

## Overview of the extended essay

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## The extended essay at a glance

The extended essay is an in-depth study of a focused topic chosen from the list of available Diploma Programme subjects for the session in question. This is normally one of the student's six chosen subjects for those taking the IB diploma, or a subject that a course student has a background in. It is intended to promote academic research and writing skills, providing students with an opportunity to engage in personal research in a topic of their own choice, under the guidance of a supervisor (an appropriately qualified member of staff within the school). This leads to a major piece of formally presented, structured writing, in which ideas and findings are communicated in a reasoned and coherent manner, appropriate to the subject chosen. It is mandatory that all students undertake three reflection sessions with their supervisor, which includes a short, concluding interview, or *viva voce*, with their supervisor following the completion of the extended essay. An assessment of this reflection process is made under criterion E (Engagement) using the [Reflections on planning and progress form](#).

The extended essay is assessed against common criteria, interpreted in ways appropriate to each subject.

### Key features of the extended essay

- The extended essay is compulsory for all students taking the Diploma Programme and is an option for course students.
- A student must achieve a D grade or higher to be awarded the Diploma.
- The extended essay is externally assessed and, in combination with the grade for theory of knowledge, contributes up to three points to the total score for the IB Diploma.
- The extended essay process helps prepare students for success at university and in other pathways beyond the Diploma Programme.
- When choosing a subject for the extended essay, students must consult the list of available Diploma Programme subjects published in the [Handbook of procedures for the Diploma Programme](#) for the session in question.
- The extended essay is a piece of independent research on a topic chosen by the student in consultation with a supervisor in the school.
- It is presented as a formal piece of sustained academic writing containing no more than 4,000 words accompanied by a reflection form of no more than 500 words.
- It is the result of approximately 40 hours of work by the student.
- Students are supported by a supervision process recommended to be 3–5 hours, which includes three mandatory reflection sessions.
- The third and final mandatory reflection session is the *viva voce*, which is a concluding interview with the supervising teacher.

## Prior learning

The extended essay is a unique task for all students, both those who are studying for the full IB diploma and course students who choose it as an option. While no particular background is formally required to undertake the extended essay, students are strongly recommended to carry out research in a subject area they are currently studying in the Diploma Programme to ensure that they have sufficient subject knowledge to complete the task. If a student has a background in the subject that is not from their Diploma Programme studies, the student must ensure that they are familiar with the subject from a Diploma Programme perspective.

For those students completing a world studies extended essay, it is strongly recommended that they are undertaking a course of study in at least one of the subjects chosen for their essay. A familiarity with research methods would be an advantage; however, when students begin the extended essay, part of the process is to develop an understanding of the methodology most appropriate for the research area within the chosen subject. Developing this understanding will be undertaken with the support and guidance of their supervisor, Diploma Programme and/or extended essay coordinator and librarian.

## The nature of the extended essay

The extended essay is a unique opportunity for students to explore an academic area in which they have a personal interest. This takes the form of an independently written research paper that allows students to demonstrate their passion, enthusiasm, intellectual initiative and/or creative approach for their chosen topic. Such topics can range from focused, in-depth analyses of specific elements of a subject to critically evaluating responses to issues of global significance in the case of the world studies extended essay. Students develop important transferable skills such as research, critical thinking, and self-management, which are communicated in the form of an academic piece of writing. Emphasis is placed on engagement and reflection on the research process, highlighting the journey the student has made on an intellectual and personal level and how it has changed them as a learner and affected the final essay.

Students complete an extended essay in a specific discipline or in one of the interdisciplinary options available. In a disciplinary essay students must demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the theories, tools and techniques of a specific discipline explored through a topic of their choice. Students who choose a world studies extended essay must demonstrate how their understanding of an issue of contemporary global significance is enhanced by taking an interdisciplinary approach.

An important aim of the extended essay, as part of the Diploma Programme core is to support and be supported by the academic disciplines. Whichever subject is chosen, the extended essay is concerned with exploring a specific research question through interpreting and evaluating evidence, and constructing reasoned arguments. In undertaking the extended essay students model many of the elements of academic research by locating their topic within a broader disciplinary context, or issue in the case of a world studies extended essay, justifying the relevance of their research and critically evaluating the overall strength of the arguments made and sources used. Guided through this process by a supervisor, students are encouraged to reflect on insights gained, evaluate decisions, and respond to challenges encountered during the research.

Embedded within the process of writing the extended essay are many elements of the *approaches to learning* (ATL). While research skills are fundamental to successful completion, other ATL skills are implicit in the task. As the extended essay is an independent task, it requires students to self-manage by developing organization and affective skills, including mindfulness, perseverance, resilience and self-motivation. The process of researching and writing the extended essay represents the learner profile in action. Being open-minded, principled and reflective are aspects of the student experience within the extended essay. The extended essay provides students with the opportunity to become more internationally minded by engaging with the local and global communities on topics of personal inquiry. The development of the learner profile attributes help to unify IB learners in a larger community in this shared experience.

The extended essay is a challenging and rewarding experience, which prepares students for different pathways beyond the Diploma Programme by developing skills valued by both tertiary education and employers. The extended essay embodies the essence of an IB education in developing inquiring, critical, lifelong learners.

## Engaging with sensitive topics

Undertaking an extended essay provides students an opportunity to engage with interesting, stimulating and personally relevant topics and issues. However, it should be noted that often such topics and issues can also be sensitive and personally challenging. Diploma Programme and/or extended essay coordinators and supervisors should be aware of this and provide guidance to students on how to approach and engage with such topics and issues in a responsible manner. The IB's [ethical guidelines](#) should be consulted.

