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What is the IPQ, and how does it fit into my studies?

The IPQ is an opportunity to do a project in a subject area which interests you. It will help you develop critical thinking and project management skills which will help in other studies, either now or if you move on to university or a professional career. The IPQ assesses your ability to plan, carry out, report on, and evaluate an independent project.

The emphasis of the assessment is on the entire planning and research process, a presentation and report, and other appropriate evidence of your work. It is a level 3 qualification which may be followed alongside your (international) A levels.
Introduction

**IPQ as a free-standing qualification**

Your Independent Project is an extension to your GCSE AS/A levels, or any other academic qualification you are following in school. You can choose an area of study related to your AS/A-levels, but the two must not overlap. You could also choose a very different area of study from your main subject areas.

Although the IPQ is an entirely free-standing qualification for which you are awarded a grade (just like your AS/A-levels), research has shown that completing a research project like this can help you achieve a higher grade in your A-levels. Research by the Centre for Education Research and Practice in the UK showed that students taking a very similar project-based qualification are 29% more likely to achieve a Grade A*-B in most of their standard A-level subjects. So whilst the IPQ is quite separate to your A-level subjects, it will help you develop skills which will also benefit your other studies.

**How is the IPQ different from my other studies?**

There are five key elements which make the IPQ special.

- It requires independent research and learning to extend your studies.
- You must choose your topic and project title in negotiation with your Supervisor.
- You have to show that you can plan, deliver and present your project work.
- There is some teaching of necessary skills involved, but the majority of your learning will require your own self motivation and organisational skills.
- Your work will be monitored and ‘mentored’ by a Project Supervisor; they may suggest other people who can also help you.
How will the Independent Project be of benefit to me?

The Independent Project should be enjoyable and fulfilling. It will also be challenging, so you need to have a clear idea of why you want to do the qualification and how it could benefit you.

• Completing the Independent Project will help you develop your own organisational, project management and independent learning skills. These skills will help you become a more confident student in other areas of study.

• The skills you develop as part of the Independent Project will provide you with a good foundation in study and research skills. These skills will help you in your university studies, if you choose to go on to higher education, and at work.

• Successfully completing the Independent Project Qualification is also likely to enhance your application to higher education. If you apply to a UK university, the IPQ will be recognised as equivalent to half an A level. It will help you to stand out from other students, both in your personal statement and at interview – this is particularly important when applying for popular university courses such as medicine and law, or if you are making an application to a top university in the US or anywhere else in the world.

• Because you are following an area of personal interest, the project will bring freshness to your studies, and might help you decide on a future career or what you will study at university.

The process involved in an IPQ

What will I be required to do?

The Oxford International AQA Examinations Independent Project Qualification has been independently validated by the UK examinations regulator Ofqual. It has specific requirements.

You will have to do the following:

1. Choose your topic or your area of interest and develop a title that will form your individual project and submit this for formal approval.

2. Identify and draft the main aims and objectives of your project. Aims are broad, general statements about what you hope your project will achieve. Objectives are specific statements about what your project will cover. The objectives should contain action verbs such as ‘identify’, ‘contrast’, ‘analyse’, and ‘construct’.

3. Plan, research and carry out your project. This will mean that you have to apply certain organisational skills and strategies to fulfil your objectives. You will also have to obtain and select information from a number of different sources, analyse your data and show that you understand the complexities of the topic you’ve chosen.

4. Document and evaluate all stages of your project process. There are certain essential requirements: you will, for example, have to complete a Production Log.

5. Produce a written report of 5000 words.

6. Prepare and give a ten-minute live presentation about your project and the process. You will need to present your project in a way that is appropriate for a non-specialist audience: this will be in a form that is appropriate for your chosen topic. This will be followed by a ten-minute live question and answer session.
Review and reflect on the whole project process. This includes assessing if your project fulfils the original aims, as well as reflecting on your own learning during the process of producing your project. You won’t be doing this entirely on your own. You will have the help and support of a Project Supervisor in your school – probably a teacher you know already, or another member of staff. Some students may also discuss their project with a Specialist Consultant and meet with them to discuss progress. If you feel like you would like to work with a Specialist Consultant, discuss this with your Project Supervisor. You should also check the exact requirements of the project with a current version of the IPQ specification.

Material required for assessment
You must submit the following as evidence for assessment:
- the completed Production Log and Assessment Record, including the Project Proposal Form, Presentation Record (and a recording of your presentation), and the Candidate Record Form
- your written report and relevant appendices, depending on the topic or subject you choose.

Will there be any lessons?
Completing the Independent Project Qualification will be more about learning for yourself than being taught by your teacher. After all, you need to develop your independent research and learning skills. However there is a taught element, and your teachers will be able to give you more information on the form this will take in your school.

Although you and your peers will be doing very different topics, there will be some skills you can learn and develop as a group.

Here are some examples:
- There are accepted forms for academic writing which may be useful to you in structuring your written work. This will be important when you come to write up your report.
- Project management skills are needed, including how you manage your work within the time available, how you manage the resources you have access to, and how to search effectively for relevant information using libraries, the internet and other sources.
- How to carry out your project safely and effectively. If you are carrying out some practical work, for example, in a science laboratory, you will need to know about laboratory health and safety. For other types of research involving members of the public you may need to adhere to certain professional codes of conduct. (All students must carry out a full risk assessment prior to starting their project.

How will I work with my Supervisor?
Although there is a strong element of you working independently and taking responsibility for your own research, this does not mean there will be no support on offer for you.

At your school or college, there will be a teacher or a member of staff who will be appointed as your Supervisor. Your Supervisor will support you along the journey from project proposal through to submission.

