



Approaches to Learning 1



Course Description

Welcome to Approaches to Learning (ATL) with Mr. Benton! This course is designed to support the rest of the pre-DP and IB curriculum by providing students with a solid base of academic skills. These include time management, organization, study strategies, research methods, test preparation, communication, collaboration, memory, metacognition, ethical decision-making, and stress management. Through practice, reflection, and application, students will develop the five interrelated ATL skill areas and the attributes of the IB Learner Profile. The goal is for students to become increasingly independent learners who can recognize useful strategies, adjust when something isn't working, and apply what they learn here in their other courses. While they do overlap, things are broken up into five units:

1. **Self-Management Skills:** organization, time management, goal-setting, study and note-taking strategies, test preparation, memory, motivation, and stress management
2. **Thinking Skills:** critical and creative thinking, metacognition, reflection, problem solving, and decision-making
3. **Social Skills:** collaboration, teamwork, interpersonal skills, perspective-taking, and conflict management
4. **Research Skills:** finding, evaluating, organizing, using, and documenting information; academic honesty and responsible use of sources
5. **Communication Skills:** written, verbal, visual, and digital communication; listening, discussion, and presenting

Academic Honesty

I expect all my students to complete individual assignments without the assistance of others unless I explicitly provide permission for collaboration or outside assistance on a specific assignment. Your work on such independent assignments should reflect your own personal thinking. Sharing such work with another student; discussing assessment questions when doing so has not been permitted; using another person's work for reference; including uncited evidence; making use of un-cited analyses, claims, evidence, or other material from generative AI; or using any other human's or AI's words or concepts without accurately citing the source will result in a grade of 0% on the assignment and a referral to administration for cheating.

ATL very often involves regular collaboration, groupwork, discussion, and shared presentations. When I've designed an assignment to be inherently collaborative, working with classmates is not only permitted but expected. So — when collaborating — share ideas, divide responsibilities, give each other feedback, rehearse together, and otherwise contribute to the success of the group as directed. Just stay honest in baking your piece of the pie so as not to poison dinner.

If you're in a bind, always ask for help instead of resorting to academic dishonesty. I reserve the right to challenge the authenticity of student-generated work; inconsistencies in style, voice, process, or demonstrated ability may require investigation to determine whether or not plagiarism occurred.

Classroom Policies

Expectations

Please bring completed assignments and all of the necessary materials to class everyday. You'll also want to be mentally prepared: this means contributing to class activities, actively listening to others, practicing unfamiliar skills, working productively with others, and taking intellectual risks on the daily. I'll ask you, as my ATL student, to reflect actively and — after some practice — to notice patterns, ask questions, identify what worked and what did not, and consider what to do differently next time. Reflection isn't performative: the goal is to leave a trail of your thinking about your own learning. Likewise, class discussions and collaborative work should be honest, respectful, and mature. Students may disagree, but effective communication requires both expressing yourself clearly and listening carefully to others.

Approach

My teaching in this course is driven by critical concepts and fueled by inquiry. Classroom activities are focused on effective teamwork, authentic collaboration, space for reflection, and the practical application of ATL skills. One class meeting each week will function as DS (Diploma Support): protected time to organize, plan ahead, seek help, catch up where necessary, and stay on top of work from across the IB Programme. Using that time well is itself part of practicing ATL skills.

Absences & Late Work

In the case that you're absent, it is your (the student's) responsibility to obtain any and all materials and information delivered in class during the period of the absence. While some course materials may be available online when applicable, some content is quite analog and limited to the physical interchange of the classroom. Touch base with classmates, and get in contact with me (Mr. Benton) the same day. You will have as many school days as you were absent to complete missed assignments. If you're absent on a TDE (field trips or other school activities), assume that you remain responsible for any work due that day unless another arrangement has been made in advance. In the case of a missed assessment or presentation, it'll be on you to take the initiative to arrange a makeup.

- Projects/assignments submitted **one** school day late can earn a maximum grade of **89%**.
- Projects/assignments submitted **two** school days late can earn a maximum grade of **79%**.
- Work submitted **more than two** school days late will not receive a grade.
- Similarly, presentations or presentation/assessment-related materials submitted after the originally assigned due time will lose 10% for each school day that passes.

In the case of extenuating circumstances (e.g. illness, personal problems) keep me in the loop by proactively communicating so that I can be flexible to your needs: I'm a creature of mercy and am ready to extend grace at a moment's notice.

Necessary Supplies

- an academic planner
- a college-ruled composition book (not spiral)
- several dark pens or regular pencils
- highlighters of six different colors
- a way to reliably store handouts, notes, etc.
- a tablet or laptop

Organization and time management are skills we practice in class, so maintaining a reliable system for materials, deadlines, and plans for ALL of your other courses (e.g. Biology, math, history, your elective) is part of ATL too. I'll do all I can to help you here, and I'll be flexible so that things work best for you.

Good Communication

ManageBac is where you'll turn in any *digital* ATL assignments (e.g. group presentation, research paper).

BentonEnglish.com is where I'll always post the schedule/agenda as well as some course materials; if you miss class or don't have your planner on you, this is a reliable way to review what's going on in class. (Please note: because of the organic nature of ATL, some things (like face-to-face instruction) have no digital footprint, and you'll just have to be in class to stay in the loop.)

