

Methods of Developing Thinking Skills Based on Independent Work in History Lessons

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Received: 11 May 2025; **Accepted:** 07 June 2025; **Published:** 09 July 2025

Abstract: The article examines an important factor in teaching logical thinking through independent work in history lessons in secondary schools, namely comparative education, linking social sciences together. It outlines the issues of developing students' competencies in scientific awareness, which ultimately leads future history students to independent, logical thinking, working with historical facts and using historical works of art on the topic in this process.

Keywords: Study assignments, independent work, integration, independent thinking, historical fact, artistic texture, fictional information, comparison, juxtaposition, generalization, identification of the original, highlighting.

Introduction: The acceleration of societal development, the expansion of information processes, and the demand for adaptability define the requirements for preparing students for life in a civil society with a market economy. These dynamics place high expectations on teachers. For the effective work of both teachers and students, it is essential to adopt a modern, competency-based approach to education. Accordingly, the teacher grounds their practice in the goals of this approach: teaching students to solve problems arising in their learning activities, select appropriate information sources, identify optimal and innovative methods, achieve objectives, assess outcomes, organise their own work, collaborate with peers, and address cognitive, analytical, and axiological challenges. In such a context, it is crucial to understand the purpose of each task, determine its aims and objectives, and seek ways to address them. It is well established that students firmly assimilate only what they have attained through their own efforts. The issue of student independence in learning is not new; scholars of every era have attached special importance to it.

According to Panfilova, the competency-based approach is tied to the idea of educating and training students not only as specialists and professionals in their field, but also as well-rounded individuals—as

members of teams and of society at large [1.37-46]. The essence of this approach goes beyond transmitting the knowledge, skills and practical experience needed for professional duties: it seeks to broaden horizons, foster interdisciplinary abilities, nurture the capacity for individual creative solutions, promote self-directed learning and cultivate humanistic values.

Situational tasks aim to cultivate the most universally applicable information-handling skills, taking B. Bloom's taxonomy as their foundation [2]. Solving such tasks proceeds through a sequence of stages: goal setting, activation of prior knowledge, problem identification, selection of tools, theoretical analysis, practical implementation and generalisation. These situational tasks represent a new-generation teaching technique that integrates multiple instructional functions.

Situational tasks are designed to develop the most universally applicable strategies for processing information. Many scholars identify the following core set of cognitive operations: analysis, synthesis, comparison, generalisation, classification, recognition, selection, design, integration, permutation, transformation, unification, structuring, construction and analogy. Hence, the pedagogical value of situational tasks lies in their ability to reframe the teacher–student relationship as one of equal,

reciprocal interaction. The teacher ceases to be a mere source of correct answers and instead acts as a facilitator who helps students master effective ways of acquiring knowledge and taking action [3.59-62].

Clear conceptions of the role that learner autonomy plays in mastering knowledge can be found in the writings of K. D. Ushinskiy, M. N. Skatkin, I. Ya. Lerner, and other scholars. The issue remains highly relevant today, because autonomy is crucial not only for completing secondary education but also for pursuing further studies after school and for succeeding in one's subsequent professional activity. Accordingly, the teacher's principal task is not merely to transmit a set amount of knowledge, but to cultivate students' intrinsic interest in learning. Interest is the driving force that prompts students to explore a topic in greater depth and to develop their thinking skills. Such interest grows when learners fully understand what the teacher is explaining, when the tasks set before them are engaging enough to stimulate creativity, and when their independence in assimilating the material is encouraged—by teaching them to draw their own conclusions and to foresee how their knowledge might be applied in future contexts. In an era marked by an unprecedented expansion of information, every individual is expected to attain a high level of professional competence and to exhibit business-oriented qualities such as efficient information navigation and confident decision-making. None of these demands can be met without the capacity for creative work.

The aim of this study is to summarise my experience in employing independent work in history lessons.

Fulfilling these objectives enables me to develop my own system for organising such tasks in class and to raise the quality of extracurricular instruction in history, law and the sciences.

