Helping your students become independent learners

Ben Knight
What does independent learning look like?

Think of an example of a student behaving with independence.

Think of an example of a student behaving without independence.
What are ‘independent learners’?

Independent learners manage and improve their own learning.

They believe they can and should control and improve their learning – they have agency.

They make their own decisions about how to improve their learning – they have autonomy.

They monitor their progress and adjust their approach – they self-regulate.
Why is it important to develop independent learners?

- Revelance
- Mixed abilities
- Time
- Intrinsic motivation
- Agency for life
What can you do as teachers?

1. Help them plan and set goals for their learning
2. Help them develop effective learning habits and strategies
3. Motivate them to manage their own learning
   - Give control to the students
   - Set engaging activities
4. Help them evaluate their own learning
1. Help your students plan and set goals for their learning
1. Planning and goal setting

| 1.1 Being clear about your mid- to long-term goals for learning English | • Exam?  
| | • Career?  
| | • Identity? (L2 self)  
| 1.2 Having a plan to study English | • Schedule  
| | • Intermediary goals  
| 1.3 Being clear about your objective in your immediate study task |
1.1 Your L2 self

Choose an L2 role model

Imagine your future L2 self

5 wishes
## 1.2 Developing plans for learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scheduling</th>
<th>Intermediary goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Weekly/monthly planner</td>
<td>• 20 new words a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How much time?</td>
<td>• 30 mins of English podcasts each week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What &amp; when?</td>
<td>• Watch one film in English each month</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# 1.3 Focus on learning point

KWL chart (what I know, what I want to know, what I learnt) – example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Know</th>
<th>Want to know</th>
<th>Learnt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Set your goals

### How much do you want each skill?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can write conditional ‘if’ sentences with very few mistakes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can understand most of the recordings in this lesson.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can give advice confidently and clearly.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can talk easily about illnesses and medicines.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### How well did you do?
2. Help your students develop effective learning habits and strategies
Managing your learning

- Obtaining and using learning resources
- Developing effective learning habits
- Using learning techniques
- Motivational management
- Making use of sources of help
- Creating an effective environment for learning
2.1 Resources for learners

**Podcasts**

BBC: [https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02pc9zn/episodes/downloads](https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02pc9zn/episodes/downloads)

Pickle [https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/pickle](https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/pickle)

**Vocab apps**

MyWordBook app (British Council)

**Writing**

Write & Improve [https://writeandimprove.com](https://writeandimprove.com)

**Listening**

Ted Ed [https://ed.ted.com/](https://ed.ted.com/)

**Speaking**

ELSA – English Language Speech Assistant

LearnEnglish Sounds Right (Pronunciation)

**Exam Practice**

IELTS Prep App (BC)
2.2 Developing effective learning habits

- I will revise vocabulary for 10 mins in my room, before breakfast
- Before I take a shower, I will read one paragraph in English
- On my bus journey to work, I will listen to 10 mins of English
- Read one page of this English book
- Learn 5 words
- Listen to 2 mins of news in English
- Write two sentences in English

Implementation intentions

Habit stacking

Two-Minute Rule

James Clear ‘Atomic Habits’
2.3 Using learning techniques

Retrieval Test yourself
• Can I remember these 30 words?
  • Can I re-do this exercise and get everything right?

Spaced practice Spread your practice out over time
• Plan to repeat this grammar exercise next month

Deliberate practice Push yourself to improve on each attempt
• Record your speaking, listen, and re-record it better
2.4 Motivational management

Keep track of your habit streak and “don’t break the chain.” Set up targets and rewards for ‘streaks’
- “I will have a takeaway on Friday if I complete my 10 mins practice for 7 days”

Variety in activities
- vocab check, listening to a song, watch a video clip, grammar task, read a blog, post comments

Track progress over time
- Keep portfolio of recordings and writing from start of course
2.5 Making use of sources of help

- Join an online English study group
- Meet once a week for lunch with people who will chat in English
- Keep a notebook of questions you’d like to ask to the teacher or someone else who speaks English
2.6 Creating an effective environment for learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Find/establish a quiet place to study English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keep your vocab notebook next to your bed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Put your language learning app top of your favourites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organise your computer files to find your study notes/exercises quickly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Motivate students to take charge of their learning

a) Giving control to learners
b) Engaging activities

‘The skill and the will’ – Barbara Sinclair
Teacher to student

**Teacher-directed**
- You tell them

**Teacher-supported**
- You help them

**Learner-directed**
- You give them the chance
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choices</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Possibly</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Which text for reading task</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which questions to answer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic for writing/speaking task</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who they work with</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in group or alone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How long to spend on the activity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What the next activity will be</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework – which task</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework – how much</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit test</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of course assessment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson focus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course objectives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Giving control

Pro’s | Con’s
3a. Managing the transfer of control

- Scaffolding
- Learner-centred
- Structure
- Flexibility
- Visible monitoring
Project: produce a poster to promote healthy living

