

Concepts

Key concepts

The MYP identifies 16 key concepts to be explored across the curriculum. These key concepts, shown in Table 2, represent understandings that reach beyond the eight MYP subject groups from which they are drawn.

Aesthetics	Change	Communication	Communities
Connections	Creativity	Culture	Development
Form	Global interactions	Identity	Logic
Perspective	Relationships	Systems	Time, place and space

Table 2

MYP key concepts

Teachers use key concepts from their own subject group(s)—as well as key concepts from other subject groups—to plan disciplinary and interdisciplinary units of work. Teachers identify one key concept that drives the unit’s development.

The following broad descriptions apply across subject groups, and MYP subject-group guides suggest further subject-specific understandings. These concepts are not only “key” in the sense of being important; they also provide a key—a way into a body of knowledge through structured and sustained inquiry. They place no limits on breadth of knowledge or on depth of understanding, and therefore provide access to every student, regardless of individual aptitudes and abilities.

Inquiry into MYP key concepts will further develop (and lead to debate on) the meaning of these significant ideas.

- **Aesthetics** deals with the characteristics, creation, meaning and perception of beauty and taste. The study of aesthetics develops skills for the critical appreciation and analysis of art, culture and nature.
- **Change** is a conversion, transformation or movement from one form, state or value to another. Inquiry into the concept of change involves understanding and evaluating causes, processes and consequences.
- **Communication** is the exchange or transfer of signals, facts, ideas and symbols. It requires a sender, a message and an intended receiver. Communication involves the activity of conveying information or meaning. Effective communication requires a common “language” (which may be written, spoken or non-verbal).

- **Communities** are groups that exist in proximity defined by space, time or relationship. Communities include, for example, groups of people sharing particular characteristics, beliefs or values as well as groups of interdependent organisms living together in a specific habitat.
- **Connections** are links, bonds and relationships among people, objects, organisms or ideas.
- **Creativity** is the process of generating novel ideas and considering existing ideas from new perspectives. Creativity includes the ability to recognize the value of ideas when developing innovative responses to problems; it may be evident in process as well as outcomes, products or solutions.
- **Culture** encompasses a range of learned and shared beliefs, values, interests, attitudes, products, ways of knowing and patterns of behaviour created by human communities. The concept of culture is dynamic and organic.
- **Development** is the act or process of growth, progress or evolution, sometimes through iterative improvements.
- **Form** is the shape and underlying structure of an entity or piece of work, including its organization, essential nature and external appearance.
- **Global interactions**, as a concept, focuses on the connections among individuals and communities, as well as their relationships with built and natural environments, from the perspective of the world as a whole.
- **Identity** is the state or fact of being the same. It refers to the particular features that define individuals, groups, things, eras, places, symbols and styles. Identity can be observed, or it can be constructed, asserted and shaped by external and internal influences.
- **Logic** is a method of reasoning and a system of principles used to build arguments and reach conclusions.
- **Perspective** is the position from which we observe situations, objects, facts, ideas and opinions. Perspective may be associated with individuals, groups, cultures or disciplines. Different perspectives often lead to multiple representations and interpretations.
- **Relationships** are the connections and associations between properties, objects, people and ideas—including the human community’s connections with the world in which we live. Any change in relationship brings consequences—some of which may occur on a small scale, while others may be far-reaching, affecting large networks and systems such as human societies and the planetary ecosystem.
- **Systems** are sets of interacting or interdependent components. Systems provide structure and order in human, natural and built environments. Systems can be static or dynamic, simple or complex.
- The intrinsically linked concept of **time, place and space** refers to the absolute or relative position of people, objects and ideas. Time, place and space focuses on how we construct and use our understanding of location (“where” and “when”).

Related concepts

Related concepts and their definitions are found in each MYP subject-group guide, along with examples of how they are used to develop MYP units. Teachers can develop additional related concepts to meet the needs of students and local or national curriculum requirements. For each unit, teachers identify one or more related concept(s) that extend(s) learning, lead(s) to deeper understanding, or offer(s) another perspective from which to understand the identified key concept(s).