Key term
Submission The formal word that awarding bodies use to refer to ‘giving in’ or ‘handing in’ work or material to be assessed.
Study tip

Remember that the Assessment Objectives focus on the process involved in your project, the evidence and your written report, as well as how you evaluate your own learning throughout that process.

Key term

**Assessment Objectives** The AOs are a set of criteria published by Oxford AQA exams which you are required to meet. Your work will be compared to these AOs when your work is being graded.

**Specialist Consultant** You may choose to seek the advice of someone who is an expert (or who ‘specialises’) in your subject area to discuss your project ideas or progress. This person won’t assess your work, nor make any decisions for you. Discuss with your Project Supervisor if you think a person like this could be helpful for you.

**Working with your Supervisor**

At the very beginning of your project process, it would be useful for you to establish answers to the following questions with your Supervisor.

- How will you communicate? By email? Face-to-face? By phone?
- How often will you meet?
- Will you be able to contact your Supervisor during school/college holidays?
- If your Supervisor is not available, who should you discuss things with?
- How should you prepare for your face-to-face meetings?

Your Supervisor will be able to advise you on managing and developing your project but you will make your own decisions. You can choose not to take the advice. Remember, your presentation at the end of your project has to be aimed at a non-specialist audience. Your Supervisor may or may not be a subject specialist in your area of research. Discuss with your Supervisor if you would like to have the support of a Specialist Consultant.
Supervisor’s responsibilities

The Supervisor’s responsibilities will be, in broad terms, as shown in the table. Their main role is to guide you. You are responsible for owning your log and recording advice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project stage (Page numbers relate to the relevant sections in this book.)</th>
<th>What your Supervisor will do</th>
<th>What AQA requires the Supervisor to do</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Starting out on your project see page 15</td>
<td>Meet with you to review your initial ideas and discuss how you intend to develop your initial idea into a full project. Agree your working title and project proposal with you</td>
<td>Complete Part B of the Candidate Record Form, Production Log and Assessment Record, giving comments on your proposal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researching your project see page 37</td>
<td>Post proposal acceptance, meet with you to review your project plan. Meet with you during your project to discuss progress</td>
<td>Conduct a mid-term review with you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Producing your written report see page 81</td>
<td>Meet with you to discuss the project as it nears its end</td>
<td>Conduct an end-of-project review with you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presenting your project see page 104</td>
<td>Your Supervisor will be present at your presentation; you will be asked questions relating to your project and the presentation</td>
<td>Your Supervisor will record and comment on the delivery of your project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finalising and submitting your project see page 119</td>
<td></td>
<td>Your Supervisor must endorse your Candidate Record form, Production Log and Assessment Record and sign the front page.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing your project</td>
<td></td>
<td>The completed Candidate Record Form, Production Log and Assessment Record, your written report (and any relevant appendices) a copy of your presentation are all provided as evidence for assessment. Supervisors give your work a grade, and confirm that all work is your own.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Can I work as part of a group?

The work for your project is intended to represent your own work as an individual. In line with this, Oxford AQA Exams do not allow work that is carried out as a group to be submitted for the international Independent Project.

You may, of course, have lessons as a class or in a group where you are taught some skills to help you carry out your project.

Key term

**Appendices (plural for appendix)** are the additional material you may need to include with your report like a bibliography or list of references.
What others might do to support you?

Librarians, in your school or college library or local public library, could help you with your research, by advising you on the availability of resources. You will be assessed on how well you obtain and select information from a variety of sources, so it’s important that you explore all relevant options.

There may be other people whose skills and experience you can draw on and who may be very keen to help:

- your parents/guardians
- local employers or local businesses
- local universities
- local museums, galleries, theatres and other community organisations
- professional organisations and societies
- a Specialist Consultant, for example, members of staff within your school or college who have interests or recent research experience in your topic area.

You don’t have to feel that independent learning is working alone. There are plenty of people who can advise and support you, and above all, you can always talk to your Supervisor.

Using this book

This book gives guidance on the journey you make whilst identifying, researching, and presenting your project and during the report writing phase. It is full of tips and techniques to help you develop and practise the skills required to carry out your project work successfully.

- This book introduces you to the skills required during each stage of your project, and explains how they will be important to your project work.
- It provides brief activities to help you learn, practise and apply the relevant skill.
- ‘What this means to my project’ helps you apply this learning to your individual project.
- ‘Study Tips’ help you understand the assessment process and how your project will be graded.
- ‘Key Terms’ highlight and explain important words or phrases.
- ‘Checklists’ help prepare you for meetings with your project Supervisor.
- ‘Project Progress Checkpoints’ highlight exactly what stage you are at in your project, and how it fits into the whole process. These will prompt you to make sure you are ready for the next stage of your project process.

This information on skills will be useful to any student doing an Independent Project. Your Supervisor may also give you additional activities to help you develop skills which may be specific to the subject area of your Independent Project.
How will my Independent Project be assessed?

See the table on the next pages.

What Oxford AQA Exams require?

Always check the most recent version of the specifications, as changes are made from time to time. The evidence for assessment you need to provide is:

1 The completed Production Log

Every student registered for this qualification has an Oxford AQA Exams Production Log. It provides the exam board with a documented record of the planning and progress of your project. It is your responsibility to make sure that every element is completed sequentially and at the appropriate time. You are not allowed to go back and complete this log retrospectively. (Your school may be using an electronic monitoring system like Project Q which doesn’t allow this, anyway. Ask your teacher if you are in any doubt.) Each student also gives in a signed Candidate Record Form and Assessment Record.

