

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](#)

Global politics: Subject-specific guidance

See also: EE generic guide and EE Teacher support material

Overview

An extended essay (EE) in global politics gives students an opportunity to undertake an in-depth analysis of a significant, contemporary global political issue.

Students should choose a topic that will allow them to demonstrate their:

- knowledge
- research skills
- critical thinking skills.

The outcome should be a substantial, coherent and structured essay that utilizes relevant key concepts, theoretical foundations and approaches to global politics to effectively answer a specific research question.

Global politics is an interdisciplinary subject, reflecting the complex nature of many contemporary political issues. Nonetheless, it has its own theoretical and conceptual frames, terminology, methods and literature. It is essential for students undertaking an EE in global politics to have knowledge and understanding of these. Global politics is **not** a residual category for essays that do not fit into any other subject.

Choice of topic

In the Diploma Programme global politics course, a political issue is defined as:

“Any question that deals with how power is distributed and how it operates within social organization, and how people think about, and engage in, their communities and the wider world on matters that affect their lives.”

Hence, there is a wide range of questions that are in principle suitable for an EE in global politics. Students must narrow their initial topic ideas to a concise question that can be researched effectively within the EE’s 4,000-word scope.

EEs in global politics may focus on topics that invite a local to global level of analysis, or on any level in between. Sometimes, it may be interesting to investigate how the same political issue unfolds at different levels of analysis.

The benefit of undertaking research that investigates issues at a global level is the availability of secondary data. Research at a local level may be more effectively investigated using primary methods.

In addition to levels of analysis, different theoretical foundations or the perspectives of varying groups of people or individuals on a political issue may help students to formulate a clear and focused research question.

“Contemporary” rule

The topic students choose must be contemporary. Contemporary here is taken to refer to events during the student’s lifetime.

References to historical events and issues can be included if they:



- provide useful background context
- are necessary for understanding a topic
- have clear implications for the present.

However, the emphasis of the essay should be on current affairs. Similarly, students should not base their essay on future events, as in this case it will become speculative and unsupported.

When choosing a topic, students and supervisors must ensure that the various assessment criteria can be satisfied within the word limit. Students are advised to avoid topics that are too broad in scope to permit an in-depth study within the prescribed word limit.

Examples of topics

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

Focused topics 	Broad topics 
A comparison of how the Hong Kong protests of late 2014 were portrayed in the official media in Singapore versus the reporting undertaken by NGOs X, Y and Z active in Singapore	The influence of 2014 Hong Kong protests on Singapore
The influence of the election success of Syriza in Greece on the campaign and outcomes of the 2015 parliamentary election in Spain	How populist political parties have changed the political landscape in Europe
An evaluation of the ability of Mexican migrants to achieve a political voice in county X in Arizona	How Mexican migration has changed the politics of the US

Treatment of the topic

EEs in global politics will often be interdisciplinary in terms of subject matter and research approach and may use both primary and secondary sources.

Essays that rely on secondary sources only are perfectly valid, but students must engage critically with the sources of information that they use.

The topic and chosen level(s) of analysis will suggest the appropriate theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches.

Various approaches to the research are possible, such as:

- case studies

- comparative studies
- analyses of discourse.

Relevant techniques for gathering and interpreting evidence include:

- interviews
- literature or media reviews
- quantitative data analysis.

Students may use journalistic or visual material, interviews or data from popular and social media, but their essay should not be based solely on such sources.

Theoretical underpinning

Students must show that they have grounding in theories and methods of global politics and are able to use these appropriately and effectively in order to develop a reasoned argument.

The essay is a formal research essay that examines contemporary political issues, and may do so from an angle previously unfamiliar to the student. For example:

- Students interested in a more theoretical approach to political issues can examine the key concepts of global politics in a way that is more anchored in academic debates.
- Students interested in statistics that underpin decision-making and perceptions in global politics can undertake more comprehensive data analysis.

