of the previous steps.

The outline of my instructions to the students (see the box on page 76) has suggested due dates, but students receive no penalties for lateness except the self-imposed penalty of a poor final grade on the project. I give their work one of the following evaluations: need to rework immediately to the next step, here (make the changes indicated on the paper and resubmit as soon as possible), or need conference (make an appointment to meet with me so I can explain the problems with the work). I tell the students to expect a 3-day turnaround whenever they turn in a step and to take this turnaround into account when they plan their work.

I have used this self-paced system, with some revisions, for six semesters now. The system makes it possible for me to actually enjoy independent research projects. On any given night of the school year, I have only a few steps to grade. Besides avoiding the padded cell, I can give each student more help than I could before. I feel more effective, and the students (even though they moan as they go through the system, as you can well imagine) have given it high praise in their end-of-the-year evaluations.

I encourage teachers from all disciplines—not just biology—to try having their students do independent research. It is amazing what students learn from seemingly simplistic research designs when forced to carry out these designs correctly. Students are going to forget many of the facts that you have them memorize, but they will not forget the method by which they solved a problem of their own choosing. This self-paced system allows you to provide your students the valuable experience of independent research while preserving your sanity.

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