

## 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](#)

# History: Subject-specific guidance

See also: EE generic guide and EE teacher support material

## Overview

The EE gives students an opportunity to undertake in-depth research in an area of interest to them, of local, regional or global significance.

The outcome of the research should be a coherent and structured essay that effectively addresses a particular issue expressed as a research question.

The question should encourage an investigation that lends itself to analysis and critical commentary. Students should avoid straightforward “What” and “How” questions as they tend to lead to narrative treatment. Terms such as “How significant...?” or “How successful...?” are more likely to engage students in analysis.

“To what extent...?” requires an analytical answer, but if students choose this or a similar term, they need to ensure that their task does also require them to consider other factors to answer the question.

## Choice of topic

The topic must:

- focus on the human past (at least 10 years ago)
- be worthy of study
- lend itself to systematic investigation in line with the published assessment criteria.

## Ten-year rule

Essays that focus on events of the past 10 years are not acceptable, as these are regarded as current affairs, not history. Any essay that does so will be compromised across several criteria.

It is not a requirement for the topic to be chosen from the Diploma Programme history course, but it must be acceptable to the supervisor.

It should provide an opportunity for critical analysis of source material, and not depend on summarizing general secondary sources (such as textbooks and encyclopedias). Such an approach is likely to produce an essay that is essentially narrative or descriptive.

The topic chosen must be suitable for effective treatment within the 4,000-word limit. Essays that cover many aspects of history, or a long time period, are unlikely to prove successful.

Narrowing the scope of the essay:

- is a crucial step in helping to ensure that the essay has a clear focus
- allows students to demonstrate detailed and specific historical knowledge, understanding and critical analysis.

## 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
An examination of the economic reasons that led to the overthrow of the Tokugawa Shogunate in Japan	The overthrow of the Tokugawa Shogunate in Japan
An evaluation of the success of denazification carried out in the US zone of Germany 1945–48	Denazification in Germany after the Second World War
An examination of the extent to which the Holodomor in the Ukraine 1932–33 was a failure of Stalin’s policy of collectivization	The introduction of collectivization in the Soviet Union
An examination of the extent to which the overthrow of Allende in 1973 was the result of external factors	The coup against Allende 1973

One way to help students narrow down their topic is to encourage them to think about the key concepts in the Diploma Programme history course:

- causation
- consequence
- change
- continuity
- significance
- perspectives.

Causation and consequence are the most common focus of history EEs. Thinking about **all** the key concepts can give students ideas beyond these.

## Treatment of the topic

### Disciplinary focus

Some topics can also be approached from the perspective of other subjects, such as economics or geography. Social history includes areas such as music and sport.

Students must ensure their treatment of the topic meets the subject requirements of history.

- While social history does include areas such as music and sport, these are only acceptable for a history extended essay if they are tackled from a historical perspective.

Suitable research questions need to lead to:

- systematic investigation
- critical analysis

- detailed understanding.

Adequate available sources are essential. If it is clear at an early stage in the research that they are not, then students should change focus. If necessary, the supervisor should advise them to do so.

## Sources

Students who use both primary and secondary sources for their research will find it easier to achieve the highest marks.

If a student chooses to use secondary sources only they will need to take particular care to address the assessment criteria.

Possible approaches to the research question include:

- using primary and secondary sources in order to establish and appraise varying interpretations
- analysing sources in order to explain changing views over time of particular happenings or developments
- using source material for a case study or local history project, perhaps leading to a comparison of local and national developments
- collecting and analysing oral and written data from family and other contacts to help explain past happenings, perhaps leading to a comparison of local and national developments
- using all available sources to answer the question posed.

## Examples of topics, research questions and 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 have all been chosen by past students and are included here for guidance only.

Topic	<b>The origins of the Cold War in Europe 1945–48</b>
Research question	How far was the Christian Democrat victory in the Italian elections of 1948 influenced by Cold War tensions?
Approach	Reading is undertaken to fully understand the context and the importance of this election as the first in post-war republican Italy. More detailed research may be carried out to determine the methods used by the Italian Communist Party and the Christian Democrats to rally their supporters and also any role played by the USSR and the US in influencing the outcome. Both primary and secondary sources would be accessible and should be used. An examination, and evaluation, of different interpretations would be carried out as well as consideration of domestic factors to be weighed against the influence of the Cold War, allowing a conclusion to be reached.

