

Extended Essay

What is the Extended Essay?

The Extended Essay is one of the three core requirements for the IB diploma. It is, simply put, a [extended] research paper [essay] that you will write. This is roughly between 16-20 double-spaced pages. The format should model that of academic journal articles in your chosen academic discipline.

Don't let the size daunt you! The EE is as much about the process of developing advanced research and writing skills as about the final essay you submit.

Purpose

Ultimately, the point of the EE is to prepare you in a very practical, hands-on way for research and academic writing at college or university. And unlike the rest of the IB programme, which is mostly prescribed for you, you will get to create your very own topic of interest out of a huge selection of potential subjects.

This may get repetitive, but you are your own guide on the Extended Essay! This has its perks and its challenges. The perks are that it is an exciting opportunity to self-direct your own study, and if you are someone who thrives on doing things your own way on your own time, it will feel liberating. The challenge comes from the independence and responsibility now being put on your shoulders - if you tend to procrastinate or rely on teachers to choose your essay topics and enforce deadlines, the EE can seem overwhelming.

Take a deep breath. You are not alone. Around 70,000 students around the world are about to start this same IB rite of passage with you. Focus first on understanding the EE process and requirements. Set goals to help you to organise your time effectively, and communicate regularly with your EE Supervisor to get advice and support. The rest will come.

Process

One thing you need to figure out early on is what kind of essay you are going to write. How formal should your writing be? What tense and voice (third person or first person) should you use? Are you collecting primary data yourself or are you analysing primary and secondary sources? This will depend on the subject you choose for your essay. A topic in History or Politics will likely require you to research and analyse a collection of primary & secondary sources, mostly in print. With a topic in any of the Experimental Sciences, you may design an experiment based on a hypothesis or question. You will then execute that experiment and analyse the results of the data you collect.

Throughout the research and writing process, you will be encouraged to reflect on your experiences, both formally and informally. Use your personal Researcher's Reflection Space (RRS) to re-examine your ideas and decide whether changes are needed at different points during the process. You will also need to complete three formal reflection sessions with your supervisor which need to be written up on the on planning and progress form.

Timeline

This is a long process, so keep your head up, and keep track of the important dates! Your teachers will direct you when to start the EE and it is likely to take several months or even a year to complete. The key to a successful essay is writing a clear, focused and arguable research question. Try to follow these steps:

1. Choose a subject and topic that is of interest to you
2. Carry out preliminary reading about the topic
3. Start posing some general questions about the topic using words like "how", "why" or "to what extent"
4. Evaluate your questions based on whether they are clear, focused, and arguable

5. Select which question to use for your essay based up what outcomes you can achieve - what kind of argument could you make and is there enough research to support you with this?

Hurrah! Once you have your research question you can start to develop your argument, using concrete facts and data from your reading to support your ideas.

Structuring your essay

How you structure your essay is really important. Having a clear framework will help you to organise your arguments and make best use of the evidence you collected during your reading. The IB helps you with this! There are six required elements:

1. Title page: Write a clear, focused summative statement of your research (Note: this should not be a question!)
2. Contents page: Number your pages and include a contents page at the start of your essay
3. Introduction: Tell readers what to expect in your essay
4. Body of the essay (research, analysis, discussion and evaluation): The requirements for this section vary from subject to subject, but essentially this should take the form of a reasoned argument which tells the reader what relevant evidence has been discovered, where/how it has been discovered and how it supports the argument
5. Conclusion: Say what has been achieved, including notes of any limitations and any questions that have not been resolved
6. References and/or bibliography

Presentation

Presentation counts! Your final essay should look professional and academic. Make sure you write in a clear, correct and formal academic style that is appropriate to your subject area. The IB has set out the following formatting requirements:

- Use a 12-point, readable font
- Double space your work
- Include page numbering
- Do not include your name or your school's name on the title page or page headers
- Your essay should be a maximum of 4000 words (the examiner won't read anything past this cut off point!)

Academic honesty

Keeping track of your sources and properly referencing them as you go through the research and draft-writing process is critical! Mistakes here could lead to failure of the IB Diploma - and what a shame that would be after all your hard work!

