

## Independent Studies: Learning Contracts

Learning contracts are argued to be the most important tool for successful and positive independent study experiences for both students and advising faculty members. Learning contracts should be constructed by the student and reviewed by the advising faculty member for constructive feedback and suggestions for modification. A final version of the learning contract should be signed by both student and advising faculty member. The contract then serves as an outline for the independent study units and a tool to aid evaluation. Modification of the learning contract may become necessary as the learning experience progresses. Modified contracts should be approved and signed by both student and advising faculty member.

### Responsibilities for the Learning Contract

Student	Advising faculty member
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Propose a written learning contract of what you want to learn and how you plan to learn it</li> <li>2. Develop a detailed schedule that has you working on contract activities each week</li> <li>3. Take the initiative to contact your advising faculty member immediately to get the assistance you need (motivation, resources, feedback, problems)</li> <li>4. Meet with your advising faculty member regularly to review progress and discuss material learned</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Assist in developing learning contract and ensure its completion and good quality</li> <li>2. Recommend learning resources, such as books, journals, people, agencies, library materials</li> <li>3. Be available as a resource for information, but allow student to take initiative in asking for assistance with learning</li> <li>4. Meet regularly with the student to review progress, share ideas, and encourage learning</li> <li>5. Evaluate the student's work as described in the learning contract</li> </ol>

Below is a sample learning contract, adapted from M.S. Knowles (1986), *Using learning contracts: Practical approaches to individualizing and structuring learning*, Jossey-Bass Publications. The sample contract contains a brief decision guide for filling out the components of the contract. This is followed by a completed learning contract that is provided as a reference for students and advising faculty members.

### Sample Learning Contract

Learner: \_\_\_\_\_

Learning Experience: \_\_\_\_\_

What are you going to learn? (Objectives)	How are you going to learn it? (Resources and Strategies)	Target date for completion	How are you going to know that you learned it? (Evidence)	How are you going to prove that you learned it? (Verification)	Advising faculty member feedback (Evaluation)
Itemize what you want to be able to DO or KNOW when completed.	What do you have to DO in order meet each of the objectives defined?	When do you plan to complete each task?	What is the specific task that you are to complete to demonstrate learning?	Who will receive the product of your learning and how will they evaluate it?	How well was the task completed? Provide an assessment decision.

I have reviewed and find acceptable the above learning contract.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Student: \_\_\_\_\_ Advising faculty member: \_\_\_\_\_

## Completed Learning Contract

Learner: Iwana KnowmoreLearning Experience: Adult Education Theory

What are you going to learn? (Objectives)	How are you going to learn it? (Resources and Strategies)	Target date for completion	How are you going to know that you learned it? (Evidence)	How are you going to prove that you learned it? (Verification)	Advising faculty member feedback (Evaluation)
<i>Unit 1</i> 1. To evaluate my readiness to learn and my learning needs for the unit Adult Education Theory.	(a) Complete the self-evaluation diagnostic guide. (b) Use the Planning your Unit decision guide to set up a tentative unit agenda. (c) Review several self-directed learning resources for advice and tips to prepare me for the independent studies unit.	September 12	Creation of a satisfactory learning contract.	The competencies and the learning contract will be presented to the advising faculty member. The contract will be rated with regards to depth and practicality of the selected goals and activities. Comments for modification of the contract will be requested and the contract revised until all agree on its validity.	Advising faculty member: The learning contract is valid. The student has set challenging, yet attainable goals and has clearly defined what will be learned, when it will be learned, what activities are involved, and how it will be assessed.  <b>Objective Complete. Very Good.</b>
2. To gain a better understanding of the differences between andragogical and pedagogical concepts.	Locate and read as many of the reference articles from Unit 1 as available (with a minimum of 10 separate references). Emphasis will be on the information regarding the differences between youth and adult educational concepts.	October 17	A 10-15 page research paper on the differences between youth and adult education will be written.	The paper will be critiqued for comprehensiveness and usefulness by the advising faculty member. An annotated bibliography of the reference material will be submitted with the paper.	Specific feedback appears on the research paper. Marker decides that it was well done, with some more elaboration needed in the area of andragogical concepts.  <b>Objective Complete. Satisfactory.</b>
<i>Unit 2</i> 3. To increase my understanding of methods or formats for planning learning experiences.	Read available references for Unit 2 and other TRACE tips sheets and articles on methods or formats for learning.	November 21	Make a list of methods or formats for organizing learning experiences with a brief description of each item. Try to include at least 2 novel methods.	The list will be submitted to the advising faculty member. An annotated bibliography of reference material will be submitted with the list. Each will be evaluated for thoroughness and creativity.	Specific feedback appears on the list. Marker decides that it was extremely well done and presented some new and creative methods.  <b>Objective Complete. Outstanding.</b>
<i>Unit 3</i> 4. To create (film and edit) videotapes of the independent studies student orientation class to be used for distance education students.	Videotapes would allow distance education students access to the resources available for on campus independent studies students. The tapes would allow me hands on experience in developing an adult education tool.	December 5	Videotape the three one-hour sessions of the night student orientation class. Develop a student workbook to accompany the videotapes.	The videotape and workbook will be evaluated by the distance education office consultant and the advising faculty member for effectiveness, practicality, applicability, and depth. Particular attention will be paid to evidence of applying knowledge gained about andragogical concepts.	The videotape was completed on time. All evaluators agreed that the tape is of poor quality. Until editing is complete, tape will not be useful. The workbook was not handed in for evaluation.  <b>Objective Incomplete Unsatisfactory.</b>

I have reviewed and find acceptable the above learning contract.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Student: \_\_\_\_\_ Advising faculty member: \_\_\_\_\_

## Benefits and Limitations of Learning Contracts

### *Benefits:*

- Requires students to be intimately involved in the process of developing their unit of study
- Requires students to explore their readiness to learn and their self-directed learning skills
- Maximizes students' motivation to learn because they have chosen the agenda
- Helps to keep less independent learners on course because of its specific and concrete nature
- May include a schedule of regular meetings with the advising faculty member
- Encourages independence of students – less demands made on advising faculty members' time
- Provides a formal way to structure learning goals and activities as well as evaluation of learning goals – helps to minimize misunderstandings and poorly communicated expectations
- Provides continual feedback about progress made
- Enables advising faculty member to encourage use of a wide variety of resources (e.g., peers, library, community, experiences)

### *Limitations:*

- May be challenging to create for students who are used to lecture/exam types of courses
- Not suitable for content with which student is totally unfamiliar – some initial guidance may be required
- May require modification as unit progresses – careful thought is needed for how much modification is acceptable and this could be defined at the outset of each unit
- Requires that faculty members redefine their traditional roles and make the transition from teacher to advisor