

## Individuals and societies: An introduction

An extended essay (EE) in one of the subjects in individuals and societies gives students an opportunity to undertake an in-depth investigation into a topic of particular interest to them. Students working on the individuals and societies EE must demonstrate in-depth analysis of the subject matter studied, be it business management, economics, geography, global politics, history, ITGS, philosophy, psychology, social and cultural anthropology or world religions. This understanding must be shown in the form of:

- a coherently written and structured essay that effectively addresses a particular issue expressed as a research question
- the development and exploration in a disciplined and imaginative way of an area of study appropriate to the chosen subject
- a critical analysis and evaluation of source material in relation to the chosen research question that is articulated in the form of a reasoned argument.

Students working on an individuals and societies EE should be advised that each subject area poses its own unique set of challenges and that the approach to topic investigation should be different for each subject area. However, across all the subject areas, the topics chosen should 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.

Additionally, their topics should enable students to recognize that the content and methodologies of the subjects are contestable and that their study requires critical thinking.

Students should have logical and coherent reasons for selecting a particular topic for the EE. They need also to identify a well-thought-out research question and to adopt an approach that allows for the development of a reasoned argument. Their choice of topic should offer enough scope to provide material for substantial and informative writing, and require students to examine, analyse and evaluate existing views, or propose new perspectives.

## The process of topic selection

Students should initially identify the broad area that they are interested in within business management, economics, geography, global politics, history, ITGS, philosophy, psychology, social and cultural anthropology or world religions.

Given the composite nature of the individuals and societies field, students may choose a topic that could be understood through the lens of more than one subject. Where a topic could be approached from different standpoints, such as economics or geography, the treatment of the topic must meet the requirements of the subject that students are submitting the essay for.

Students must demonstrate a sufficient grounding in their chosen subject: reading a textbook or consulting an encyclopedia while writing their EE will not compensate for a lack of background knowledge in the subject.

The most important aspect of topic selection is that it should reflect each student's particular interest and enthusiasm.

Often, their previous experiences help students to decide on their topic.

For some, the inspiration might be work already undertaken as part of the course.

Students might also search e-resources, textbooks, databases and reference guides. Students should be advised that these types of sources should be consulted in conjunction with other relevant research material to support the student's own original research. The information that students use as a reference in the essay should come from a sound methodology, which is clearly appropriate to the subject and research question posed.

Students' choice of topic might also be stimulated by work done in class, issues of contemporary debate, discussion, current or past events, private reading or reflection.

The topic should be suitable for effective treatment within the 4,000-word limit. Topics that cover many aspects of the subject and are too broad are unlikely to produce successful essays. Narrowing the scope of the essay will help to ensure a clear focus and allow students to demonstrate detailed and specific knowledge, understanding and critical analysis of their subject matter. Each subject section of this guide provides some examples of more focused topics.

## **Literature review—demonstrating knowledge and understanding in context**

Conducting literature-based research is an essential element of the EE. Students should review the existing literature on their topic to inform the construction of their own research question and the development of their argument. Students need to spend time on their literature review (eg by compiling an annotated bibliography) ensuring that they are able to contextualize their own work and to meet criterion B: knowledge and understanding.

Once they have discussed their choice of topic with their supervisor, students can begin to outline the main points to be discussed in the essay. Their research plan should be flexible enough to allow them to explore the topic in a creative manner and also change direction if needed. This may be necessary if students find it difficult to locate supporting material and research data.

Students should be advised to use accurate terminology and subject-specific concepts throughout their essay. They should also show awareness of the value and reliability of their sources, rather than accepting evidence uncritically.

## Research question

In designing a research question, students should mainly be guided by their interests, but also consider the relevance of their research. Research questions should not be of a trivial nature and should be worthy of investigation. They should follow from the existing body of literature on the topic, seeking to explore it in innovative ways. They should set an appropriate context and encourage an investigative approach to the essay.

Research questions that do not lead to systematic investigation, critical analysis and detailed understanding are unlikely to be suitable. A well-constructed research question is:

- specific and sharply focused on the particular aspect or area of subject matter being explored
- stated clearly on the title page and in the introduction of the essay
- evident throughout the whole discussion.

Students need to avoid questions that are too narrow or too obvious as this will limit their ability to formulate reasoned arguments. The research question must give an appropriate context and encourage an investigative approach. The EE's aim is to foster students' ability to reason and argue, and to learn to critically evaluate sources in support of a reasoned argument.

Students should try to develop ideas around the topic and research questions that take an interesting, novel or creative approach. Alternatively, they can examine existing views and argue against them to a greater or lesser degree. Critical analysis and evaluation are required to access the higher levels of the assessment criteria.