## Policies relevant to the extended essay

All students undertaking an extended essay must be aware of and read the relevant policies related to [ethical guidelines](#) for carrying out research and those relating to academic honesty. Additionally, students must ensure that they follow the policies related to specific subject areas, such as in the sciences, psychology, and social and cultural anthropology. In the sciences, this refers specifically to the animal experimentation policy, and in psychology and social and cultural anthropology it refers to ethical guidelines for undertaking research.

## Aims

The aims of the extended essay are for students to:

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

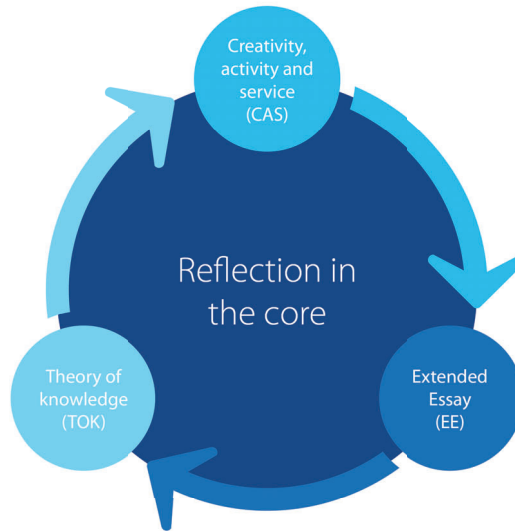
## Assessment objectives

In working on the extended essay, students are expected to achieve the following assessment objectives.

Assessment objectives	
Knowledge and understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the topic chosen and the research question posed.</li><li>• To demonstrate knowledge and understanding of subject specific terminology and/or concepts.</li><li>• To demonstrate knowledge and understanding of relevant and/or appropriate research sources and/or methods used to gather information.</li></ul>
Application and analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To select and apply research that is relevant and appropriate to the research question.</li><li>• To analyse the research effectively and focus on the research question.</li></ul>
Synthesis and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To be able to discuss the research in terms of a clear and coherent reasoned argument in relation to the research question.</li><li>• To be able to critically evaluate the arguments presented in the essay.</li><li>• To be able to reflect on and evaluate the research process.</li></ul>
A variety of (research) skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To be able to present information in an appropriate academic format.</li><li>• To understand and demonstrate academic integrity.</li></ul>

## Reflection in the core

Being reflective is one attribute of the IB learner profile: “We thoughtfully consider the world and our own ideas and experience. We work to understand our strengths and weaknesses in order to support our learning and personal development.”

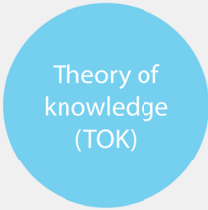


### Reflection in CAS:

Creativity,  
activity and  
service  
(CAS)

- Reflection is central to building a deep and rich experience of CAS. Students explore their own actions and reflect on their personal growth.
- The emphasis in CAS is on **affective** reflection, characterized by reflecting on attitudes, feelings, values, principles, motivation, emotions and self-development.
- Students will be encouraged to informally reflect on their CAS experiences throughout the CAS programme, but are required to reflect formally when developing a CAS portfolio.

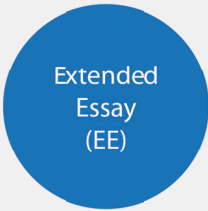
## Reflection in TOK:



Theory of  
knowledge  
(TOK)

- TOK is about reflecting on the nature of knowledge. Students are encouraged to reflect on how knowledge is constructed as well as the commonalities and differences in their subject areas.
- The emphasis in TOK is on **critical** reflection, characterized by reflecting on metacognition, evaluation, justification, arguments, claims and counterclaims, underlying assumptions and different perspectives.
- Students will be encouraged to informally reflect on their engagement with knowledge throughout the course, but are required to reflect formally as part of the TOK essay and the TOK presentation.

## Reflection in the extended essay:



Extended  
Essay  
(EE)

- Reflection in the extended essay focuses on the student's progress during the planning, research and writing process. It is intended to help students with the development of their extended essay as well as allowing them the opportunity to consider the effectiveness of their choices, to re-examine their ideas and to decide whether changes are needed.
- The emphasis in the extended essay is on **process** reflection, characterized by reflecting on conceptual understandings, decision-making, engagement with data, the research process, time management, methodology, successes and challenges, and the appropriateness of sources.
- Students will be encouraged to informally reflect throughout the experience of researching and writing the extended essay, but are required to reflect formally during the reflection sessions with their supervisor and when completing the Reflections on planning and progress form.



## Reflection in the extended essay

Student reflection in the extended essay is a critical evaluation of the decision-making process. It demonstrates the evolution and discovery of conceptual understandings as they relate to the research question and sources. Reflection demonstrates the rationale for decisions made and the skills and understandings developed, as well as the authenticity and intellectual initiative of the student voice. Effective reflection highlights the journey the student has taken to engage in an intellectual and personal process as well as how it has changed him or her as a learner and affected the final essay.

As a part of the extended essay, students will be expected to show evidence of intellectual growth, critical and personal development, intellectual initiative and creativity. This should be facilitated by the use of the Researcher's reflection space. The most successful students will be able to show an appreciation that learning is complex and that they are able to consider their actions and ideas in response to setbacks that they may experience during the research process.

The depth of reflection will demonstrate that the student has constructively engaged with the learning process. Such engagement provides evidence that the student has grown as a learner as a result of his or her experience. More importantly, it demonstrates the skills that have been learned.

These skills may include:

- critical thinking
- decision-making
- general research
- planning
- referencing and citations
- specific research methodology
- time management.

Reflection must be documented on the [Reflections on planning and progress form](#) and is explicitly assessed under assessment criterion E (engagement).