

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 of a Spring</i> , <i>Invitation of a Summer</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

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)
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.