What can and should a student be able to do independently?

First and foremost, they must be capable of acquiring knowledge from diverse sources. Student autonomy is manifested in the need and ability to think independently, act in unfamiliar situations, recognise a question or problem and devise an approach to solving it. It is distinguished by a pronounced critical awareness and the capacity to articulate one's own point of view.

Consequently, I regard the essence of independent work as the student's productive activity, during which they transform information, acquire new knowledge and skills, and resolve design- and creativity-oriented problems.

Independent work is an integral element of the

educational process—one that raises lesson effectiveness, energises students in class and fosters the development of their cognitive activity. Taking into account the specific nature of history as a school subject, I emphasise the following core mental abilities of students:

- Ability to locate historical facts and processes in time and space: correlating an event's date with a specific time period; linking a date to its century or millennium; determining the duration, sequence and synchrony of the events and processes under study; constructing chronological charts and synchronic tables.

- Ability to analyse historical material: break a narrative into coherent segments; single out the main idea in a passage; highlight the key characteristics and interrelations of historical events, including their class nature; examine a social phenomenon in its development by identifying its primary causes and consequences; apply generalised knowledge—concepts arranged in a logical sequence—to analyse and explain analogous facts; interpret new historical evidence on the basis of the assimilated laws and regularities of social development.

- Ability to synthesise and generalise historical material: describe individual facts; characterise the phenomena under study and prominent historical figures; draw overarching conclusions from the facts examined; and generalise the causal relationships of historical events.

- Ability to compare and contrast similar historical facts: identify their shared and divergent features; trace the changes that occur as a social phenomenon moves from one stage of development to the next; and construct comparative profiles of historical events, processes and figures.

- Ability to derive and substantiate conclusions from a class-based perspective, grounding them in evidence and structuring arguments in a logically coherent manner.

- Ability to present historical and contemporary materials, and to produce outlines and summaries.

If factual data are mastered by students solely through rote repetition, cognitive strategies can be internalised only by means of independent practice—training in specific operations and applying them in new contexts. Such opportunities arise only through systematic independent work. A systematic approach to independent work includes the following elements:

- Incorporating into students' sphere of independent cognitive activity the full range of knowledge available on the topic — facts, laws, methods of inquiry, and so forth;

- Engaging every student in the process of independent

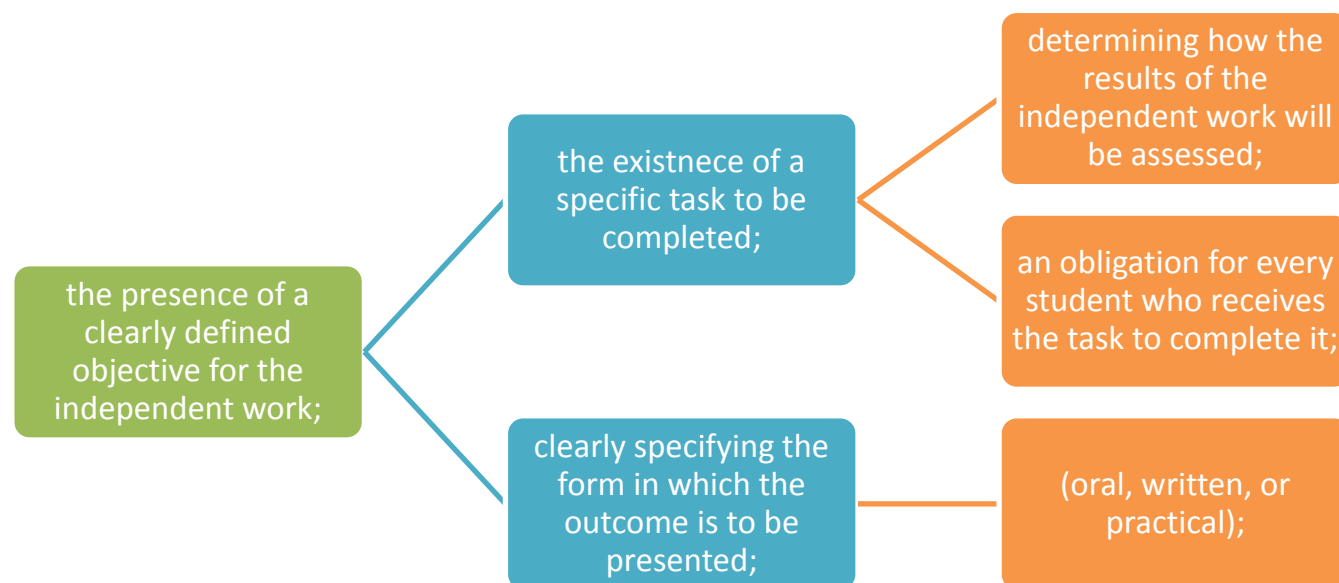
cognitive activity, taking into account their level of preparedness and individual characteristics;