Topic	<b>The decline of the Ottoman Empire</b>
Research question	To what extent was poor leadership the reason for the defeat of the Ottoman armies at the gates of Vienna in 1683?
Approach	Reading is undertaken to become familiar with the context of the topic, in particular to understand the nature of the Ottoman Empire and its weaknesses

	by the end of the 17th century in order to determine how these may have contributed to its defeat. Also to read sources on the decline in leadership after the death of Suleiman the Magnificent, over a century earlier. The growing unity among the Christian powers in Europe and its contribution to their victory in 1683 will also be examined. Both primary and secondary sources as well as a variety of historical interpretations will be accessed to understand the Habsburg Empires at this time and the reasons why the siege was brought to an end. The merits of various interpretations regarding the factors that led to the defeat of the Ottomans as well as the success of the Christian league can be examined and both primary and secondary sources will be used to allow a judgment to be made.
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Topic	<b>The 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago</b>
Research question	"I have done my best. I have lost, Mr. Nixon has won." (Hubert Humphrey) To what extent did Hubert Humphrey lose the 1968 presidential election because of the Chicago Convention?
Approach	General reading is undertaken to aid familiarization with the events of 1968, a year marked by riots, protests and political assassinations. Both primary and secondary sources are used as well as different interpretations accessed to discover the reasons for the defeat of Humphrey, the Democratic presidential candidate. These are identified and assessed to allow a judgment to be made on the importance of the Convention as a factor that influenced the outcome of the election.

Topic	<b>The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in post-apartheid South Africa</b>
Research question	How far did the Truth and Reconciliation Commission achieve its twin aims of establishing the truth and achieving reconciliation by 2002?
Approach	Both primary and secondary resources that outline the Commission procedures and findings are used for background and note-taking. The criticisms of the Commission are also investigated to see how far they can be justified. The end point of 2002 (the year that the Commission came to an end) is included to provide a focus to the investigation and to narrow its scope sufficiently.

## Critical analysis and evaluation

Students should not accept uncritically the value and reliability of sources, especially when the authenticity of some of the sources may be questionable.

Students should show awareness of the value and limitations of their main sources through analysing their origin, purpose and content:

- Who were the authors?
- What was the intended audience?
- What were the overt and covert reasons for the production of the source being evaluated?

They should integrate this evaluation into the main body of the essay and not adopt a "stand alone" approach of two sources.

Students can show good critical analysis and historical judgment through a sound assessment of source material and different explanations and interpretations.

Opportunities for reporting and assessing different interpretations will vary with the topic chosen.

Students will gain credit for explaining why a historian formed an interpretation, not merely stating it.



## The essay's argument

Students should aim to produce an argument that:

- consistently shows good historical understanding
- sets the research question into context
- addresses the research question fully and effectively
- is well substantiated, based on relevant specific evidence with added analytical comments.

An EE in history is a formal essay that is marked according to the assessment criteria. An essay will not score well if students are unaware of these criteria and make no attempt to address them in the work.

## 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.

## The history EE and IA

In particular, the EE is not an extension of the internal assessment (IA) for the subject. Students must ensure that they understand the differences between the two.

	EE	IA
Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• more generic</li><li>• requires students to reflect on the process of their own research</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• TOK-inspired</li><li>• requires students to reflect on the particular problems and challenges faced by historians using the historical method</li></ul>
Purpose	an academic research paper on a historical event	focuses on historical method

**Topic:** Students may choose to write their EE and the IA on the same time period or on a similar topic.

**Sources:** These must be sufficiently different to show clearly that the student has accessed a broad range of both primary and secondary material. In other words, the IA and EE must not replicate sources. If some of the same sources are used, other different sources must also be used for each of the tasks.

**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)