2 A written report

All students must provide a written report and any relevant appendices. Your report should be 5000 words in length. You are allowed to write within +/- 10% of this which means your report should amount to more than 4500 words but less than 5500 words.

3 A record of your presentation

You have to provide a live 10-minute presentation to a non-specialist audience, followed by a 10-minute question and answer session. The presentation may include flipcharts, posters, Prezi, PowerPoint, or short video extracts. It’s your choice. You must decide what medium suits your subject area and your audience. Make your decision in consultation with your Project Supervisor; your school may need you to fit in with other students’ presentations, too.

Your assessment evidence must include a record of the live presentation. Your Supervisor will also provide a record of relevant questions you were asked and how you answered them.

Remember that your presentation must include reference to the whole project process, not just your research conclusions.

For the IPQ, the presentation can be carried out in your native language (i.e. it doesn’t have to be in English, although your school might decide that this is a better option for you). If it is not in English, evidence needs to be provided in English for external moderation purposes.
## How will my Independent Project be assessed?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Project stage (Page numbers relate to the relevant sections in this book.)</th>
<th>What you will do</th>
<th>What Oxford AQA Exams requires you to do</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Starting out on your project see page 15</td>
<td>Select your topic/area of interest Draft a suggested title, aims, and objectives - this will be approved by your school/Supervisor Carry out a risk assessment to understand how to carry out every aspect of your research safely and to put measures in place to reduce any risks Carry out some initial research so that you can sufficiently develop your project aims and objectives and finalise your project title and research plan Agree the working title with your Supervisor</td>
<td>Complete the Record of initial ideas section of the Candidate Record Form, Production Log and Assessment Record Complete Part A: Candidate Proposal section of the Candidate Record Form, Production Log and Assessment Record [title of this form(s) tbc] Write a risk assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researching your project see page 37</td>
<td>Conduct the research that your project plan requires to meet the aims and objectives you set yourself Record your research and the resources that you make use of Meet with your Supervisor regularly to discuss the project process and any issues you face. Record any action you take as a result of their advice or guidance. Record any changes you make to your plan and why you have decided to make these changes Finalise your project title, aims and objectives</td>
<td>Record your planning and research in the Candidate Record Form, Production Log and Assessment Record</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Producing your project product see page 81</td>
<td>Produce your written report with relevant appendices</td>
<td>All students must provide a written report of 5000 words. Your appendices should include a full bibliography and any relevant references for your written report Complete the Project product review section of the Candidate Record Form, Production Log and Assessment Record</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presenting your project see page 104</td>
<td>Communicate findings from your project research and a review of the project process in a ten-minute live presentation Be prepared to answer questions about your project in a ten-minute session after this presentation</td>
<td>Deliver your presentation, targeted at a non-specialist audience and answer the questions you are asked Your presentation needs to be recorded in the Production Log, and your Supervisor will also complete the Production Log to confirm that your live presentation took place and provide evidence of the questions you were asked and how you answered them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewing, finalising and submitting your project see page 119</td>
<td>Reflect on the process of planning, researching, writing up, and presenting your project</td>
<td>Complete your the Summary and reflection section of the Candidate Record Form, Production Log and Assessment Record, ensuring that it includes your reflections on the process of your project</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Checklist: are you ready to start your Independent Project?

Your Independent Project should be a very rewarding and exciting educational experience. You will be expected to work independently and develop new skills, but you will have plenty of support through your project Supervisor and by using this resource.

Before starting on your Independent Project, make sure you are appropriately prepared for what it will involve. Make notes on the following:

- The benefits to me of carrying out an Independent Project are …
- The implications of committing my time and resource to the Independent Project are …
- The following teachers are happy to provide me with appropriate support …
- I think that a topic for a good Independent Project could be …
- I will ensure that my Independent Project has an equal focus on both the project content and its process by …
- The time I have available to research my project and complete it appropriately is …
- The aspects of my project research which might incur some risk either to myself or the safety of others are … (eg using equipment safely)
- What else do I need to do? (such as people to talk to, and research on possible topics)

Filling in this chart is not an assessment requirement for your IPQ. However it may help you to prepare for an initial meeting with your Supervisor to agree your project ideas.

Next steps

You will be required to identify a suitable topic for your project and to explore the possible aims and objectives. See the next chapter of this book.
Getting started on your Independent Project will be an exciting time, allowing you some real independence in a chosen topic area that is likely to motivate and inspire you. Don’t let that enthusiasm to ‘get into it’ stop you from taking time and effort to carefully plan your project research and identify your ultimate goals. It will help you succeed if you establish the aims and objectives for your project at the start, and make sure your project plan makes appropriate use of both time and available resources.

**This chapter will help you to:**

✔ think about what might influence your choice of topic for your Independent Project
✔ practise some techniques to help you identify some possible projects
✔ establish your project aims and objectives
✔ plan your project and explore the issues that will help you achieve your goals
✔ fulfil the requirements of Oxford AQA Exams’ project approval process.
Choosing a topic

By the end of this section, you should be able to:

- explore the factors which might affect your choice of topic
- understand what we mean by ‘independent’ and how that will help you make your topic choice
- identify your suggested project aims and objectives
- understand the difference between a ‘working’ title and the ‘final’ title of your research project
- prepare for your initial planning meeting with your Project Supervisor to agree your project ideas.

What do we mean by ‘independent’?

The ‘independent’ nature of the IPQ is what makes it unique at this level. It is that which sets it apart from anything you are likely to have done before in your studies. You have to make sure that your project matches this expectation for you to work entirely independently.

