

Learner Autonomy

What is it?

Autonomy is best described as the ability to make independent judgements and decisions without being told the answers by someone else. Employers value people who have the capacity to critically assess their own actions and performance, are self-directed in their approach to work and take responsibility for complex tasks.

Autonomous workers show many of the following capabilities:

- They have an attitude of inquiry;
- Know how to integrate new knowledge with previous understanding;
- Can create relevance and meaning of information and situations with independence;
- Have the confidence to voice their knowledge and opinions clearly;
- Actively pursue new knowledge through self-exploration;
- Self-assess to evaluate their understanding;
- Collaborate and engage with others to broaden their knowledge and understanding.

How can students become self-directed learners?

To encourage your students to become self-directed, autonomous learners:

- Create learning activities that require students to interpret and make their own meaning of new knowledge and information.
- Provide activities that require students to take responsibility for completing complex activities. Use a scaffolded approach, so that students receive frequent feedback on their progress.
- Encourage exploration and enquiry by asking students to provide evidence-informed opinions and judgements.
- Develop unstructured tasks for students to complete.
- Encourage students to articulate ideas clearly, using professional terminology and language, where they receive peer feedback on clarity and accuracy of information.
- Create opportunities for students to communicate to diverse audiences, where they receive feedback on the clarity and careful use of knowledge.
- Encourage students to evaluate their own performance against specific assessment criteria, so that they learn to self-assess, evaluate and improve their performance in structured ways.
- Encourage students to reflect upon their learning and the impact of their learning upon their professional capabilities.

How can autonomy be assessed?

When assessing autonomy and self-directed learning, it is important to:

- Hold students accountable for following assignment instructions correctly and not making assumptions based on what they did in a previous unit.
- Assess the student's ability to evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses; including identification of required actions to improve upon weaknesses.
- Encourage students to estimate and predict outcomes, with evaluation and reflection upon

the accuracy of their predictions at the end of the activity.

- Have students create project timelines with clear submission deadlines and assess the accuracy of completion to these timeframes; evaluating whether the timeframes were realistic or unrealistic at the end of the project.
- Hold student accountable for meeting deadlines.
- Assess the ability of students to adapt their approach and monitor their own performance.
- Provide feedback on their ability to use new knowledge correctly when communicating.
- Use peer review and feedback activities to help students monitor improvements and assess their performance.
- Encourage self-exploration through assessment of the breadth of reading and research undertaken when completing an assignment.

References

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