Remind is an app I use for messaging the class. While I will never announce work or make exclusively essential announcements via Remind, it's pretty important for reminders and convenient and quick two-way communication outside of in-person classtime. It's the easiest way to get a quick answer to a specific question. You'll notice I try to stay available here, especially to my ATL students (of whom I'm especially protective).

Email is just fine too, and we'll talk about this in class. My email address is **bentonro@pcsb.org**. Don't forget the "o", and please provide your name and period in the message so it's easier for me to quickly identify you and address your specific needs.

Focus has a messaging feature, but I've found it unreliable and unintuitive. You may use it, of course, but you'll likely not get a speedy reply. Obviously, Focus is where you'll see finished grades for assignments.

Grades & Measurement

I've designed this course to reward effortful planning, reasonable punctuality, and personal academic growth. ATL is a skill-based course, so you'll be assessed both on your practice with *developing* skills as well as on your ability to *demonstrate* those skills with ever-increasing independence. The gradebook is divided evenly between two categories:

Classwork & Assignments — 50%

This category includes regular work designed to *develop and practice* ATL skills, such as in-class activities, notes, reflections, individual or collaborative assignments, and planner/organization checks. I'll generally provide classtime to complete all ATL work. I'll check your planner every week and sometimes without prior notice. Collaboration is nearly always encouraged and allowed unless I specify otherwise.

Assessments & Presentations — 50%

This category includes larger demonstrations of your ability to *apply* ATL skills, including individual and group presentations, projects, performance-based or reflective assessments, quizzes on important content, and the course midterm and final exam. The exact number and distribution of tasks will vary from one quarter to the next.

ATL Beyond This Class

ATL is designed to support you throughout the pre-DP curriculum and prepare you for the increasing independence and academic demands of the IB Diploma Programme. Course materials may draw from learning, memory, organization, research, communication, technology, collaboration, motivation, stress, and related areas. You'll also be applying ATL strategies to work from your other courses; the goal is not simply to learn "study tips," but to develop skills that can be used effectively in new situations.

Tips for a Great Year ...

- ✓ Don't allow a single assignment to totally pass you by. Everything counts. It is much easier to stay caught up than to dig your way out later.
- ✓ Find a way to *get involved* at St. Pete High. It will make all the difference in the college you get into and the scholarships you could earn. It will also make a positive difference in how much you actually enjoy school. Universities have moved away from students who are performatively larping in a million involvements to students who started during their freshman year in a club, organization, or sport and continued all the way through with ever-increasingly engaged involvement. Don't put this off.
- ✓ When it comes time to apply for college, *ninth grade counts* on your transcripts. If you don't like a subject or a teacher, it's no reason to ruin your own future. Seniors have told me over and over again that their future changed because of what they chose not to do during their freshman year.
- ✓ Get to know your *school counselor* and make sure your counselor knows who you are! This person will be filling out recommendation forms for you when college applications roll around.
- ✓ Middle school is very much *over*. Now you have exponentially more freedom and choices. No one holds your hand anymore. Enjoy your new independence and realize that you also have new responsibilities; ATL is here in part to help you manage that burden of excitement.
- ✓ Communicate with your teachers. They're all human beings, and they're all very different. Email, Remind message, stop by outside of class: many of your teachers are eager to respond to questions and will be significantly more merciful when contacted one-on-one. Problems are rarely fixed with silence.
- ✓ Pay attention to what actually works for you. Looking organized and being organized are not the same thing; neither are feeling busy and learning effectively. Try different approaches, notice the results, keep what helps, and change what doesn't. If you do, by the end of this year, you will know considerably more about how you learn than you did when you stepped on campus.
- ✓ Protect some balance. Being an ambitious student does not mean being miserable. Learn to plan ahead, triage when everything feels urgent, ask for help when needed, and make space in your life for people, creativity, interests, sleep, activities, hobbies, and service — things that have nothing to do with grades.

Learn deeply, think honestly,
listen openly, act courageously,
and leave things better than
you found them.

Student Name: _____

Class Name: _____ Class Period/Block: _____



After fully reading the syllabus, please sign, complete, detach, and return only this page by the due date or – if you’re entering the course later in the year – three school days after receiving this syllabus packet. Please keep the rest of the syllabus until the end of the school year.

Syllabus Agreement

By signing below, I agree that I have read, understand, fully submit to, personally agree with, and shall willfully comply with all of the policies, rules, requirements, expectations, and consequences covered throughout this syllabus for Mr. Benton’s course:

Student’s Signature: _____

Parent’s Signature: _____

Teacher’s Signature: _____

Parent/Guardian Info

name: _____

relationship to student: _____

phone: (____) - ____ - ____

email: _____

name: _____

relationship to student: _____

phone: (____) - ____ - ____

email: _____

(If more space is needed for more family contacts, please attach additional sheets.)

STUDENT SURVEY

your phone: (____) - ____ - ____

your email: _____

What's one thing that you're already pretty good at as a student?

Which are you most likely to do: rush something, overthink something, or put it off?

Do you prefer clear step-by-step instructions or more freedom to figure things out?

Do you plan to graduate through the IB Diploma Programme or another program? Why?

Aside from an A, what do you want to get out of this class?

In groupwork, what role/personality do you naturally tend to shift into?

What is one school-related thing you wish your teachers understood about how you operate?