- It is a single and original piece of work carried out by you.
- It requires good quality planning and preparation by you.
- It requires you to use a high degree of independence in your research finding your own sources of material, taking notes, without copying directly without acknowledgement.
- It allows you to go beyond a single exam specification or subject area.
- It is a piece of work that doesn’t duplicate something you are already doing as part of another qualification (eg in one of your A-levels), or that you have already submitted as part of an exam in the past.

It is a piece of work you do yourself, not as part of a group or with the input of others in your class. This means that you will be developing and extending a specific area of your studies, or a personal interest or activity, in such a way that your final project topic would not normally fall within your main programme of study.

So what does this mean in practice?

- You can’t resubmit a piece of work that you have already completed as part of another examination.
- You can’t reuse a project that you had already completed as part of another course of study.
- The topic for your project will not overlap with anything you are already studying. If you are studying History, you can do a historical topic, but it should, for example, be taken from a different time period to any which forms part of your A level studies.
- You work alone, but you are given plenty of support by teachers and/or your Project Supervisor (some students may also request the help of a Subject Specialist).
An Independent Project encourages real creativity, independent exploration, innovation, and to some extent, risk-taking. These will extend your own knowledge, skills and experience and underpin your development as a researcher.

Bear in mind this quotation from the eminent scientist, Albert Einstein, who developed the theory of relativity:

‘If we knew what we were doing it wouldn’t be research, would it?’

**What does this mean in terms of level?**

In terms of the level required, an Independent Project Qualification is a level 3 qualification, equivalent to A level standard. You may be doing it alongside AS levels or in year 12 (the first year of your A level studies), so have not necessarily reached an A level standard in other subject areas yet. To achieve this qualification, your work must reach the same level as an A level.

We’ve talked about the IPQ being the equivalent of an AS level. To be clear about this:

- The planning, research, execution, development of thinking, review, and presentation of your project must reflect an A level standard (so could be awarded an A*).
- The qualification is worth half an A level for university admission (UK).

When choosing the topic area for your research, it might be difficult to decide where to begin. Consider the questions on the next page – these might help lead you to your chosen area.

---

**Key term**

**Independent** Your project must be planned, researched, and carried out by you. Whilst you will have the support of your Supervisor, you have to make sure that your work is original and completed by you alone.

**Dual accreditation** Your project topic must not overlap with any of your other studies. You cannot enter a piece of work for one assessment/accreditation and also submit it for your IPQ. That would represent dual accreditation and is not allowed.
Take a good hard look at yourself

ACTIVITY  Look at yourself

1 Think carefully about the following questions. These should prompt some thinking around topic areas that would reflect your skills, experience and personal interests.

A Which subject areas have you enjoyed? (This might not be the same as those areas you know you are good at.)

B Which activities do you describe yourself as passionate about? (This might be an activity you do as part of your school life, or might be a hobby you do outside of school.)

C Of the following skills, which ones would you mark yourself with 7/10 or more?

- reading for an overview of text, and critically evaluating what you read
- putting people at ease and getting them to talk
- reading literary texts
- analysing information
- solving problems with an IT solution
- exploring the world around you
- reviewing multimedia and films

D Is there a topic or subject area you have always wanted to find out more about?

E What are you thinking of doing after school? Is there a topic that links with this? If you are going on to university to study, is there a topic which would really show your enthusiasm for the subject you have chosen to study?

F When you first thought about doing an IPQ, what was your first thought as to a suitable project? Gut instinct is often right! If there is an idea that keeps nagging away at you, go back to it.

Enjoy it!

Whatever you decide to do, and whatever research question you come up with, make sure it really interests you! You want to make sure you enjoy it! The IPQ, like most worthwhile ventures, is hard work, so you might be more successful if you are motivated by a project you can get passionate about.
What constraints might affect your topic choice?

Doing something you enjoy might provide lots of positive thinking and optimism, but you’ll still need to keep your feet on the ground. Several factors might restrict your project choice.

### ACTIVITY  Constraints

1. Consider the following questions. These may reveal some obstacles to your choice of topic area. You may want to make some notes, and discuss your answers with your Project Supervisor.

   **A** Does your project complement your other subject areas? Will it be easy to manage around your other subject commitments?

   **B** Have you been told that you can or can’t make use of specialist accommodation or equipment? Do you need access to a science laboratory? Do you need certain chemicals? Will you or your school be able to obtain these?

   **C** Are there any cultural or religious customs which might affect what you choose to research or which prevent you from researching certain topic areas?

   **D** Are you or your school able to provide online access to the resources you might need? Is there a subscription to pay - how affordable is this?

   **E** Will you research resources in your native language? Or in English? Are all the resources you need to access available in the language you would like to use? Is there any vocabulary it would be useful for you to clarify before you start in the subject area you choose?

### Study tip

Above all, it’s important to be motivated to learn about your chosen topic. This is one of the few study opportunities where you get to choose what you study - so choose well! Your Supervisor will help you.
Be inspired! – getting ideas to flow

People can be inspired in different ways. Some learners work hard whilst others sit back and seemingly wait for an idea to hit them. There are several techniques you can use to build up some original ideas for a project topic. You might use a spidergram to help generate some ideas. Ideas will come more easily once you start paying attention to them and start to nurture them.

Building up a spidergram

Start with a theme and write that down in the middle of a piece of paper. Relax, be open to ideas and just write down whatever that theme suggests to you. Don’t reject anything you think of – note each point down as it occurs to you and allow it to connect in some way to the next. There are no right or wrong ideas – you just need to write something down and then let your mind think of the next idea. You could then circle the most relevant themes and create a new spidergram from each of those.
Change your perspective

As we grow up in a certain environment and culture, we tend to develop our own perspective that is personal to us. This can be a good thing, but might limit the creation of new ideas for your project. Try these suggestions:

- Talk to other people about what sort of project they might do. Don’t ask your friends at school (they might also be finding it difficult to come up with an idea!), but ask your parents, your little brother/sister, your aunt, your grandfather, your neighbour, or someone from a different culture to you. They can’t tell you what you must do, but their responses might trigger off some new ideas for you.

