Independence Along the Continuum: Differentiating and Empowering Student Learning
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What is Independent Learning?
The ability to find one’s own path toward a learning goal; involves navigating complexities to find answers to problems without the intervention of a teacher (Chau & Cheng, 2010).

Characteristics of the Independent Learner

- Organized
- Persistent
- Reads and understands instructions independently
- Completes tasks without adult help
- Uses (and evaluates) multiple sources to find information
- Sets individual goals and strives to achieve them
- Learns from failures

Primary
- Give students opportunity to explore and develop skills early on
- Provide good rules and boundaries but be willing to let go of control
- Model – I do, we do, you do
- Praise and encourage independence
- Consider a “Centers” classroom model

Middle School
- Students can now go further – allow them more time for independent problem-solving, critical thinking
- Help students learn from and with peers through group collaboration

High School
- They may resist, but fostering independence is critical
- Instill lifelong learning skills and habits – personal study style
- Self-reflection, organizational skills, problem-solving all key to growth

College
- Students must move away from expecting to “be taught” to real learning
- Planning and organizing is essential
- Encourage students to adopt planners or calendars and set aside specific time for study
- Use apps like Forest or Pattern to stay on task!

Tips, Tricks, and Lessons Learned

Tools to Support Independent Learning

References