

Subject-specific guidance

Overview

This section covers individual subjects' requirements for the extended essay (EE) in terms of:

- Choice of topic
- Treatment of topic
- Assessment:
 - Criterion A: focus and method
 - Criterion B: knowledge and understanding
 - Criterion C: critical thinking
 - Criterion D: presentation
 - Criterion E: engagement.

It assumes that teachers are already familiar with the EE generic guide and the EE teacher support material, in particular the process whereby students choose a subject area and topic, write their research question and select the research method(s) they will use to explore and answer it.

For a full summary, see the process diagram and the generic assessment criteria.

Or for a quick refresher, read [Extended essay: general requirements](#) .

General requirements

The EE is an in-depth study of a focused topic. It gives students the opportunity to:

- engage in independent research with intellectual initiative, creativity and rigour
- develop research, thinking, self-management and communication skills
- reflect on what they have learned throughout the research and writing process.

All students must:

- provide a logical and coherent rationale for their choice of topic
- review what has already been written about the topic
- formulate a clear research question
- offer a concrete description of the methods they use to investigate the question
- generate reasoned interpretations and conclusions based on their reading and independent research in order to answer the question.

Choice of topic

See also *Initial guidance on research and writing*

Students first need to identify the broad area of inquiry they are interested in.

Sources of ideas may include:

- work already undertaken as part of the course
- preliminary reading of academic journals and reputable scholarly e-resources, eg conference papers, essays, book chapters or journal articles. A school librarian can advise on this
- conversations with teachers, fellow students and librarians.

Literature review

Students should try to read as much as they can of what has already been written about their topic. Time spent on a literature review early on in the research process will guide and improve their work. It will help them to:

- contextualize their research question and subsequent findings
- meet criterion B: demonstrating knowledge and understanding .

While conducting their literature review, students may find it useful to compile an annotated bibliography and to record their responses to what they read in their researcher's reflection space (RRS).

If using the internet, students are encouraged to use specialized academic search engines that will find resources appropriate for citation in the EE.

Students must be aware of their responsibilities to cite properly the resources they use and to check their work for plagiarism. Their citations should adhere to [the requirements of the IB](#) and be consistently applied.

Research question

Students should identify a **working** research question early on but be prepared to change, eg if too little information is available to permit the intended investigation.

Students should be guided by the idea that what they are writing is important because:

- it seeks to fill a gap in understanding their chosen topic, or
- it offers a resolution to some controversial argument.

The research question should therefore be non-trivial and follow from the existing body of literature on the topic. It must be:

- specific, sharply focused and capable of being answered within a 4,000-word essay
- stated clearly in the introduction of the essay and on the title page
- related to the chosen topic.

Students need to avoid researching questions that are too narrow or too obvious as this will limit their ability to formulate reasoned arguments.

Their answer to the question must be analytical rather than descriptive.

Title

The title is a formal requirement on the title page of the essay. If the title is missing, it will be considered on balance with the other formal requirements against criterion D. While there is no explicit penalty in criterion A, the title will help address the requirements as it expands on the student's intended focus. Without a title, students lose an opportunity to clarify their focus.

Treatment of the topic

Once students have identified their topic and written their research question, they can decide how to research their answer. They may find it helpful to write a statement outlining their broad approach.

The definition of "research" and terms such as "primary data" and "secondary data" varies from subject to subject.

In some subjects, students must use both primary and secondary data. In others, students may, or even must, rely exclusively on secondary data.

However, all students must carry out secondary research in terms of a literature review for their topic.

Two important reminders

1. Undertaking an extended essay is a challenge. Planning is crucial. Students need to start writing their papers early and discuss any emerging difficulties with their supervisor. As well as their supervisors, librarians are a great source of information, advice and support for students.
2. Students risk their diploma if found guilty of academic misconduct:

Individuals and societies

Individuals and societies

An extended essay (EE) in individuals and societies is intended for students who are interested in undertaking research in an area of business management, economics, geography, global politics, history, ITGS, philosophy, psychology, social and cultural anthropology or world religions.

The individuals and societies EE is intended to encourage the systematic and critical study of:

- human experience and behaviour
- physical, economic and social environments
- the history and development of social and cultural institutions.

Students' choice of topic should enable them to recognize that the content and methodologies of the subjects are contestable and that their study requires critical thinking.

Students must have sufficient grounding in the subject under which they submit their essay: reading a textbook or consulting an encyclopedia while writing the EE will not compensate for a lack of proper background knowledge.

For a longer general introduction to the subject areas of individual societies see [Individuals and societies: An introduction](#)

Business management: Subject-specific guidance

See also: EE generic guide and EE teacher support material

Overview

An extended essay (EE) in business management gives students an opportunity to carry out in-depth research in an area of personal interest relating to business management.