- Consider what you might do if you were a different person. For example, if you were David Beckham, Priscilla Chan, or Huda Kattan, what ideas might you have? Or if you were a police officer or a dentist, what ideas might you have? It doesn’t matter who it is, you’re just trying to change your usual perspective and look at things a little differently.

Random choice

You need to look for different stimuli to help you come up with some ideas. Open a dictionary or a web page, select a word at random. Look for possible connections between this word and a possible topic. Look through some photos in a magazine – does one of those get you thinking of different ideas? Can one of these be developed into a project idea that would really interest you?

Ideas shower: generating ideas

Everyone needs to be clear about the rules for generating ideas. To be successful, an ideas shower session has to be structured.

- Start with a goal: set yourself an objective for your session.
- Time your session, about 10-20 minutes. If you need it to go on longer than this, have a break first.
- Generate ideas in a place where you know you will be relaxed, it could be somewhere you don’t normally work.
- Always have a pen and paper, a flip chart or a whiteboard to jot down all your ideas. A group may have a scribe whose only role is to record the ideas.
- Note every idea that comes into your head: nothing is too stupid to include. In fact, something may initially sound silly but lead onto something good.
Building up an initial project idea

You have by now a much better idea (or ideas) of the topic area for your project. You need to identify the initial idea, and to clarify the planned path or aims and objectives. This path requires you to first identify a ‘working title’ for your research project. Your Project Supervisor will meet with you to discuss your initial idea(s) and explore your suggested working title.

In order to establish your ‘working’ title, you will need to undertake some preliminary research. This will help you decide on the resources where you will start your research, and have clear aims and objectives. Identify your project’s aims and objectives.

Your working title or objective must have a clear focus. You will present it as part of the Project Proposal Form and give it a title. This title should be a single phrase presenting the topic succinctly and clearly. It may be a short statement, a question, or a hypothesis. Any one of these may look to solve a problem, seek to confirm or deny a theory, or suggest an investigation to explore an issue. Avoid any title that would lead to a largely descriptive report. You must set up an investigation or argument with more than one view to be analysed. Previous examples of titles have included:

- Concrete or asphalt for motorway surfaces?
- The Trojan Horse: Fact or Fiction?
- How has English affected the German language? Is this leading to its decline as a world language?

Your aims and objectives will include your proposed action, that is, the key tasks you consider necessary to fulfil the project outline as well as the format for the presentation for your project.

These should be clear and focused. You need to be able to complete them within the time you have available, and to write about your topic within the Oxford AQA Exams word limit.

Can you explain your project to others? Share your project title, aims and objectives with another student. You are well on the way if you can explain why you are carrying out this project, what it will be called, and what you hope to achieve in terms of its aims and objectives.

**Key term**

- **‘Working’ title**: This is the title you start with, and that is agreed as part of your proposal with your Supervisor.

- **Word limit**: You must submit a written report which is 5000 words long (+/- 10%). This means that you must write more than 4500, but no more than 5500 words.

**Study tip**

Your working title and your proposed action must allow you to investigate and access all the skills that you see in the Assessment Objectives. So the scope of your project must allow you to plan, research, analyse, and evaluate your topic, not just describe or narrate the topic.
From ‘working’ title to final title

The initial idea(s) for your project and your project aims and objectives will be summed up in your ‘working’ title. This ‘working’ title is agreed with your Supervisor. You will have done some preliminary research into your topic which helps you develop this ‘working’ title.

At your mid-project review meeting held with your Supervisor (see chapter x in this book), you will be expected to show how you have completed your research, before moving on to the report-writing stage. Your plan may have changed at this point, depending on how your project work has progressed. As a result of your meeting with your Supervisor, you may make modifications to your plan. This is not a problem. In fact, it’s a very acceptable part of project research.

You will record these changes (or modifications) in your Production Log. You will also decide on your ‘final’ title. This may be a bit different from your original ‘working’ title. Again, this is not a problem, since it reflects the nature of independent research. Remember the assessment of your IPQ is very focused on the process you follow, as well as your final written report.

Study tip

You may choose to work up more than one initial idea for your meeting with your Supervisor. Or if your Supervisor doesn’t agree that your first initial idea will work effectively as a research project, you may need to work through more than one initial idea. This is not a problem, and is all part of the learning and research process. Consider your Supervisor as helping you to achieve the best results in your project research. Their advice is a valuable resource for you.
Working independently

Completing your IPQ gives you the opportunity to choose your own topic of study and work on your own. This is great preparation for employment or higher education. It may also be one of the first times where you’ve had to take responsibility for your own work at this level.

**ACTIVITY Independent working**

1 Independent working has its own risks. Read the statements A–E below, then decide your level of experience of these risk factors (where 1 = no experience at all; 2 = some experience, and 3 = lots of experience). On the right, write a number 1–3 and note how you intend to overcome these risk factors.

- **A** believing you have lots more time than you do, particularly at the start
- **B** not structuring and planning your time in detail
- **C** missing key deadlines
- **D** not giving yourself key deadlines, or monitoring your progress against your plan
- **E** not asking for advice and support from the right people

**Study tip**

Working independently does not mean you are on your own. Your Project Supervisor will schedule key meetings with you, and will be available at other times to offer advice, guidance and support. If your Supervisor can’t help you, they’ll be able to suggest other people who can.
Checklist: are you ready for your initial ideas review meeting with your Supervisor?

