

## Language acquisition: An introduction

Students working on a language acquisition extended essay (EE) must demonstrate an in-depth analysis of the language, culture and society or literature studied. This understanding must be shown in the form of:

- an analysis of a cultural context or a specific text
- an analysis of trends in the culture studied and the impact of a cultural change on the form or use of the language
- an analysis and comparison of literary texts.

For those undertaking a classical Greek or Latin EE, the focus is on demonstrating an understanding of a relevant or significant aspect of the language, literature and civilization of ancient Greece or Rome.

Students should be advised about the importance of having logical and coherent reasons for selecting their particular topic, and the need for identifying a well-thought-out research question and approach to a text analysis.

While communication and quality of language are only assessed universally, and not in the same way that it is assessed in the language acquisition course itself, students undertaking an EE in language acquisition must have sufficient proficiency in the language in order to address the assessment criteria.

In relation to a classical Greek or Latin EE, students will submit their essay in either English or Spanish, depending on their language of registration. However, since there is a requirement that students engage with sources written in classical Greek and Latin, they must have sufficient proficiency to do this.

## The process of topic selection

Students should initially identify the broad area of inquiry that they are interested in within the language, culture and society or literature studied. Students are encouraged to pursue their interest in the language through research based on texts (spoken or written records of the language) or specific cultural artifacts, a requirement for the category 2B essay.

They then need to narrow down their topic by dividing the area into more specific and detailed subtopics. For instance, a student might be interested in conducting research on the Japanese language and its usage. They could narrow this down to focus on “An investigation into the usage of foreign words in Japanese language by young and old people”.

Students should also be cautioned against choosing a topic that does not have sufficient scope or may not be worthy of investigation, resulting in a merely descriptive or narrative essay.

For students of classical Greek and Latin, their essay may focus on an aspect of classical Greek or Latin language and/or literature. If a student chooses to examine the culture or civilization of ancient Greece or Rome, their topic must allow them to show the close relationship between language, literature and the culture and civilization and to explore how they are linked.

After a careful analysis of the topic and its selection, students can begin to plan the structure of their paper.

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

For some, the inspiration might be work already undertaken as part of the course. Students aiming to write on literature may have a specific author or text ready to investigate further, or they could consult the [Prescribed list of authors \(PLA\)](#) for ideas.

## Secondary reading

A source of reference might be works on philosophical, political and/or social questions that are discussed in academic journals. Students can refer to such publications, in addition to searching e-resources, databases, reference guides on local and international law, national folklore, newspaper articles and advertisements. Students should be advised to use internet sources carefully and critically, especially in terms of their reliability and validity.

Other sources might include: unpublished conference papers, previously published essays, book chapters or journal articles. Students should also be encouraged to consult with their school or local librarian.

For classical Greek and Latin essays, establishing the historical and cultural context of the essay topic is very important. This context is best established through appropriate references to art, literature or archeological sources. Secondary reading is therefore an essential part of the research process.

## Literature review—demonstrating knowledge and understanding in context

Conducting literature-based research is an essential part of the EE. Students should review the existing literature on their topic to inform the construction of their own research question and design. Time spent early on reviewing the literature will help students to contextualize their own work. It will also enable them to score highly against criterion B: knowledge and understanding. However, references to the existing literature must be in the context of the chosen topic and should not distract the reader from the essay's main focus.

## Research question

In designing a research question, students should be guided by their interests, but also consider the relevance of their topic. The question should be non-trivial and follow from the existing body of literature on the topic. The question needs to:

- be specific and sharply focused
- be stated clearly in the introduction of the essay and on the title page
- fit into one of the categories of a language acquisition group (language, culture and society or literature), or be a combination of these.

Students need to avoid researching a question that is too narrow or too obvious as this will limit their ability to formulate reasoned arguments.

## Research methods

Students writing an EE in language acquisition should be engaged with the analysis of primary and secondary sources in conducting their research.

- A **primary source** of texts refers to the books, book chapters, novels, essays, poems, stories, plays, interviews, discussions, newspaper headlines, articles, historical documents, speeches, advertising, informal conversations or any other occurrence of “communicative language” that is original.
- A **secondary source** refers to a scholarly work, including books, journal articles, essays in an edited book collection or reviews about the primary author's work, or an author biography, genre and techniques incorporated in the publication that is the focus of student's research.

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

## Framework for an EE in language acquisition

<b>Introduction</b>	<p>An EE in language acquisition is intended for students who are studying a second modern language. An essay cannot be submitted as a language acquisition essay in a student's language A. The EEs in this group are divided into three categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a specific analysis of the language (its use and structure), normally related to its cultural context or a specific text</li> <li>• an analysis of a cultural nature that describes the impact of a particular issue on the form or use of the language</li> <li>• an analysis of a literary type, based on a specific work or works of literature exclusively from the target language.</li> </ul>
<b>Methods most relevant to subjects in this group</b>	<p>Primary methods involve analysing an author's collected novels, personal essays, books, book chapters, poems, stories, plays, interviews, discussions, newspaper headlines, articles, historical documents, speeches, advertising, theatre, informal conversations or any other occurrence of "communicative language" that is original.</p> <p>Secondary methods include contextualizing with books, journal articles, an essay in an edited book collection, or reviews about the author's work. The author's biography, genre and techniques incorporated in the publication are also considered to be a qualitative secondary source of research.</p>
<b>Suggestions for possible sources</b>	<p>Peer-reviewed journals, newspaper articles, personal conversations with the author, books, electronic resources and publications online, specialized academic research engines, unpublished conference papers, previously published essays and book chapters, among other sources.</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. Supervisors and librarians are a great source of information, advice and support for students. Students writing a language acquisition EE should search for primary and secondary sources of information prior to initiating the writing process. The framing of a good research question, which is clear and focused, will aide students in establishing a reasoned argument and maintaining this throughout the essay.</p>
<b>The EE and other assessed components</b>	<p>The EE is not an extension of other assessed components and students must ensure that they are not using material submitted for any other assessment component as part of the EE submission—see the subject-specific guidance for more details.</p>