The EE gives students an opportunity to develop research skills by:

- reviewing business theories, concepts and principles
- critically analysing their use and application in the business world and their resultant impact on business activity.

The EE requires the application of business management theories, tools and techniques to produce a coherent and structured analytical essay that effectively addresses the research question.

Choice of topic

Students can choose a topic they have encountered during their Diploma Programme business management course. However, they may also choose to investigate issues that fall outside its scope. For example:

- business practices in a specific regional or national context, or
- the practical applications of the work of a particular business management theorist.

Whatever area they choose, students must root their research firmly in accepted business management theories and use the core principles of business management as the basis for their research.

Students are strongly advised to choose a topic that enables them to carry out research and apply business management theories and techniques in a real-world setting. This setting may be an organization, industry or market in a particular region or country, or globally.

Sources of ideas may include:

- an interest in issues raised in the classroom
- aspects of a student's own experience
- current events.

Research questions that do not allow a systematic and meaningful investigation using business management theories, concepts and principles are unlikely to be suitable.

Backward versus forward-looking questions

Students can choose to investigate past event(s). However, they must ensure that their question will enable them to analyse and evaluate rather than simply describe what happened.

A forward-looking question can enable students to search for conflicting sources to arrive at a well-supported argument and conclusion. But the topic should not be so forward-looking that information and results are not yet available: hypothetical questions based on future events are to be avoided.

Examples of topics

These examples are for guidance only. Students must ensure that their choice of topic is focused (left-hand column) rather than broad (right-hand column).

✓	✗
Focused topics	Broad topics
Application of lean production principles to the NGO ABC	Relevance of lean production for NGOs
Relevance of ethical objectives for very small and very large companies in Canada	The link between ethical objectives and organizational size
Use of Herzberg's motivation theory in productivity improvement at XYZ Ltd	Motivational techniques at XYZ Ltd
The contribution of Just-in-Time production in improving efficiency in the textile industry in Cambodia	Effectiveness of Just-in-Time production techniques

Treatment of the topic

Sources

Students' research should be broad and detailed, using a range of sources. Excessive reliance on a single source, such as a company's annual report, is unlikely to give students sufficient scope or breadth in their analysis.

Students can include materials sourced from a particular business or organization whose area of business is related to the topic chosen, eg market research companies, industry analysts or think tanks.

Secondary sources

Students should use secondary data as the basis of their EE, supported where appropriate by primary research. The sole use of secondary sources is permitted and will allow students access to all levels of the EE assessment criteria.

(Note that this is **similar** to the research approach of the SL internal assessment task of the business management course and **different** to the research approach of the HL internal assessment task, where primary research takes precedence.)

A good range of secondary sources should be consulted, including:

- business management textbooks
- general business management books
- industry analyses
- company reports and data.

Primary research

Students must plan any primary research well so that it yields genuinely additional and significant insights.

Students and supervisors are required to:

- act with tact and sensitivity towards the research subjects
- respect the confidentiality of the organization(s) and people involved.

All the research carried out must address the research question. Similarly, the development of the essay must be related to the research question directly and consistently and must not include information that is unnecessary.

Use of analytical tools and numerical data

A good essay will demonstrate the appropriate use of analytical tools, often supported by numerical data to assist the discussion and evaluation.

Appropriate analytical tools from the business management syllabus include:

- Ansoff Matrix
- BCG Matrix
- Break-even analysis
- Decision tree
- Financial statements and ratio analysis
- Fishbone diagram
- Force field analysis
- Position maps
- Stakeholders analysis
- STEEPLE analysis
- SWOT analysis

Students may also use analytical tools that are not included in the syllabus.

Conceptual perspectives

Strategic and conceptual perspectives on the research question can add to the interest and rigour of the essay, for example:

- the effect of new technologies on organizational innovation
- the cultural and ethical implications of business decisions.

Analysing the data

Use of theory

Students should integrate relevant business management theories, tools and techniques with the evidence obtained by the research throughout the essay.

Students should not present theory as a separate section. An essay that delivers theory as a separate section of the essay and does not apply it to the specific research question is unlikely to succeed.

Students should avoid making assertions using business management theories and techniques if they cannot meaningfully link these to their case study with supporting evidence.

Critical thinking

Students must ask probing questions and look at all relevant factors when considering the information obtained from their research. Information cannot always be accepted at face value.

A critical approach, in which students display the skills of analysis and evaluation, is essential.

Students should indicate unresolved questions, or new questions that have arisen from their study, in their conclusions.