As part of your IPQ, you are required to gain Oxford AQA Exams approval for your project title. Your Supervisor will discuss with you exactly how to go about getting your project approved. Work through your initial idea(s) with your Supervisor to get some early feedback.

**Study tip**

Make sure you can ‘sell’ your project idea to your Supervisor. Practise describing it in one or two sentences so that it sounds succinct and clear. If you can convince yourself that it’s something you are passionate about and that you can research it in sufficient depth (at A level standard), your Supervisor will appreciate this and be able to help you more easily to gain approval for your project title.

You need to be sure that your idea has sufficient potential for you to fulfill the Assessment Objectives effectively. Use this checklist to make sure you’re prepared to meet your Supervisor.¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>If no, why not? Comment on your next steps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have a clear idea of how completing an IPQ will be of benefit to me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have carefully considered the time I need to make available for completing my Independent Project</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have thought carefully about my topic area and know it really interests me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have considered what resources I have available and to what extent this impacts on my topic choice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹Filling in this chart is not an Oxford AQA Exams requirement for your IPQ. However it may help you to prepare for a meeting with your Supervisor.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>If no, why not? Comment on your next steps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have given sufficient thought to my suggested project title(s) and feel confident it will give me scope to fulfil the assessment criteria</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a good idea of the financial costs involved with carrying out my project and have considered if this affects my topic choice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ve drawn up at least one draft project title (my suggested ‘working title’)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have done some preliminary research to help me decide on my project title and the initial resources where i will start my research</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I’ve got a good idea of my project aims and objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My project title allows me to make use of high-level research skills including planning, analysis, evaluation and explanation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The questions I need to ask my Supervisor in my initial planning meeting are:

As a result of my meeting with my Project Supervisor, I need to:
Initial planning for your project

By the end of this section, you should be able to:
✔ explore the tasks and sub-tasks involved in the work of your project
✔ identify the timings involved in each phase of the project
✔ understand a variety of project planning techniques available to you
✔ draft an initial plan for your project.

Project planning

A project is more likely to be successful if you do some research before you start. You need to identify the sort of tasks you need to do, and whom or where you will consult in order to fulfil your objectives. This planning process will allow you to anticipate the risks involved and the problems you might face, and to manage your project efficiently.

Project planning techniques are useful in many different situations, such as planning a holiday, a gap year, a revision programme or a work-related task. A thorough plan helps you to make sure that your goals are achievable within the time and budget you have available.

Study tip

The most common comment offered by students when they reflect on the work of their Independent Project is:

‘If I did this again I would plan my time better.’

What factors do you need to consider?

Several different factors will impact on the successful completion of your project. These might include the following.

• **Time available:** work back from your final deadline, and include any interim dates you need to meet. Also consider other commitments in and out of school, and deadlines for other subjects. What time do you have to do the required tasks? How much time will each task take? To keep yourself on track, break your project into a series of phases with short-term deadlines.

• **Resources available:** What sources are available, are there enough to cover your research topic? Do you need any specialist equipment or materials in order to gather your own primary data? Are these all readily available in your school, or do you need to find them yourself?

Key term

**Project plan** This is a project schedule which details the key tasks and the deadlines you need to achieve to fulfil your project.
• **Dependencies:** work out the sequence of tasks to be carried out. Note which tasks can only be done once a preceding task has been completed. This is the critical path of your project plan. It highlights the items in your schedule which could hold up the remaining phases of the project. For example, you can’t hold an event such as a football match unless you have found somewhere to play. The timing when some other tasks are done may not be so critical to the success of the project.

• **Risks or potential problems:** what could go wrong? Might problems get in your way? Does your plan rely too heavily on a busy person’s contribution? Do you need some ‘buffer’ time or contingency, in case problems arise?

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### Checklist for successful project planning

**Clear goals:** write down exactly what it is you are hoping to achieve.

**Communication:** work out how and when you will communicate with other people involved in or interested in your project’s progress.

**Risk management:** carry out a risk assessment to stay safe, (see page 62); anticipate any other potential problems and create a ‘plan B’ should these occur.

**Keep realistic:** be entirely realistic about the resources you have: stay rational and down-to-earth about the schedule and scope of the project.

**Keep on track:** identify exactly how you will keep to the deadlines you have set yourself, and monitor your own progress.

**Clearly define roles and responsibilities:** if your project involves other people (you might interview them, for example), make sure they are clear about what, how, and when they should help you.

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### Making a diary

Making a print or electronic diary is essential to planning your own time, keeping you on track, and reducing the risks of working independently. This diary does not need to be submitted but you might want to include a sample page or two as evidence of your organisation skills to complement the production log entries.

✔ At the start, put in all your appointments with your Project Supervisor.

✔ Put in your key project dates as outlined in your own project plan.

✔ Include all the Oxford AQA Exams deadlines (your Supervisor will know them).

✔ Add other activities in your project plan, showing when they have to be done and completed.

✔ Plan time for fun and rest as well!

✔ Keep your diary with you always – and refer to it regularly.

✔ Set up phone alerts or email reminders to warn you of key dates and what needs to be done.
For project planning techniques see pages 30–31.

**ACTIVITY  Project planning**

As part of a school charity day, there will be a ‘table top’ sale. You will be selling second-hand books. You have been asked to market the event around school. You have to produce 200 leaflets to distribute in the staff room, classrooms, the library, and promote the event online. You have three weeks to fulfil the brief.

