IIM Research Process

7 Steps to Helping Every Student Achieve Research Excellence

The Independent Investigation Method (IIM) consists of seven successive steps that culminate in a completed research project. The process is repeatable and applicable across a school's full range of subjects.

Proven over decades, IIM is used in schools throughout the country to guide primary, intermediate and secondary students through the research process. IIM gives teachers the tools to teach and monitor essential skills, meet state standards, encourage critical thinking and prevent plagiarism.

Step 1: Choosing a Topic

Making sure a research topic is neither too broad nor too narrow is a challenge for your students, even when you have assigned the topic. Here are some of the skills IIM reinforces during Step 1:

> Brainstorming
>
> Choosing a topic
>
> Reviewing existing literature
>
> Identifying prior knowledge
>
> Formulating questions of interest about the topic
>
> Organizing information using provided tools
>
> Developing new vocabulary about the topic through listening and writing

Step 2: Setting a Goal

Before students grab the encyclopedia or charge off to the Internet in search of information, they must have a clear idea of what they are looking for. The goal setting

process gets all the "stuff" of research in place before the search begins. This includes asking good questions related to their topics. Being playful with questioning strategies gets them out of the proverbial "box."

IIM sets the stage for:

> Setting concrete, measurable goals
>
> Developing questions about the topic to inform the research
>
> Formulating different kinds of questions
>
> Managing time
>
> Writing a statement of purpose

Step 3: Doing the Research

The research step of any research process is where students finally begin to find NEW information. Once they find it, do they know what to do with it? Too many students are expected to complete an assignment without training in the skills of gathering information without plagiarizing.

IIM is here to help. Step 3 helps students:

> Understand the ethics of research
>
> Document sources in correct bibliographical format
>
> Use a variety of appropriate text and non-text sources
>
> Gather detailed information through listening, observing and/or reading

Formulate notes for paraphrasing and summarizing

Use a variety of note-taking techniques

Develop new vocabulary about the topic through listening, observing and reading

Step 4: Organizing Materials

All too often students don't know what to do with all the information they have gathered. Overwhelmed by the volume of amassed facts, they typically write their reports sequencing information source by source, rather than integrating what they have learned from all their sources and then writing an original piece.

IIM shows students how to structure their projects by encouraging them to consider what they have learned and construct their presentations accordingly. They'll learn how to:

Summarize and organize information from multiple resources

Organize information in systematic ways

Analyze and synthesize their notes into sequential categories

Step 5: Evaluating Goals

All students deserve to know how well they are doing. Revisiting their project goals along the way helps ensure students are being true to their original topics and goals. Additionally, it helps them be sure their research process has been satisfactory.

IIM provides this check-in by encouraging each student to:

>   Retell specific details and draw conclusions from the information they've gathered
>   Use their compiled information and acquired knowledge to check on original goals, raise additional questions and tell about their experiences
>   Identify areas where they need to dig for more information
>   Reflect on the role of researcher
>   Set goals for future research studies

Step 6: Creating the Product

Too often the dreaded research paper becomes the reason students groan at the thought of a research assignment. Good writing skills should be valued and nurtured.

They will be tested on many required state tests. However, there are many ways to share what the student has learned that go beyond a factual report. Teachers want students to be information producers, not just information consumers, so product requirements need to be creative to enable student creativity.

That's where IIM comes in. Step 6 challenges students to explore creative ways to tell their stories by helping them:

> Represent information in a variety of ways
>
> Develop and follow a creative presentation plan
>
> Produce final, edited documents and projects
>
> Select, organize and produce visual assets (photos, charts, etc.) to complement their presentation and enhance meaning
>
> Use a variety of writing styles

Step 7: Presenting the Project

All too often teachers add to the frustration of the research process by having the outcome be a report reading session—tiring and uninformative for both the students and the teacher! Students need to learn how to present to different types of audiences and in different settings. A presentation to the school board requires a different format than a display table at a product fair.

IIM prepares students for a variety of presentation situations by helping them:

Present information in a variety of formats

Use speaking strategies effectively

Practice and use identified presentation skills: eye contact, voice tone, volume, pace, etc.

Speak appropriately to different audiences for different purposes and occasions

Identify necessary presentation techniques and equipment

Listen attentively to others' presentations