International
INDEPENDENT PROJECT QUALIFICATION

Mary James
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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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Key term</strong></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dual accreditation</strong></td>
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</table>
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>Constraints</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Does your project complement your other subject areas? Will it be easy to manage around your other subject commitments?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>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?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Are there any cultural or religious customs which might affect what you choose to research or which prevent you from researching certain topic areas?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>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?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>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?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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

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.†

<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>
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</table>

†Filling 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 management skills: starting out

<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></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ve got a good idea of my project aims and objectives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My project title allows me to make use of high-level research skills including planning, analysis, evaluation and explanation</td>
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</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 of 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.
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.)
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.
✔ Use 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 specification2.

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.

Filling 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have you completed part A of the Project Proposal Form?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you discussed the Project Proposal Form, and in particular, part B of the Form with your Supervisor?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you got all the information you need regarding the approval process within your part?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 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.
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.

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**How to get in touch:**

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