

Independent Study: the essentials

What does 'independent study' or 'self-directed study' mean? What should I be doing?

It means study time in which you make the decisions about what to learn.

Read:

- Assigned reading from your tutor's list. Skim read for gist before a class, read in detail or critically to prepare for discussion, or answer questions you have.
- 'Supplementary' or additional texts which are recommended but not required. Choose sources on topics that interest or confuse you, or relate to assignments. Select carefully e.g. one chapter from a book, or skim a text to identify the gist.
- Library books, journal articles or e-books related to the module but not on the list. Read them to develop your understanding or answer particular questions.
- Newspapers, magazines or websites related to module topics. Engage critically; relate it to your academic reading.

Watch & listen:

- Podcasts – BBC, University of Oxford podcasts, NPR, How Stuff Works, etc.
- iTunes & YouTube – e.g. Ted talks, look for university lecturers or professionals
- Documentaries – BBC archive, library catalogue, online subscription services

Think:

- Identify relationships and differences between concepts, models or evidence
- Evaluate, question and critique ideas, sources and information
- Respond to reading, questions or prompts and self-evaluate on performance

Write:

- Start a blog or tweet or start a Facebook page for your class
- Notes, flashcards or summaries
- Thought pieces or emails to authors

Draw and map:

- Sketch to illustrate an interaction
- Mind-map ideas
- Use a table to take notes to illustrate comparisons
- Diagram a process or relationship or theory or model using symbols

Before class:

- Complete any online content required before class.
- Preview the lecture notes if your tutor has made them available.
- Look up the topic of this week's classes and what to expect.
- Review your notes from last week.
- Make notes for discussion.

During class:

- Take notes of key ideas, interesting points or things to follow up on.

After class:

- Complete any online content required after class.

- Review and add to your notes; complete any quick follow up tasks.
- Compare notes with classmates.
- Form a study group for discussion.
- Revise and review your notes and assigned readings.