

Studying in the Sixth Form and Being an Independent Learner

In the Sixth Form you will have more individual freedom and your academic life will be less structured than before. This is a very positive thing if approached responsibly, but it is easy to lose sight of your priorities. You will certainly need to organise your work. Staff will expect work to be completed on time and to a high standard. It should not be left until the last minute, but should be done efficiently during private study periods in school or at home; and you will have to do work at weekends as well as during the week in order to perform well. Moreover, **the work set by your teachers is a minimum: wide background reading is necessary in each subject** if you expect to do well. There is a big jump from GCSEs to A-levels and not everyone appreciates just how much work is needed in order to thrive at this level. A-levels are not GCSEs! However innately talented you may be, there is no substitute for hard work. The students who appreciate that and put in the work find the whole Sixth Form experience much more rewarding and get much better results! Your attitude to your studies will colour your experience of Sixth Form life and affect the grades you get. **It is therefore important for you to think about how you can become an independent learner – something that will be invaluable to you now, at university, to your employer later and throughout your career.**

What is independent learning?

Independent: Not reliant on the support of others; capable of acting for oneself on one's own

Learning: The art of gaining knowledge

Independent learning is therefore the art of gaining knowledge on one's own, without relying on the support of others.

If you are an independent learner you will:

1. be motivated to learn
2. manage your own time
3. reflect on your learning

These attributes will enable you to become a successful learner and should also provide you with some insight into how you learn and how you can achieve through learning. This will encourage you to continue learning.

1. Motivated to learn	2. Manage your time	3. Reflect on your learning
• You need to take responsibility for your own learning • Set yourself challenging goals • Don't procrastinate. It is easy to just <i>talk</i> about working and easy to put things off. A motivated learner will get on and actually do the work she needs to do	• Actively identify what is important to you in your studies and prioritise your work • Balance your studies with your social life and other interests • Use your time effectively and know where the resources are that you need • Understand how you learn best	• Develop your ability to reflect on your own progress (and be honest with yourself about how you are doing) • Record how you are developing a wide range of skills • Think about what feedback you need from your teachers and how to use it

Being responsible for your own learning

The table below indicates some of the features that differentiate independent from dependent learning. As you can see, the ‘independent learner’ shows greater responsibility for her own learning.

Your learning	Dependent Learner	Independent Learner
Motivation to learn	You predominantly respond to the pressures of the system through deadlines, penalties & marks.	You respond to the external pressures, but you are also seeking personal satisfaction and want to learn as much as you can.
What you learn	The content and resources are determined by your teachers.	Although your teachers have given guidance on the resources you need, you happily seek out your own resources and do wider reading.
Managing your learning	You follow your teacher’s instructions to the letter and don’t go much beyond that. You find that sufficient.	You are keen to develop personal strategies for learning. You regard your teacher’s instructions as just a starting point.
Reflection on your learning	You find little opportunity in your studies to do this.	You are keen to reflect on what and how you learn.

Your teachers can only do so much. It is up to you to be prepared to take full advantage of what is on offer.

Are you motivated to study?

Success and the feeling of achievement is very motivating. It is therefore important to identify what strategies you already have in place to do well in your studies, as well as finding new strategies that will help you to achieve.

Setting goals

A good strategy for achievement is to set yourself challenging, but attainable goals and to break down tasks into manageable chunks. In your studies, your assignment goals are set by your teacher, but **you** have the control on **how** to break the task down into manageable sub-goals. Are you doing this?

Leaving things to the last minute

When you are having difficulty with assignments you may find yourself procrastinating regularly. If this happens, you need to think about why you are doing this and how you can overcome it. Make sure you have broken down assignments into manageable chunks, as having a large assignment as the only goal makes it a very daunting task. There may be other reasons for procrastinating: are you sure what you have to do? Have you read enough? Are you just finding it difficult to get started? Identify what is making you put things off and do something about it.

Managing your Time

Managing your time is vital to keeping on top of your work, and to making the most of your studies and your time in the Sixth Form. Time management entails an analysis of the jobs you have to do within a given time period. To do this effectively you need to plan your activities; creating prioritised ‘to do’ lists may help you do this. However, time management is more than just identifying tasks and planning how to carry them out. You also need to make room for your wider goals in life: other interests and commitments, including relationships, friends and family – you need a balance. You can take charge of how you allocate time for all the activities you are involved in.

- Start by drawing up a timetable of your commitments
- Allocate times that you can use for personal study time & allow time to reflect on your studies
- Don’t let paid employment interfere with your work (don’t do more than 8 hours paid employment per week: ideally at weekends and not during weekday evenings)
- **Be realistic** and try to develop a pattern of activities so that you eventually just go with the flow of your own timetable. Making lots of changes to your timetable merely gives you the opportunity to dither and then not do things
- Don’t forget to timetable in your social events as well