- Progressing step by step from simpler tasks to more complex ones, while reinforcing their creative dimension.

Independent work helps students consolidate knowledge, form both academic and intellectual work skills, develop their cognitive capacities, prepare for self-directed effort and cultivate habits of self-

education. The fostering of autonomy unfolds gradually over the entire period of schooling, with the share of independent tasks rising from the lower to the upper grades. The effectiveness of such work depends on how it is organised and on the skilful combination of independent activities with other instructional methods.

From an organisational standpoint, independent work includes:

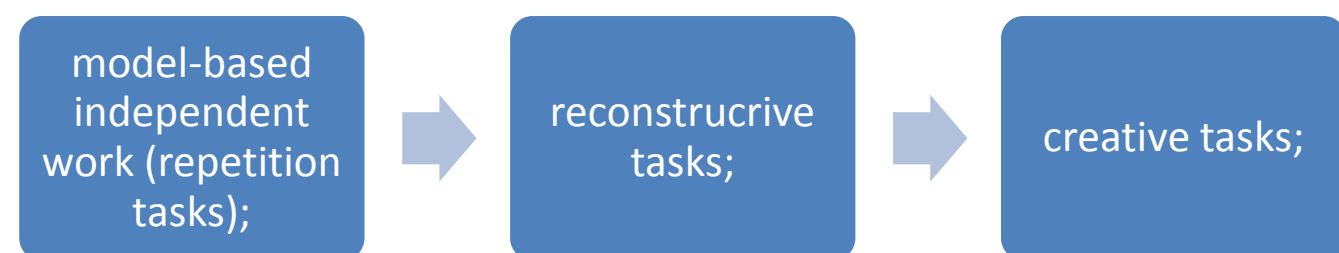


Independent work, when used as a learning tool, must in every specific situation correspond to a clearly defined didactic goal and task. Research by various scholars makes it possible to distinguish three—sometimes four—levels of autonomous activity.

In the pedagogical literature, independent work is classified in several ways—by didactic purpose,

knowledge sources, and the level of students' productive creative activity. Students' cognitive activity falls into two principal categories: reproductive and creative.

The following types of independent work correspond to these categories:



In my pedagogical practice, we apply four successive levels of students' productive independence during lessons. Each level corresponds to one of the four types of independent work.

For an individual to reach fulfilment through education—and especially to achieve self-understanding—one must first know one's own history. Indeed, without historical memory there can

be no progress. From this standpoint, the country faces a pressing need to reform its system of history

education. In recent years a range of modern methods and techniques has been actively adopted in the teaching of history. Scholars have synthesised traditional approaches, classifying them into four principal methods and identifying the specific techniques associated with each [4.48-61].

At the first level, students replicate actions according to a given model: describing a historical figure, constructing a diagram, recognising events and highlighting key ideas. Such tasks typically rely on worked examples and model problems and are practised in lower- and middle-secondary history lessons. Because independence here is limited to straightforward repetition of modelled actions, the activity is not yet fully autonomous. To reinforce these operations, I provide extensive scaffolding materials—varied prompts, cues and reference sheets (e.g., when studying the Timurid period). Tasks at this level supply the core knowledge students must acquire before moving on to more demanding stages of independent work.