- What are the different areas of knowledge or skill they need to do this well? Language, information, putting it together?
- How can you help them with any of those?
- What stages can you break it up into, to allow you to check on their progress?
ii) Structure - routines

Routines for writing tasks
• A reading task to introduce the topic, the vocabulary and as a model text
• Check the vocabulary
• Examine the structure of the text
• Generating ideas for the writing task
• Organise ideas
• Draft
• Share and comment
• Revise and present

Routines for listening tasks
• ...
• ...
• ...
• ...
iii) Learner centred

**Learner-generated content**
Padlet, JamBoard
Own experiences on a topic – likes/dislikes, pictures, words and phrases, ideas

**Using other students**
- Three before me
- Group questions

**Students actions**
Students write new words on board
Peer assessment

**Peer teach vocab**
- Divide key vocab between groups
- Research meanings
- Teach their words to other students

**Develop own questions for presentation**
- Before students give presentation, they write 3 questions about it for the other students
iv) Flexibility

**Open-ended activities**
- Creative writing (story or argument)
- Projects
- Visual prompts for speaking

**Add stretch options**
- Write up new vocab on the board
- Record themselves and then self-correct
- Give reasons for answers

**Change groupings**
- Strong-strong, strong-weak
### v) Tracking & monitoring progress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Logbooks</th>
<th>Portfolios</th>
<th>Posters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journal</td>
<td>Written texts</td>
<td>Shared plans or goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planner</td>
<td>• Audio/video Recordings of speaking</td>
<td>• Semester goals (curriculum)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>• Books, articles, sites, etc, in English, read out of class</td>
<td>• Plan for each project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Videos, songs, etc, in English, listened to out of class</td>
<td>• Ground rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Recurrent errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Favourite vocab</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3b) Engaging activities

Accomplishment
- Target numbers
- Time limits
- Competition

Curiosity
- Cliffhangers
- Puzzles (anagrams)

Fun
- Visual impact
- Music

Lyricstraining

NATURE ANAGRAMS

NAME: ___________________________

Don't cry, snowman, •••• front of me
Who'll catch your •••• if you •••• catch me, darling
4. Help them evaluate their own learning
Self-evaluation – getting started

Evaluate activities or lessons
- Enjoyment
- Difficulty
- Participation
- Collaboration

Exit tickets
- Today I learned
- Traffic lights

Today my learning stopped because...
Today I considered a question, new idea or new perspective...
Today I understood and learned...
1. Focus on one or two things
2. Balance encouragement and correction
3. Give phrases for feedback
4. Use criteria

Speaking in show and tell
• loud and clear enough
• not too much hesitating
Self-assessment and peer-assessment

1. Focus on one or two things
2. **Balance encouragement and correction**
3. Give phrases for feedback
4. Use criteria

One positive comment and one correction or improvement
Self-assessment and peer-assessment

1. Focus on one or two things
2. Balance encouragement and correction
3. Give phrases for feedback
4. Use criteria

- It was good when you....
- You should try to ..... 
- You shouldn’t say .....
**Self-assessment and peer-assessment**

1. **Focus on one or two things**
2. **Balance encouragement and correction**
3. **Give phrases for feedback**
4. **Use criteria**

### Student Self-Assessment: Writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I used interesting words.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I varied my sentences.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I gave lots of details.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I included many interesting events.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My story was well organized and easy to read.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had few spelling and grammatical errors.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My story had interesting character development.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My story had a beginning, middle and end.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The setting of my story is detailed and interesting.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Self-evaluation - descriptors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WRITING A NARRATIVE (CEFR LEVEL: B1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONTENT AND COMMUNICATIVE ACHIEVEMENT</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the story interesting?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the story hold the reader’s attention?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ORGANIZATION</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the story organized in a clear, readable way?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the sequence of events in the story easy to follow?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the story have a clear beginning, middle and end?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LANGUAGE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the writing contain a good range of appropriate vocabulary to tell the story?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the writer use appropriate past tenses and linking words to help the reader follow the story?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do errors of grammar, vocabulary, punctuation or spelling make it difficult to understand the story?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>G</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Ø</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>grammar</td>
<td>tense</td>
<td>not necessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MW missing word</td>
<td>WC word choice</td>
<td>/ start a new sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P punctuation</td>
<td>WO word order</td>
<td>\ something is missing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sp spelling</td>
<td>WW wrong word</td>
<td>??? very unclear</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Self-correction – speaking

S  ‘th’

Herbert Puchta
How can you help your students become independent learners?

1. Help them plan and set goals for their learning
2. Help them develop effective learning habits and strategies
3. Motivate them to manage their own learning
   - Give control to the students
   - Set engaging activities
4. Help them evaluate their own learning
Any questions?

“A well-educated mind will always have more questions than answers.”

Helen Keller

Ben Knight