The research question must be defined in the form of a question. Students must explore it using research methods appropriate to the subject, which may include both qualitative methods and the empirical analysis of quantitative data. Students must ensure that they have read and understood the parameters in which they are permitted to undertake research within their chosen subject; this includes being familiar with the relevant ethical codes.

## Research methods

The EE's emphasis should always be on written analysis, interpretation of data and sources, evaluation, and construction and development of a sound argument. It is vital that the methodology of the essay is tailored to the research question, appropriate for the subject and allows for an in-depth exploration of the research area.

Students should be guided by the methods of research for their given subject. Given the diversity of the subjects covered in this group, the range of research methods available is wide, and in most cases it will be necessary to use more than one method.

Students are advised to check carefully the specific subject guidance as methods appropriate for a particular discipline are not always permitted for the purposes of the EE. For example, psychology students are not allowed to undertake primary research using experiments; in social and cultural anthropology, primary methods should only be used to supplement secondary research; an EE in geography need not place so strong an emphasis on primary field data.

In fact, many successful research topics are based on published data in the form of books, newspapers and magazines, interviews, maps, aerial photographs and satellite images, digital landscape simulations, videos, CDs, DVDs, GIS, diagrams and models.

Research questions in philosophy are explored through an examination of themes and texts. The range of sources that can be used is wide and includes the works of philosophers, dictionaries of philosophy, textbooks and encyclopedias.

Oral and written data from family members to explain past happenings constitutes primary source material in history. Its use is highly encouraged in the history EE, but is not a requirement.

In business management, students can include materials sourced from a particular business or organization whose area of business is related to the topic chosen (for example, market research companies, industry analysts or think tanks). In contrast, EEs in microeconomics allow students to carry out primary research in the form of surveys, questionnaires and interviews.

All areas of research, in all subjects, will necessitate some level of secondary research, even if students also use primary methods. Students must use secondary sources to establish the context of their research and to support the argument and conclusion of the essay. This is an important aspect of demonstrating knowledge and understanding.

An essay that is based solely on secondary data is permitted—if appropriate to the subject—and allows students to access all levels of the EE assessment criteria.

Proper planning of an essay should involve integrating source material in the light of the research question. Secondary sources of information include academic and research journals, books, newspaper and magazine articles and websites. Subject-specific examples are:

- In business management—the appropriate use and application of selected analytical tools, often supported by statistical data to assist any discussion and evaluation (for instance, Ansoff's Matrix, BCG Matrix, Decision tree analysis, etc).

- In economics—statistical data collected from national statistical agencies, the IMF, the ILO, the World Bank and the WTO.
- In social and cultural anthropology—a critical comparison and evaluation of two ethnographies exploring an anthropological concept.

Supervisors need to ensure that students are aware of their responsibility to cite properly the resources used and check their work for plagiarism. Citations should adhere to the requirements of the IB and be correctly and consistently applied.

## Framework for the EE in individuals and societies

<b>Introduction</b>	<p>An 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.</p> <p>Qualitative and quantitative methods are used when writing EEs in this group.</p>
<b>Methods most relevant to subjects in this group</b>	<p>Primary methods involve content analysis, surveys, questionnaires, oral history, interviews, observation and fieldwork.</p> <p>Secondary methods include academic and research journals, books, newspapers and magazines, maps, aerial photographs and satellite images, digital landscape simulations, videos, CDs, DVDs, GIS, diagrams and models, websites, analytical tools and statistical data.</p>
<b>Suggestions for possible sources</b>	<p>Use of peer-reviewed journals, newspaper articles, books, e-resources and publications online, specialized academic research engines, unpublished conference papers, previously published essays.</p> <p>Students may wish to interview practitioners and professionals.</p>
<b>Particular things to be aware of</b>	<p>Students need to be aware that their work will be checked in terms of the IB's academic honesty policy and so all students must ensure that they are familiar with this document.</p>
<b>Summary</b>	<p>Undertaking an EE is a challenge and so planning is crucial. Students need to remember to start writing their papers early and discuss any emerging difficulties with their supervisor.</p> <p>Supervisors, librarians, practitioners and professionals in the field are a great source of information, advice and support for students.</p> <p>Students should search for primary and secondary sources of information prior to initiating the writing process. The framing of a good research question, which is well structured and thought through, will aid students in establishing a reasoned argument.</p>
<b>The EE and internal assessments</b>	<p>The EE is not an extension of the internal assessment and students must ensure that they are not using material submitted for any other assessment component as part of the EE submission—see individual subject-specific guidance for more details.</p>