

Independent Contracts

What it is: Independent contracts are also referred to as learning contracts. Contracts begin with a conversation between the student and the teacher to select a topic to explore independently. They come to agreement about what will be learned and how the student will demonstrate this learning and formalize it in a signed contract.

Benefits:

- Provide choice and flexibility
- Engage students
- Help develop independence in learning
- Help develop time-management skills

Examples:

- Study Guide and Extensions Menu (Winebrenner, 2001)

Situations where it's useful:

- In conjunction with curriculum compacting
- To capitalize on a student's interest to make learning relevant

Pointers:

- Be clear about the purpose, objectives, expectations, and outcomes of the contract up front
- Develop a plan for completing the work that includes a timeline
- Use a daily log so the student can track progress in completing the plan
- Focus the contract on concepts or problems that integrate skill development rather than focusing on skills work alone
- Students can demonstrate their learning through traditional (e.g., writing a report or giving a speech) or alternative (e.g., composing a song or putting together a scrapbook) products
- Establish standards for products at the outset (e.g., share the rubric or scoring checklist)
- Consider having a parent/guardian sign the contract in addition to the student and teacher - this is an effective way of communicating the services the student is receiving
- In addition to having a contract for the learning, sign an agreement for working conditions that specify student behavior such as where s/he will work and how s/he will ask the teacher questions
- Renegotiate and resign the contract when necessary

References/Resources

Boswell, C. and Carlile, V.D. (2010). *RTI for the gifted student*. Hawthorne, NJ: Educational Impressions.

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Renzulli, J. (1978). *The compactor*. Mansfield Center, CT: Creative Learning Press.

Winebrenner, S. (2001). *Teaching gifted kids in the regular classroom: Strategies and techniques every teacher can use to meet the academic needs of the gifted and talented (revised, expanded, updated)*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.