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	Influence of “big data” on election campaign tactics: the case of the Obama 2012 campaign
Research question	To what extent should we be worried about the use of “big data” in election campaigns? The case of the Obama 2012 campaign.
Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature review of the ways in which “big data” on voter opinions and behaviours delivers different information to political campaigners than traditional pre-election voter surveys. • Analysis of the differences in how the Obama 2008 and 2012 campaigns approached voters and which of these could be attributable to understanding more about individual voters in the 2012 campaign, including an interview with a key campaign manager.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation of the ethical implications of the use of “big data” tactics in light of different political conceptions of democracy and different political ideologies about individual freedom.
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Topic	A comparative study of migration from rural areas into cities in Australia and Indonesia
Research question	To what extent are the ideological and practical forces that drive urbanization global instead of nation-specific? A comparison of the political rhetoric, government policies and impact of global forces in driving migration from rural areas into cities in Australia and Indonesia.
Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the extent and local and global reasons behind rural-to-urban migration in Australia and Indonesia. • Analysis of the political rhetoric used in the two countries to argue for the necessity (or otherwise) and benefits (or drawbacks) of this form of migration. • Analysis of the government policies applied in the two countries that have as their intention to encourage this form of migration.

Topic	Evolution in the Russia–China relationship during and after the 2014–15 Ukraine crisis
Research question	To what extent is the evolution in the Russia–China relationship during and after the 2014–15 Ukraine crisis evidence that a realist view on international politics still has applicability?
Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature review on the ways in which variants of the theory of realism have been used to explain big powers’ strategies and moves in post-Cold War international politics. • Brief historical review of the Russia–China relationship in the post-Cold War era. • Analysis of Russian, Chinese and Western media reporting on the evolution in the Russia–China relationship during and after the 2014–15 Ukraine crisis. • Evaluation of these developments against realist theories of international politics.

An important note on “double-dipping”

Students must ensure that their EE does not overlap significantly with any other work they are submitting for the Diploma Programme. For example, the engagement activity and higher level extension tasks might give students ideas and inspiration for their EE but they must not examine the same political issue.

The global politics EE and IA

In particular, an EE in global politics is not an extension of the internal assessment tasks—the engagement activity (SL and HL students) and the HL extension (HL students only)—for the subject. Students must ensure that they understand the differences between the two.

- The engagement activity task is based primarily on experiential learning, whereas the EE in global politics is a formal research essay relying primarily on secondary sources.
- Although the HL extension task and the EE in global politics are both based primarily on secondary sources, the HL extension task is directed towards an oral end product, whereas the EE in global politics culminates in a comprehensive written task.

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)

Students must choose a topic that deals with a contemporary global political issue. They must explain the significance of the issue and why it is worthy of investigation. Often this has to do with how the issue affects people's lives within a social organization either locally, globally or at other levels of analysis.

The topic chosen must be expressed in the form of a research question. The research question must be specific and sharply focused and capable of being discussed effectively within the word limit. As global politics is an interdisciplinary subject and as what counts as a 'political issue' is broadly interpreted, it is particularly important that students choose a topic and formulate a research question that allows them to base their essay on the specific theoretical and conceptual frames, terminology, methods and literature of global politics.

Students must demonstrate that they have made considered methodological choices in their research and selected a suitable range of appropriate and relevant sources. Case studies, comparative studies and analyses of discourse are all legitimate approaches to research, whereas interviews, literature or media reviews, or quantitative data analysis are all possible research techniques; choices depend on the research question and what is available, and need to be justified. It is appropriate to use only secondary sources or a combination of primary and secondary sources; selection depends on the level of analysis at which students approach their political issue. Again, this needs to be justified.

The approaches, techniques and sources must provide sufficient material to develop and support an argument and conclusion relevant to the research question, and they must contain different theoretical or conceptual perspectives for critical engagement to be possible.

Effective planning and a well-focused research question tend to go together. A key indicator of this is that students have chosen a comprehensive range of sources and suitable research methods, which are relevant and appropriate to answering the research question.