

Studies in language and literature

Interpreting the EE assessment criteria

Criterion A: Focus and method

(Strands: Topic, Research question, Methodology)

For all three categories of studies in language and literature essays, the term “research” should be interpreted as “research material(s)” or “area of investigation” or “the topic under investigation”.

In terms of the choice of topic, the research question must be specific and sharply focused and stated clearly in the introduction of the essay. It should be formulated as a question, not a statement or proposition for discussion. Its purpose should be made clear to the reader and be related to the knowledge and understanding in context.

Overly broad topics that cannot be dealt with adequately within the scope of the word limit should be avoided. Similarly, too obvious a topic is unlikely to score highly in terms of criterion C.

The introduction should state briefly why the student has chosen that particular research question and what it has to offer. It should also indicate clearly how it relates to existing knowledge on that topic.

The subsequent planning of the essay and its focus for discussion should involve analysis of the text(s) in the light of the research question. Students may also include a critical perspective on secondary source material so that the views of critics are used to support the students’ own arguments. The sources used must provide sufficient material to develop and support an argument and a conclusion relevant to the research question.

- For **categories 1 and 2 essays**, appropriate sources include the literary text or texts that form the focus of the investigation and, where appropriate, secondary sources such as published criticism on those texts.
- In both these categories, students should be aware that they may be limiting themselves by choosing texts that are not capable of sustaining a detailed in-depth literary analysis, eg some types of children’s literature or teenage fiction.
- **Category 2 essays** should include a brief rationale for the pairing of the texts chosen, indicating what might be gained from the comparative study being undertaken. Students should avoid taking an approach where such texts are dealt with in two separate discussions.
- **Category 3 language essays** based on a primary text or texts from the range indicated in the subject guide should also use secondary sources to provide a framework for a critical analysis of how language, culture and context shape meaning.

If the topic or research question is deemed inappropriate for the subject in which the essay is registered, no more than four marks can be awarded for this criterion. This applies to language A essays that are based on inappropriate texts.

Criterion B: Knowledge and understanding

(Strands: Context, Subject-specific terminology and concepts)

For all three categories of essay, supporting source materials should be chosen appropriately and used effectively and purposefully to demonstrate an understanding of the wider issues involved.

Clarity and precision of communication in a studies in language and literature essay includes the correct use of language. Students should be able to convey their ideas fluently and articulately. They should also be able to use subject-specific terminology appropriate to the discipline and apply it to their chosen topic with discernment.

- For **categories 1 and 2 literature essays**, the context should be established succinctly and should not be an excuse for padding out an essay with a lengthy account of the historical or biographical context of a literary text: the quality of the student's understanding of the primary text is the main concern. The use of secondary source materials is helpful in terms of establishing a wider framework for the discussion; however this should not replace the student's personal engagement with the primary text(s).
- For **category 3 language essays**, the introduction of the essay should focus on the chosen topic and how it relates to existing knowledge of that subject and/or why it is of special interest to the target language and/or culture. The text(s) should be explored and understood through a critical consideration of their specific cultural and/or linguistic background. The student's personal experience or personal opinion should only be included if relevant to a discussion of, for example, the target audience for the text, and not as unsupported assertion.

If the topic or research question is deemed inappropriate for the subject in which the essay is registered, no more than four marks can be awarded for this criterion. This applies to language A essays that are based on inappropriate texts.

Criterion C: Critical thinking

(Strands: Research, Analysis, and Discussion and evaluation)

For all three categories of studies in language and literature essays, the analysis and argument should focus on the research question and support a personal interpretation.

Students should aim for a detailed and critical consideration that develops their own argument rather than simply adopting the views of critics. Second-hand interpretations or viewpoints that are derived solely from secondary sources, or purely descriptive essays, will not score highly.

The essays must focus on the analysis of the research material presented. Personal views should not simply be stated but need to be supported by reasoned argument.

The conclusion should present a considered evaluation of the topic in the light of the discussion as well as findings or results from the research (as appropriate).

Students are also encouraged to take a critical perspective on secondary sources: in particular, if students make use of internet-based sources, they should do so critically and circumspectly in full awareness of their potential unreliability.

- For **categories 1 and 2 literature essays**, a straightforward description of a literary text through plot summary or narration of the action does not usually advance an argument and should generally be avoided.
- This also applies to **category 3 language essays** that give only straightforward descriptive or narrative accounts of a text or texts that lack critical analysis.

If the topic or research question is deemed inappropriate for the subject in which the essay is registered, no more than three marks can be awarded for this criterion. This applies to language A essays that are based on inappropriate texts.

Criterion D: Presentation

(Strands: Structure, Layout)

This criterion relates to the extent to which the essay conforms to current academic standards concerning the presentation of research papers. It also relates to how well these elements support the reading, understanding and evaluation of the essay.

Essays in studies in language and literature would normally be presented as a continuous body of text, although some category 3 topics may benefit from a section and subsection structure to their essays, with appropriate informative headings.