Using one of the project planning techniques described overleaf, or one of your own:

1. Break down this project into smaller tasks and estimate the time needed for each task.
2. Identify the dependencies – that is, which tasks can only be done when another has been completed.
3. Prepare a project plan.
4. Is it all manageable within the time and money resources you have available? If not, what changes do you need to make?

### What this means for my project

This type of project planning is vital for the successful development of your Independent Project. At the same time, your Project Proposal Form requires you to complete a Planning review. On the form, you need to list:

- the research/activity/task to be carried out and the deadlines you set yourself
- the sources you will consult in your research (these might involve you accessing
- library resources, an online database, or carrying out some face to face interviews)
- your proposed actions.

### Study tip

Your Project Proposal Form requires you to list any likely resources you will make use of in your project work. It’s helpful, therefore, to make a note of any books, websites, data or evidence you refer to in your initial planning which may be relevant for your project. This represents good practice for when you move on to your full research anyway. You are also asked to append any planning documentation or tools that you may use. The main elements of the plan need to be in the log. Additional planning materials should be minimal, and not all submitted with the final project.
Project planning techniques

There are several project planning tools and techniques you can use.

Planning with Gantt charts

A Gantt chart is a useful tool to help schedule actions and tasks which are part of a project that has a number of stages. A Gantt chart is a horizontal bar chart showing the scheduled tasks and dependencies against a timeline. It will:

✔ help you to break down tasks into smaller chunks of work
✔ assist in working out a critical path for a project
✔ help you to plan for periods of more intense activity
✔ help you to monitor progress and check whether you are on schedule or not.

To create a Gantt chart

1. Make a list of all the activities you think will form part of the project you need to plan. Be as comprehensive as you can.
2. List the length of time you think each task should take. Work out which tasks must precede (come before) others, and which tasks can be done in parallel.
3. Using spreadsheet software, list the days/weeks/months you have available to complete your project across the horizontal (x) axis.
4. Down the vertical (y) axis, list all the activities in the correct order of completion. Then draw a horizontal bar beside each task to represent the length of time it will take.

Planning with sticky notes

This can be a very practical way to visualise the tasks you have ahead.

1. List all the tasks and sub-tasks that make up your project and write each one of them on a sticky note. At this point, you just need to list everything. Don’t worry about getting them in the right order.
2. Now group the sticky notes together into larger areas of activity. Write how long each task should take on each sticky note.
3. On a whiteboard, create a start point on the left and an end point on the right. Place the sticky notes in a logical line, drawing a line into each activity box (or sticky note) and a line out. This will help you identify dependencies.

Using online planning templates

You can also find free planning templates online; these provide a structure which you can personalise for your own needs. (Free or open source project planning software may also be available online, but remember these are often set up for multi-user team projects so are perhaps more complex than you need now.)
1 Project management skills: starting out

Drawing up a detailed project plan

Having looked at the different project planning techniques available to you, you should now be able to consider your own project in more detail and create your own project plan. In some cases, you may need to carry out this detailed planning before your project can be approved. In other cases, your initial planning may provide sufficient information for your proposal to be approved.

Key term

**Dependencies** The tasks that have to be done first in order that other tasks can be done. For example, are there materials you need before you can start an experiment for your research?

Your plan

Your plan will need to detail the following.

1. **Main tasks** involved in carrying out your project.
2. **Sub-tasks** related to these main tasks.
3. **Critical path** of your project: what are the dependencies?
4. **Time you have available**: the deadline for submission, as well as interim project requirements are laid down by Oxford International AQA Exams; your school may also set deadlines for you.
5. **Time that each task and sub-task will take**.
6. **Risks** that might be involved during your project, together with a plan of action should they materialise.
7. **Budget** (if applicable) that you are working to.
8. How often will you **communicate**/meet up with your Project Supervisor?
9. **Format** to present your project.
10. **How you will monitor your own progress** against the project plan. This is a very important part of your project plan and should include all relevant details. For example, what sort of checks will you put in place to ensure that you’re on target to achieve your objectives? How will you know that each element of your project is being given the appropriate amount of time, and that you will finish it on schedule? If you have to divert from the original plan, perhaps for good reason, what will you do?

**ACTIVITY** Drawing up a plan

Using one of the techniques described above, draw up an initial plan for your own Independent Project

**Study tip**

You are more likely to have success in the IPQ if you have a detailed project plan, and can provide clear evidence of how you will monitor your progress against the agreed project plan, even if you later change this plan. You will achieve a lower grade if your project plan is brief, with little evidence of how you will keep track of your project’s development.
Organisational skills – keeping your project on track

Of course, coming up with a good project plan is not all of it. It’s a great start – and absolutely essential. You’ve also got to keep track of progress and ensure you’re on schedule to succeed.

**ACTIVITY  Personal organisational skills audit**

1. Identify a project or a task you completed recently. It may be related to school work, or something in your free time. Write down what it was.
   - A Make a note of all the skills you used really well to carry out this task.
   - B Make a note of all the skills you could have improved in order to do this task better.

2. Define the organisational skills you believe are necessary for successful completion of your project. Write these down, dividing up your ideas into:
   - A those which are a ‘must-have’ or essential
   - B those which are a ‘nice to have’ or desirable

**ACTIVITY  Matching competencies and skills requirements**

1. How do your own competencies match up to the skills requirements listed on page 33? Decide what level of experience you have in these areas. Write a number 1–3 beside each list item, according to the following levels:
   - A no experience at all = 1
   - B some experience = 2
   - C lots of experience = 3

2. In the areas where you have no experience or very little, consider what you will do to compensate for this or how you will work differently with regard to your Independent Project. Your Supervisor might be able to help here.

