


Do you sometimes worry that what you are doing with your students inside the classroom just isn't enough? There is probably good reason for your concern. This lesson looks at why it is a good idea for learners to be autonomous and suggests ways that you can help them achieve this.

### Task 1 – Opinion survey



**Look at the statements below and decide if you agree or disagree with them. Think about why you agree or disagree. Then read the feedback box below for some comments on these opinions.** 

- a) The best thing for students to study outside the classroom is vocabulary.
- b) You can't change a student's learning style.
- c) When it comes to independent learning, students don't know what they need.
- d) It's no good setting homework because students never do it.
- e) You can waste a lot of time making your methodology obvious to learners.

### Task 1 Feedback

- a) Vocabulary is only one thing students can study outside the classroom. They can also study grammar and practise language skills. There is a lot of things that they can do outside the classroom.
- b) You probably can't change a student's learning style in any radical way, but you can point out to them ways in which their learning style can limit them and suggest some options.
- c) This is often true. Students know what they like doing, but that is not always what they need the most.
- d) This is true of some students, but many students expect homework and feel disappointed if teachers do not set it.
- e) However, this can also give students an insight into different approaches to learning that they can utilise outside the classroom.

**Key skill**

Students can make better progress if they spend some time learning autonomously outside the classroom. Teachers need to help their students develop awareness of autonomous learning options and suggest strategies for putting them into practice.

**Task 2 – Why should teachers promote autonomous learning?**



**1 to 5 below are key ideas associated with learner autonomy, while a to e provide an explanation of the key ideas. Match the ideas to the explanations.**

Key ideas	
1. Learning time	2. Students' individual needs
3. Students' motivation	4. Students' general study ability
5. Students' individual responsibility for learning	

Explanations
<p><b>a.</b> Some students may have had little or no training on how to study any subject in an effective way, so English language teachers will need to help them with useful strategies.</p> <p><b>b.</b> If students have a sense of ownership of their English language learning, they are likely to want to study more.</p> <p><b>c.</b> Teachers cannot hope to teach students absolutely everything they need to know so a good part of the learning is up to the student.</p> <p><b>d.</b> Students are outside the classroom more than they are inside it and need strategies to help them use their own time productively.</p> <p><b>e.</b> When students are working in a group they cannot hope to always do the things they like doing or need to do. They have to consider other students needs too.</p>

Check your ideas in the answer key

Task 3 – Advice to students



Numbers 1 to 8 below are areas of advice for students who need to develop autonomy. Letters a to h are statements you might make directly to students in relation to each area of advice. Match the advice to the statements.

Areas of advice for students	
1. goals	2. time frames
3. materials	4. help
5. learning style	6. progress
7. revision	8. learning systems

Statements

- a. You will need this sometimes, so don't be afraid to come and ask for it.
- b. This has got to be done regularly. We'll do some in class, but you also need to do your own.
- c. A good way to start is by finding out what is available in the library and the learning centre – not just books, but also computer programmes and things off the internet.
- d. You need two lots of these – ones that you can reach in a short space of time and others, bigger ones that will take you longer to reach, for example studying at an English-speaking university.
- e. You need to think about setting up ones that work for you, for example, the best way for you to record vocabulary so that you'll remember it.
- f. These need to be realistic in relation to your learning goals.
- g. I'm not asking you to change this, but you sometimes need to be a bit flexible about the way you study language.
- h. It's just as important to know when this has been made as it is to realise what you don't know yet.

Check your answers in the answer key 

### Key skill

One of the broader aims of learner autonomy is to ensure students accept some responsibility for their own learning outside the classroom. It is easier for students to meet their individual needs during the time they study alone. With the right kind of advice from the teacher on how to go about this, student motivation can be increased.

### Task 4 – Some specific strategies



**Some strategies for learner autonomy are best taught in class, while others are best taught in one-on-one counselling sessions. Look at the techniques below and put them into the correct box.**

#### Techniques

1. Set homework regularly.
2. Discuss the rationale for the methodology you use e.g. stages in a reading lesson in relation to practising reading sub skills (scan, gist, intensive reading etc.)
3. Help students articulate specific short and long term goals.
4. Systematically revise language that you teach.
5. Give advice on alternative learning strategies e.g. suggest a fluency-based learner try some accuracy-based activities for a change.
6. Set up group and project work that gets students relying on each other independent of you.
7. Provide learners with an orientation to resources that you have such as a library or a learning centre.
8. Give learners feedback on their progress in relation to the goals they have set.
9. Point out specific resources such as self-access books, computer programmes or internet web sites that could help students.
10. Provide examples of different learning systems that other students have used.

Best taught in class	Best taught in one-on-one sessions

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

**Key skill**

The ideas in task 3 suggest that teachers have an important advising or counselling role to play with their students. However, this is not all they can do. See task 4 below for more ideas.

#### **Thinking about your teaching ...**

Put yourself in your students' place. If you are currently learning a language, this will be easy. If you are not, try to imagine that you are. Which of the autonomous learning techniques in task 4 would you find most useful. Rank them from 1 to 10 (from the most to the least useful) and note down why.

Record your observations in your *Teaching log*.

#### **Taking it to the classroom ...**

Choose one of the in-class strategies from task 4 that you do not currently do with your learners. Try it out and get them to give you feedback on this. You can record this experiment in your Teaching log.

#### **Want to find out more ... ?**

On pages 394 – 408 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching (4<sup>th</sup> edition)* by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007), there is further reading on learner autonomy.

#### **Related TaskBook lessons...**

You may be interested in the following lessons in the ESOL TaskBook series, which also relate to this topic:

- Unit 1 c) **Learning styles:** Looks at how students' learning styles may affect their preferences for certain kinds of learning activities both in and outside the classroom.

**Answer Key**



**Task 2 – Feedback**

- 1. d
- 2. e
- 3. b
- 4. a
- 5. c

**Task 3 - Feedback**

- 1. d
- 2. f
- 3. c
- 4. a
- 5. g
- 6. h
- 7. b
- 8. e

**Task 4 - Feedback**

Best taught in class	Best taught in one-on-one sessions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Set homework regularly.</li> <li>2. Discuss the rationale for the methodology you use e.g. stages in a reading lesson in relation to practising reading sub skills (scan, gist, intensive etc.)</li> <li>4. Systematically revise language that you teach.</li> <li>6. Set up group and project work that gets students relying on each other independent of you.</li> <li>7. Provide learners with an orientation to resources that you have such as a library of a learning centre.</li> <li>10. Provide examples of different learning systems that other students have found useful.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Help students articulate specific short and long term goals.</li> <li>5. Give advice on alternative learning strategies e.g. suggest a fluency-based learner try some accuracy-based activities for a change.</li> <li>8. Gives learners feedback on their progress in relation to the goals they have set.</li> <li>9. Point out specific resources such as self access books, computer programmes or internet web sites that could help students.</li> </ul>