It is your responsibility to provide the reader with the precise sources of quotations, ideas and points of view in your essay. You achieve this through accurate citations, which may be in-text or footnotes throughout your essay, and full list of references at the end of your paper. The type of citation method you use will vary depending on your subject matter and/or the instructions of your school. As a general rule of thumb, the four main style manuals used in academic publications are the Chicago Manual, MLA, APA and Harvard Reference.

There are plenty of websites that you can find online to clarify how to cite your sources. Just be aware that a given website might take liberties with some of the details of the guidelines, so when in doubt, trust only the official published manual for each style. A helpful, printed quick-reference, along with simple directives for clear grammar, punctuation, and mechanics of style, is Diana Hacker's A Pocket Style Manual.

Supervisor

You should think of your EE supervisor as a resource for general feedback, but do not rely on them to hold your hand through this process. You must take the initiative on all fronts, from choosing your subject to writing a plan and setting internal deadlines for yourself so that you can meet school deadlines! You will edit your EE on your own; do not expect your EE Supervisor to read, edit, or mark up your drafts in any way.

Think of it this way: The IB's general EE guidelines require you to spend at least forty hours researching and writing your Extended Essay. In contrast, your EE Supervisor should spend no more than about 3-5 hours advising your work along the way.

That said, your supervisor can be a valuable support to you through this process - someone to bounce ideas off, clarify your understanding and support your time-management. Make them your first point of call if you have difficulties...don't suffer in silence, they are there to help!

FAQs



I don't understand. What is the Student / EE Supervisor relationship supposed to be?

Unlike most student/teacher relationships, for the Extended Essay you are the one in the driver's seat, so to speak. Yes, there are deadlines and guidelines and you must meet them, but you choose your topic and you plan your research on your own and you write and edit the essay on your own. Your EE Supervisor is there as a resource if you need help, or if your essay is heading in the wrong direction or stalled. Think of your EE Supervisor as a backseat driver - you may hear "Watch out!" or "Go [write] faster!" but, ultimately, you are the one responsible for putting your foot on the pedal and making sure you are in good shape coming down the home stretch of the Extended Essay process.

Help! I'm used to teachers reading my drafts and telling me what to fix. What do I do for the Extended Essay?

Learning how to edit your own work is an invaluable skill, though it may be painful at first. Some tried-and-true tips for copy-editing as you go along:

- Print out a draft and mark it up by hand, with colored pens or a pencil - write on your paper liberally. Circle phrases that just sound "funny", put question marks or "awk" (short for awkward) when a sentence construction is particularly gawky, write "w.c." when you need to reconsider your word choice, and play around with chopping sentences down in size (this one would be a good example!) or changing around the order of your paragraphs or arguments. For some reason, it is often a lot easier to see these mistakes and visualize changes when you are looking at a printed sheet of paper rather than scrolling down a computer screen.
- When you think you have your final draft, print it out and read the entire thing out loud to yourself, pen in hand. Yes, this is tedious. But it is absolutely worth it! I guarantee you, you'll hear subtle mistakes even when the same text you just read a moment ago appeared fine. It's not just that your eyes may be tired... After all, punctuation in writing exists to imitate the natural inflections and intonation we have when speaking. Converting your essay back into oral form is the best litmus test for the integrity of your tone and grammar! Try it out!

I have no idea how to write an academic paper. Where do I start?

Relax. Many students are overly worried about writing academic papers simply because they may not be able to visualize what exactly an academic paper will entail, and how it differs from the school papers they have been writing in one form or another since elementary school.

Here is the quick definition: an academic paper is a piece of formal writing (i.e. unlike a conversational tone such as what I am using now, you will most likely be using the third person voice, and should avoid colloquialisms and unfounded generalizations). At the heart of most academic papers is the thesis statement, which describes what you believe and what you are trying to prove, out of all the research and analysis you have done. All the other points in the paper will go towards supporting your thesis statement.

You will write the Extended Essay to emulate an academic journal article. Because these journal articles are published, there is often a very strict methodology for how you go about writing them. This is great for you, because it means there are a lot of resources, both online and off, available to teach you about these methodologies!

Good luck, and happy writing!

LINKS

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