**Key term**

**Competence** (competencies - pl) the ability or talent to do something very well or very efficiently

**Critical path** the sequence of tasks in your project which need the longest time and will affect the end date (or deadline) if they are delayed. Some tasks may be done later, but won’t necessarily impact on the end date; these don’t form part of the critical path.
Organisational skills for the purposes of your Independent Project involve three key areas.

**Managing your time**
We often hear the phrase ‘time management’, but we can’t manage time, only the activities we do within that time.

✔ Plan out each task and sub task to be completed by a particular date.
✔ Plan your time so that you know exactly when you will be working on your Extended Project.
✔ Protect this planned time carefully.
✔ Carry out tasks in the most effective order, and always be aware of the critical path of your project.

**Managing yourself**

✔ Start with a positive commitment to fulfil your Independent Project.
✔ It is very easy to get distracted – developing self-discipline is crucial. (Put your phone in a different room when you work on your project!)
✔ List the tasks you will do at the beginning of each planned period of work; short term goals are as important as long term goals.
✔ Learn to adjust or amend your plans as required. Keep a record of the changes you make and why you made them.
✔ Build in rewards for completing some of your goals.

**Managing your environment**

✔ Re-adjust others’ expectations of you and what free time you will have available.
✔ Identify where you work best, both at school and at home.
✔ Organise your desk so that you are working most effectively.
✔ Organise your files on your computer and regularly make a back up of all your work.
✔ Make your notes on A4 punched paper so you can easily file them in a ring binder and organise/index them appropriately.
✔ User a planner, diary or calendar to assign time to tasks.
Project proposal and approval

By the end of this section, you should:

✔ understand what is involved in the project approval process and why it matters
✔ appreciate what your Project Supervisor needs to consider when assessing your project idea
✔ be able to prepare for your planning review meeting with your Project Supervisor
✔ What is involved in the project approval process?

Oxford AQA has a formal project approval process which you need to be aware of. This process helps you and your Supervisor make sure that you have chosen an appropriate area of study and project objectives. This is a check that you will be able to fulfil the assessment criteria and achieve success. Your Project Supervisor will support you through this process, but it is important that you understand the requirements. See the Oxford International AQA specification.2

Checklist for the approval of titles

Your Supervisor will need to check the following:

✔ Your project topic allows for the development and extension of your skills and knowledge outside of your other areas of study.
✔ Your project allows you to access the higher level concepts and skills in the assessment objectives, that is that you can plan, research, analyse, evaluate, and explain – rather than simply describe and narrate.
✔ Your project title is clear and focussed on a specific issue which will allow you to fulfil it within the timescale and within the word limits, and that it will not end up either too long or too short.
✔ Your project title will allow you to work independently, investigating and researching your objectives without having to rely on a very small number of existing resources which would limit the potential for original work.
✔ You will be able to approach your project impartially and in an entirely balanced way.
✔ You have a good idea of the format and date of presentation of your final project.

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2Please refer to the current version of the specification on Oxford International AQA’s website at www.oxfordaqaexams.org.uk/subjects/projects/ipq
Checklist: are you ready for your Planning Review meeting?

Use this checklist to make sure you’re appropriately prepared.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have carefully considered which topic area I’d like to form the basis of my research, and it is …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My project title is …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have conducted preliminary research into possible sources and know where I can find relevant information (see page 43 onwards for more information on research methods).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The way this project allows me to fulfil the assessment criteria is …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The way I will monitor my progress against my project plan is …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have carried out a skills audit and considered the risks involved in organising my project and available time are …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have begun to think about the risks involved in gathering the data I need (see page 62).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will manage time and resources as part of my project plan by …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The issues involved with working independently are…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The time I have available is …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The questions to ask my Project Supervisor in my Planning Review meeting are…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What else do I need to do?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What this means for my project

The work of this chapter allows you and your Project Supervisor to complete parts A and B of the AQA Project Proposal Form. Part C of this form will also be completed by your Centre Coordinator. Once this is done, your project proposal has been formally approved. Completed Parts A, B and C of the Project Proposal Form form part of the evidence required for assessment and moderation. Once your project proposal has been formally approved, you will then have a planning review meeting with your Supervisor.

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3Filling in this chart is not an Oxford AQA Exams requirement for your IPQ. However it may help you to prepare for a meeting with your Supervisor.
Project progress checkpoint

1 Project management skills: starting out

Have you completed part A of the Project Proposal Form? Yes No
Have you discussed the Project Proposal Form, and in particular, part B of the Form with your Supervisor? Yes No
Have you got all the information you need regarding the approval process within your part? Yes No

2 Project management skills: researching the project

3 Project management skills: producing the project product

4 Presenting your project

5 Finalising and submitting your project

Next steps

The next stage of your Independent Project Qualification is to really focus on the research for your project. As a result of discussions with your Project Supervisor in your planning review meeting, you might choose to make amendments or changes to your project plan. This is not a problem; you just need to record the changes you make. Your project research will involve using resources effectively, and the development of skills such as critical thinking, decision making, and problem solving to support you in the successful completion of this stage.
Mary James

The only handbook that has been designed specifically to support the Oxford AQA International Independent Project Qualification (9693). This resource is invaluable for students who are embarking on their independent project and also for teachers guiding them through the process. It offers practical advice, hints and study tips to assist students as they:

- Identify an area of interest and plan out their project, to enable them to meet a schedule and conform to specification requirements.
- Develop research skills, including record keeping, selecting sources and evaluating evidence.
- Draft a subject report and select the best techniques to present their work.
- Learn how to get the most out of project review meetings, by formulating the right questions to ask their supervisor.