Using key and related concepts

Since key and related concepts describe the most important ideas for teaching in the subject, teachers can use them as a framework for vertically articulating the curriculum. For example, teachers can begin by identifying the key and related concepts that will be addressed in each year of the programme, and then map the development of those concepts with respect to MYP subject-group objectives. Alternatively, teachers can begin by developing their understanding of subject-group objectives over the years of the programme, then identify key and related concepts for specific units.

When planning a unit of work and determining the conceptual understandings for students to explore through the unit, it is important to note the following.

- Students need multiple opportunities to explore the concepts defined for each subject or discipline. Students should have meaningful inquiry into all of the key and related concepts for each relevant subject group at least once over the course of the MYP.
- Over the course of the programme, students need to develop an understanding of the key and related concepts at increasing levels of sophistication and abstraction.
- Summative assessments should offer students opportunities to reach the highest achievement levels with regard to their conceptual knowledge and understanding.
- Related concepts can have different levels of abstraction and disciplinary specificity (Erickson 2008). In some cases, key concepts can function like related concepts. For example, in a unit entitled “Balance in complex organisms requires the effective interaction of systems”, the related concepts balance and interaction bring disciplinary depth to the key concept of systems—and also deepen understanding of the subject.

MYP related concepts

Language and literature			
Audience imperatives	Character	Context	Genre
Intertextuality	Point of view	Purpose	Self-expression
Setting	Structure	Style	Theme
Language acquisition			
Phases 1–2			
Accent	Audience	Context	Conventions
Form	Function	Meaning	Message
Patterns	Purpose	Structure	Word choice
Individuals and societies			
Economics			
Choice	Consumption	Equity	Globalization
Growth	Model	Poverty	Power
Resources	Scarcity	Sustainability	Trade
Geography			
Causality (cause and consequence)	Culture	Disparity and equity	Diversity
Globalization	Management and intervention	Networks	Patterns and trends
Power	Processes	Scale	Sustainability
History			
Causality (cause and consequence)	Civilization	Conflict	Cooperation
Culture	Governance	Identity	Ideology

Innovation and revolution	Interdependence	Perspective	Significance
Integrated humanities (drawn from economics, geography and history)			
Causality (cause and consequence)	Choice	Culture	Equity
Globalization	Identity	Innovation and revolution	Perspective
Power	Processes	Resources	Sustainability
<i>The MYP Individuals and societies guide contains suggested related concepts for business management, philosophy, psychology, sociology/anthropology, political science/civics/government and world religions.</i>			
Sciences			
Biology			
Balance	Consequences	Energy	Environment
Evidence	Form	Function	Interaction
Models	Movement	Patterns	Transformation
Chemistry			
Balance	Conditions	Consequences	Energy
Evidence	Form	Function	Interaction
Models	Movement	Patterns	Transfer
Physics			
Consequences	Development	Energy	Environment
Evidence	Form	Function	Interaction
Models	Movement	Patterns	Transformation
The related concepts for modular sciences courses			
Balance	Consequences	Energy	Environment
Evidence	Form	Function	Interaction
Models	Movement	Patterns	Transformation

Mathematics			
Change	Equivalence	Generalization	Justification
Measurement	Models	Patterns	Quantity
Representation	Simplification	Space	Systems
Arts			
Visual arts			
Audience	Boundaries	Composition	Expression
Genre	Innovation	Interpretation	Narrative
Presentation	Representation	Style	Visual culture
Performing arts			
Audience	Boundaries	Composition	Expression
Genre	Innovation	Interpretation	Narrative
Play	Presentation	Role	Structure
Physical and health education			
Adaptation	Balance	Choice	Energy
Environment	Function	Interaction	Movement
Perspective	Refinement	Space	Systems
Design			
Adaptation	Collaboration	Ergonomics	Evaluation
Form	Function	Innovation	Invention
Markets and trends	Perspective	Resources	Sustainability