The use of charts, images and tables may also be appropriate for category 3 essays. They should only be used if they are directly relevant to the research question, contribute towards the understanding of the argument and are of a good graphic quality.

Any material that is not original must be carefully acknowledged, with specific attention paid to the acknowledgment and referencing of quotes and ideas. This acknowledgment and referencing is applicable to audiovisual material, text, graphs and data published in print and electronic sources. If the referencing does not meet the minimum standard as indicated in the guide (name of author, date of publication, title of source and page numbers, as applicable), and is not consistently applied, the work will be considered as a case of possible academic misconduct.

A bibliography is essential and has to be presented in a standard format. Title page, table of contents, page numbers, etc must contribute to the quality of presentation.

The essay must not exceed 4,000 words of narrative. Graphs, diagrams or other illustrative material are not included in the word count. Students should be aware that examiners will not read beyond the 4,000-word limit, nor assess any material presented thereafter.

Criterion E: Engagement

(Strands: Process, Research focus)

This criterion assesses the student's engagement with their research focus and the research process. It will be applied by the examiner at the end of the assessment of the essay, and is based solely on the candidate's reflections as detailed on the [RPPE](#), with the supervisory comments and extended essay itself as context.

Students are expected to provide reflections on the decision-making and planning process undertaken in completing the essay. Students must demonstrate how they arrived at a topic as well as the methods and approach used. This criterion assesses the extent to which a student has evidenced the rationale for decisions made throughout the planning process and the skills and understandings developed.

For example, students may reflect on:

- the approach and strategies chosen, and their relative success
- the [Approaches to learning](#) skills they have acquired and how they have developed as a learner
- how their conceptual understandings have developed or changed as a result of their research
- challenges faced in their research and how they overcame these
- questions that emerged as a result of their research
- what they would do differently if they were to undertake the research again.

Effective reflection highlights the journey the student has engaged in through the EE process. In order to demonstrate that engagement, students must show evidence of critical and reflective thinking that goes beyond simply describing the procedures that have been followed. Reflections must provide the examiner with an insight into **student** thinking, creativity and originality within the research process. The **student** voice must be clearly present and demonstrate the learning that has taken place.

Treatment of the topic

Students should use both primary and secondary sources for their research.

Primary sources refer to the novels, poems, stories, plays or essays by the author whose work is the focus of the student's research.

Secondary sources are scholarly works about:

- the primary author's work and biography
- the genre the student is focusing on
- literary techniques.

Secondary sources include:

- books
- academic journal articles

- edited essays in book collections
- reviews incorporated in the publication that is the focus of the student's research.

Categories 1 and 2—literature

Students should always consider how the text(s) work as literature, dealing with aspects such as the effects they achieve, the devices they use and the way they are written.

Philosophical, political or social issues

Students can choose as their topic a philosophical, political or social issue arising from a work of literature. However, the major focus of their essay should be the literary treatment of the issue. They must not treat the literary work(s) simply as documentary evidence in a discussion of the particular issue.

In addition, students should not use the essay solely as a vehicle for their own thoughts on the issue. Students must focus first on their analysis of the presentation of the author's ideas. Then they can present their personal views on the way the author has treated the subject.

Use of literary criticism

Students should aim for a compromise between building on the wisdom of experienced critics and introducing new personal elements. An essay that simply repeats the views of established literary critics will not receive a high mark.

Use of literary biography

Essays that interpret literary works in terms of the writer's life tend to produce reductive readings based on second-hand information. Such essays receive low marks and the IB therefore advises students to avoid biographical topics.

Examples of topics, research questions and suggested approaches—category 1

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	An exploration of evil as a motivating force in drama
Research question	How effectively does Christopher Marlowe present his view of evil in <i>Dr Faustus</i> ?
Approach	A detailed study of the play to include selected quotations to support the argument, with reference to secondary source material if appropriate.

Topic	The treatment of prejudice in novels
Research question	How far are the approaches to prejudice and discrimination different in <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> and <i>The Kite Runner</i> ?
Approach	The identification of types of prejudice (religious, racial, caste, gender, as appropriate) in the novels and the selection of detailed incidents and/or character studies for close analysis. Some background research into 1950s America and Afghanistan between 1970 and the mid-1990s may be helpful in establishing a context for the argument and a comparative element to the discussion.

Topic	Social criticism in Nicanor Parra's poetry
Research question	Is there a change in Nicanor Parra's social criticism in <i>Poemas y antipoemas</i> and <i>Hojas de Parra</i> ?
Approach	Using a selection of poems from two works of poetry written in two different moments in Parra's literary career (eg <i>Poemas y Antipoemas</i> and <i>Hojas de Parra</i>) this study will illustrate how social criticism has been embedded in Parra's work. The approach will focus on a selection of topics, themes and poetic techniques and his literary development using these two examples of early and later poetry from his career. This work will also use critical studies and other secondary sources that will help enlighten the approach of this research.

