videos. Each subject will provide students with a differentiated reading/extension activity list and guidance as to how these materials can be used effectively. The emphasis will be on developing broader contextual understanding and areas of personal interest in preparation for higher education.

Resources to Support Independent Learning

A: Completing Independent Learning in the INA sixth form study areas & library

All students are welcome to take advantage of the sixth form library and silent study areas as ideal spaces in which to complete independent learning tasks. The library is open before school from 8am and each evening until 6pm. There is always a member of staff on hand to facilitate independent learning. In 2001, research by MacBeath, Kirwan and Myers (University of Strathclyde) showed that students who attended homework clubs gained on average one extra GCSE grade C+ and that attendance had a favourable effect on attitudes to school.

B: Use of Music Practice Rooms

Students are encouraged to make use of the 7 practice rooms before school, at lunchtime and after school to practice their musical instrument.

C: Use of ICT resources and Independent Learning Software

Students are encouraged to use pcs in the independent study room, T03 and the Library before school, during lunchtimes and after school to access independent learning software, to access resources on the Academy's VLE and to engage in discussion in on-line forums. Students are also permitted to use their own electric devices in designated sixth form areas, including the sixth form common room.

Setting Independent Learning Tasks

Staff set Independent Learning activities at the most logical point in the lesson, but never in a rush at the end. They are expected to ensure that every student has recorded the full details of the task set in their student organiser, including the purpose of the task and the 'due in' date. IL stretch tasks are available for each scheme of learning on Fronter to extend high attaining students.

Monitoring the recording and completion of Independent Learning Tasks

KS5 students will be required to develop the organisational and independent study skills to enable them to cope with the level and quantity of learning required for success at KS5 and beyond. KS5 students are expected to manage their independent study time in order to ensure that all learning is

completed promptly and to the highest standard. Students are provided with a Student Diary to support their organisational skills.

Students should be proactive in their response to any difficulties in completing independent learning, initially seeking solutions independently and/or collaboratively with their peers, but then, if necessary, actively seeking help from staff to address any difficulties.

Through our programme of academic monitoring and support, we will identify students who are not undertaking sufficient independent study, producing independent learning of a sufficiently high quality or depth or who are not managing their workload well. The PLs and sixth form tutors will work closely with subject departments and, if necessary, parents and also offer guidance and support through our tutorial system.

Middle and Senior Leaders conduct book looks, student organiser checks, Fronter checks and student interviews to monitor the implementation of the Independent Learning Policy.

Discussion of Independent Learning Activities

At Isaac Newton Academy all staff engage in learning dialogues with students. They encourage students to see the importance of Independent Learning and to support them with it by finding opportunities to discuss the activities they are engaged in, for example when on break duty, having lunch with students or supporting them in the Library, through on-line forums and discussion groups.

Feedback on Independent Learning Activities

If Independent Learning is assigned it should always be commented on by the teacher. Walberg's study of 1999 found that the effects of independent learning vary greatly, depending on the feedback that the teacher provides. He maintained that homework assigned but not commented on generates an effect of 0.28. When graded, the effect size increases to 0.78. Homework on which the teacher provides written comments for students has an effect size of 0.83. All teachers at Isaac Newton Academy are expected to provide feedback on **all** independent learning completed (see Assessment For Learning policy).

Consequences of failing to submit an independent learning task by the deadline

If a student experiences difficulty in completing an Independent Learning task he/she is expected to see the teacher who set the activity before the day when it is due in for assistance/clarification. Should a student arrive to a lesson without completed IL or with IL of it is not of a sufficiently high quality, the teacher should record it on eportal. The student will be expected to attend compulsory study at the end of the school day. Failure to complete IL or to produce quality IL on 3 occasions in a term will lead to withdrawal of privileges to study off site and he/she will be expected to attend supervised study after school. Failure to complete IL or to produce quality IL on 5 occasions in a term will lead to a student being placed on probation.

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