

## Choice of topic

The topic must:

- focus on the human past (at least 10 years ago)
- be worthy of study
- lend itself to systematic investigation in line with the published assessment criteria.

## Ten-year rule

Essays that focus on events of the past 10 years are not acceptable, as these are regarded as current affairs, not history. Any essay that does so will be compromised across several criteria.

It is not a requirement for the topic to be chosen from the Diploma Programme history course, but it must be acceptable to the supervisor.

It should provide an opportunity for critical analysis of source material, and not depend on summarizing general secondary sources (such as textbooks and encyclopedias). Such an approach is likely to produce an essay that is essentially narrative or descriptive.

The topic chosen must be suitable for effective treatment within the 4,000-word limit. Essays that cover many aspects of history, or a long time period, are unlikely to prove successful.

Narrowing the scope of the essay:

- is a crucial step in helping to ensure that the essay has a clear focus
- allows students to demonstrate detailed and specific historical knowledge, understanding and critical analysis.

## Examples of topics

These examples are for guidance only. Students must ensure their choice of topic is focused (left-hand column) rather than broad (right-hand column).

(The essay does not need a title in addition to its research question. It is usually better if they are the same because it helps the student to obtain a clear focus.)

| ✓<br>Focused topics   | ✗<br>Broad topics  |
|---|--|
| An examination of the economic reasons that led to the overthrow of the Tokugawa Shogunate in Japan                             | The overthrow of the Tokugawa Shogunate in Japan         |
| An evaluation of the success of denazification carried out in the US zone of Germany 1945–48                                    | Denazification in Germany after the Second World War     |
| An examination of the extent to which the Holodomor in the Ukraine 1932–33 was a failure of Stalin's policy of collectivization | The introduction of collectivization in the Soviet Union |
| An examination of the extent to which the overthrow of Allende in 1973 was the result of external factors                       | The coup against Allende 1973                            |

One way to help students narrow down their topic is to encourage them to think about the key concepts in the Diploma Programme history course:

- causation
- consequence
- change
- continuity
- significance
- perspectives.

Causation and consequence are the most common focus of history EEs. Thinking about **all** the key concepts can give students ideas beyond these.