Students should remember that a business management essay must be written in an objective style without personal bias. Conclusions should be derived from the evidence and not based on any preconceptions of the student.

Examples of topics, research questions and suggested approaches

Once students have identified their topic and written their research question, they can decide how to research their answer. They may find it helpful to write a statement outlining their broad approach. These examples are for guidance only.

Topic	An evaluation of the introduction of total quality management in ABC Ltd
Research question	To what extent has the introduction of total quality management (TQM) improved quality at ABC Ltd?
Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A literature review of how quality management techniques have changed with the introduction of TQM, both generally and specifically in the industry of ABC Ltd. • Selection of relevant indicators measuring quality and collection of the corresponding data for ABC Ltd. • Analysis and evaluation of the ways in which ABC Ltd has adapted its approach to managing quality, and the impact of this on the selected indicators.

Topic	An evaluation of the case for strengthening social responsibility practices at multinational XYZ
Research question	Should multinational XYZ strengthen its corporate social responsibility practices in the aftermath of scandal X?
Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A review of how various local and international media reported on the reasons for and events around scandal X at multinational XYZ.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of the social responsibility practices at multinational XYZ preceding scandal X, with a particular emphasis on practices and indicators relevant to scandal X. • Application of SWOT analysis to these practices. • Identification of potential ways of strengthening social responsibility practices from industry leaders. • Application of SWOT analysis to these practices. • Evaluation, from different stakeholder groups' perspectives, on whether multinational XYZ should strengthen its social responsibility practices in suggested ways or leave them as is.
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Topic	Measuring the success of joint ventures: a comparative case study
Research question	How successful has the joint venture between ABC Ltd and XYZ Ltd been as a growth strategy for both companies?
Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A literature review of the theoretical benefits and drawbacks of joint ventures. • A review on the reporting around the joint venture at the time it happened: what were the reasons given by the companies for the joint venture and how did industry analysts assess the case? • An examination of the financial results of ABC Ltd and XYZ Ltd prior to and after the joint venture, and comparison of these results with industry benchmarks. • Analysis and evaluation of the qualitative and longer term benefits and drawbacks of the joint venture since the joint venture, in comparison with benchmarks in the industry.

An important note on “double-dipping”

Students must ensure that their EE does not duplicate any other work they are submitting for the Diploma Programme. In particular, the EE must not be an extension of the internal assessment task. Students must ensure that they understand the differences between the two.

- The HLIA task—a research project—must be based on primary research (eg interviews or questionnaires), whereas the EE must be based on secondary research (eg academic journal articles or specialized publications).
- The HLIA task is a practical and highly structured piece of investigation leading to practical proposals for action for company management, whereas the EE is a scholarly piece of investigation that does not result in the formulation of recommendations.
- The SLIA task—a written commentary—must be based on secondary research, like the EE, but for the SLIA task, only three to five supporting documents are required, whereas for the EE, there is an expectation of attempting a more academic, broader and in-depth investigation.

Supervisors play an important role here in guiding students on these distinctions. Students risk their diploma if academic misconduct is found.

Interpreting the EE assessment criteria

Criterion A: Focus and method

(Strands: Topic, Research question, Methodology)

The EE title promotes the application of the higher order skills of analysis, evaluation and synthesis, rather than encouraging a descriptive essay.

The research question must be specific and sharply focused on a business problem or issue worthy of investigation. It should require the use of business management theories, tools and techniques. Topics that consider generic or broad issues will restrict the possibility of effective treatment within the word limit and will constrain performance on this criterion.

Students must use **secondary resources** in the first instance. Students should employ high-level academic research and writing skills, and show that the student is capable of intellectual discovery and creativity .

The essay should be based on a comprehensive review of the literature on the topic selected. It **must not** end up as a practical investigation resembling a higher level internal assessment.

Any essay based heavily on questionnaires and/or interviews will inevitably lose marks on a range of criteria.

If primary research is conducted it must provide information that is not accessible from secondary sources or that significantly enhances the value of the secondary data presented.

All research conducted, whether primary or secondary, should support specific quantitative and qualitative analysis and evaluation directly related to the research question.

Students must demonstrate that their essay has been well planned and that they have designed an appropriate and coherent approach and structure to address the research question.

Criterion B: Knowledge and understanding

(Strands: Context, Subject-specific terminology and concepts)

The student should use the sources to place their topic into a wider business context.

For example, if the focus of the essay is on the role of social media, the student should be able to explain the impact the social media has on a number of business functions, such as marketing and recruitment.

The student must demonstrate that they have a good grasp of business terminology and that they can use this fluently, accurately and consistently when developing lines of argument. They may need to clarify terms or provide further explanation or definition of selected terms or concepts.