Topic	The use of colour in Friedrich Dürrenmatt's play <i>Der Besuch der alten Dame</i>
Research question	How effective is Friedrich Dürrenmatt's use of colour to convey his message in the play <i>Der Besuch der alten Dame</i> ?
Approach	An analysis and evaluation of colour symbolism in Dürrenmatt's play <i>Der Besuch der alten Dame</i> .

Topic	<i>Au retour des oies blanches</i> and classical tragedy
Research question	What role do the patterns of classical tragedy play in Marcel Dubé's <i>Au retour des oies blanches</i> ?
Approach	An analysis based on the claim by Michel Tremblay that influences of classical tragedy appear across Dubé's work. The essay will investigate classical tragedy and then carry out a detailed analysis of this particular work to support the argument.

Examples of topics, research questions and suggested approaches—category 2

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	The portrayal of childhood in novels
Research question	In what ways, and to what purposes, do Nabokov's <i>Invitation to a Beheading</i> and Proust's <i>Swann's Way</i> evoke memories of childhood?
Approach	A close analysis of both works, with reference to secondary source material if

	appropriate, and some comparative element to the discussion
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Topic	The presentation of guilt in novels
Research question	How important is the narrative structure to the way guilt is addressed by Bernhard Schlink in <i>The Reader</i> and Tim O'Brien in <i>The Things They Carried</i> ?
Approach	A close analysis of both works, with reference to secondary source material if appropriate, and some comparative element to the discussion.

Category 3—language

Students should give focused and critical attention to the text or texts being considered. The approach should aim to be balanced, coherently argued, and illustrated by relevant supporting examples.

Students are encouraged to:

- adopt an analytical, critical position
- show awareness of potentially conflicting viewpoints on the text(s) and their meaning in a wider social context.

Their analysis must include a wider discussion of the contexts in which the text(s) are produced and understood.

Essays that attempt to interpret the text(s) without considering the original audience and context are unlikely to offer a fully successful discussion.

Examples of topics, research questions and suggested approaches—category 3

The examples are just for guidance. Apart from examples 1 and 7, each specifies a particular language so that the research question is precise. However, they may also work in another language and context.

Examples 1, 2 and 3—language in a cultural context

Students can explore how language develops in specific cultural contexts, how it impacts on the world, and the ways in which language shapes both individual and group identity.

Topic	Gender
Research question	How has the portrayal of men in male grooming products changed from the 1980s to date?
Approach	A careful analysis of the contexts and the devices employed in at least two specific advertising campaigns in the target language culture, with some comparative element to the discussion.

Topic	Language and communities
Research question	How do the Spanish press present controversies that happen during the Real Madrid and Barcelona derbies?
Approach	A careful analysis of the emotive language used to describe the controversial moments from the Barcelona and Madrid press (El País, El Periódico de Catalunya, Marca, As, El Mundo) focusing on a particular season. There will be an evaluation of the social and political stances taken by the different newspapers and an analysis of bias.

Topic	Language and communities (nation/region, subcultures)
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Research question	How are second and third generation Turkish young people portrayed in the German media?
Approach	A careful analysis of and comparison between three different media forms from a variety of viewpoints. There will be a focus on the nature of the language used to portray second and third generation Turkish youth (15–25 years old).

Examples 4, 5, 6 and 7—language and mass communication

Students are able to consider the way language is used in the media, and may address how the production and reception of texts is influenced by the medium in which they are written.

Topic	Language and presentation of speeches
Research question	To what extent does Cristina Fernández de Kirchner use rhetorical devices to criticize international culture funds?
Approach	A careful analysis of the contexts and the rhetorical devices used by Fernández de Kirchner in a select handful of speeches in which she criticizes international culture funds, with some comparative element to the discussion.

Topic	The use of persuasive language in motivational speeches
Research question	By what means do Steve Jobs and Martin

	Luther King seek to inspire their particular audiences?
Approach	A careful analysis of the contexts and the rhetorical and emotive devices employed in Steve Jobs' Stanford University graduation commencement ceremony speech (2005) and Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" discourse (1963), with some comparative element to the discussion.

Topic	News coverage
Research question	How do different newspapers vary in their reporting methods of racist incidents in English league football?
Approach	A careful analysis of the emotive language used to describe specific incidents of racism in football as reported in daily newspapers (eg <i>The Guardian</i> , <i>Daily Telegraph</i> , <i>Daily Mirror</i> and a sports publication) and an evaluation of how far the stance taken on this issue is representative of each newspaper's social, political and class bias.

Topic	Textual bias
Research question	How do different newspapers vary the way they convey their political views in their

	editorials?
Approach	A careful analysis of the contexts and the language (choice of key words, rhetorical devices) used by two leading newspapers <i>Asahi</i> and <i>Yomiuri</i> issued on the 3rd of May, The Institutional Day (Japanese national holiday to commemorate their peaceful post-war Constitutional Law) for the past five years, with comparative elements to the discussion.