The second level involves generalising previously learned cognitive techniques and applying them to more complex—yet still routine—problems. Tasks at this stage nurture intellectual curiosity and create conditions for advancing students' patterns of thinking. This level is realised through reproductive-variative independent work. Here, students tackle modified-context exercises that systematise and organise earlier material, along with verification tasks that provide immediate feedback. Such transformative repetition of knowledge forms the foundation of reconstructive independent work.

The third level presupposes the productive, independent application of previously acquired knowledge through higher-order mental operations—analysis, synthesis, comparison, identifying the essential, generalisation, and inductive-deductive reasoning. Tasks at this stage fall under the cognitive-search (heuristic) type, and the learner's creative individuality begins to emerge precisely here. A continual search for new solutions, together with the systematisation and generalisation of accumulated knowledge, makes students' understanding more flexible, deepens their interest in what they are studying, and fosters a sustained desire for further self-directed learning. Creative cognitive activity involves seeking new knowledge by means that the learners themselves select or devise; the most common format is the solution of cognitive, problem-based tasks. In my teaching practice I employ varied sets of such tasks—diagnostic and verification exercises, problem situations, exploratory assignments, and creative homework—at every instructional stage. They encourage active intellectual engagement and heighten interest in the study of the past. Because of the variety of cognitive tasks, I use assessment tools that specify criteria for each particular assignment: the student's ability to apply effective learning strategies proposed in—or independently derived from—the

task; the capacity to identify what is most significant, essential, and sufficient in historical material to justify conclusions, formulate personal viewpoints, or evaluate past events; the ability to operate with relevant concepts; and the skill to construct an answer in logical sequence and present it in an appropriate form.

1. Logical tasks.

When responding to a question, students should:

- 1) decide why the most recent fact must be connected with one of the earlier ones and formulate a precise inductive or deductive conclusion.
- 2) support their answer with at least three pieces of evidence, choosing from the following:
 - A) similarity of goals between the two uprisings;
 - B) similarity in the composition of their participants;
 - C) similarity of the causes that triggered them;
 - D) similarity in the course of events and their outcomes;
 - E) similarity in the reasons for their defeat;
 - F) similarity in their consequences.
- 3) employ a task-specific comparative method and, if appropriate, compile a comparative summary table.
- 4) classify the historical facts under an appropriate category—e.g., civil war, peasant uprising, national-liberation movement, and so forth.
- 5) optionally, apply evidence-based argumentation by presenting specific historical facts for each line of comparison. The nature and volume of the data will enable assessment of students' overall awareness and the breadth of sources they have consulted.

2. Problem-based tasks.

3. Metaphorical tasks.

At this level, I assign independent “laboratory” tasks that require students to work with a variety of sources. The complexity of these tasks should increase in proportion to the degree to which thinking skills are being developed. The highest expression of students' creative activity is reached when they can formulate a problem themselves and devise ways to solve it.

The use of independent work facilitates the implementation of a differentiated approach to teaching. My professional experience leads me to the following conclusions:

Regular use of independent work noticeably improves the quality of students' knowledge.

Independent tasks achieve the stated developmental objectives.

Engaging in autonomous activity stimulates learners'

cognitive engagement and helps them become self-confident individuals.

In history lessons, students reach the fourth level of thinking only by progressing through the preceding three. Assigning a complex task while skipping a level wastes class time, leaves the learner confused and ultimately prevents mastery of the material. At the fourth level, tasks require students to draw on the rich network of concepts and relationships accumulated in instruction and life experience and, through the power of imagination and active reasoning, to create something new, distinctive and—to a certain extent—individual. The more independent assignments are incorporated into history teaching in general-education schools, the more fully students' logical-thinking skills develop.

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