

Treatment of the topic

Disciplinary focus

Some topics can also be approached from the perspective of other subjects, such as economics or geography. Social history includes areas such as music and sport.

Students must ensure their treatment of the topic meets the subject requirements of history.

- While social history does include areas such as music and sport, these are only acceptable for a history extended essay if they are tackled from a historical perspective.

Suitable research questions need to lead to:

- systematic investigation
- critical analysis
- detailed understanding.

Adequate available sources are essential. If it is clear at an early stage in the research that they are not, then students should change focus. If necessary, the supervisor should advise them to do so.

Sources

Students who use both primary and secondary sources for their research will find it easier to achieve the highest marks.

If a student chooses to use secondary sources only they will need to take particular care to address the assessment criteria.

Possible approaches to the research question include:

- using primary and secondary sources in order to establish and appraise varying interpretations
- analysing sources in order to explain changing views over time of particular happenings or developments
- using source material for a case study or local history project, perhaps leading to a comparison of local and national developments
- collecting and analysing oral and written data from family and other contacts to help explain past happenings, perhaps leading to a comparison of local and national developments
- using all available sources to answer the question posed.

Examples of topics, research questions and approaches

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 have all been chosen by past students and are included here for guidance only.

Topic	The origins of the Cold War in Europe 1945–48
Research question	How far was the Christian Democrat victory in the Italian elections of 1948 influenced by Cold War tensions?
Approach	Reading is undertaken to fully understand the context and the importance of this election as the first in post-war republican Italy. More detailed research may be carried out to determine the methods used by the Italian Communist Party and the Christian Democrats to rally their supporters and also any role played by the USSR and the US in influencing the outcome. Both primary and secondary sources would be accessible and should be used. An examination, and evaluation, of different interpretations would be carried out as well as consideration of domestic factors to be weighed against the influence of the Cold War, allowing a conclusion to be reached.

Topic	The decline of the Ottoman Empire
Research question	To what extent was poor leadership the reason for the defeat of the Ottoman armies at the gates of Vienna in 1683?
Approach	Reading is undertaken to become familiar with the context of the topic, in particular to understand the nature of the Ottoman Empire and its weaknesses by the end of the 17th century in order to determine how these may have contributed to its defeat. Also to read sources on the decline in leadership after the death of Suleiman the Magnificent, over a century earlier. The growing unity among the Christian powers in Europe and its contribution to their victory in 1683 will also be examined. Both primary and secondary sources as well as a variety of historical interpretations will be accessed to understand the Habsburg Empires at this time and the reasons why the siege was brought to an end. The merits of various interpretations regarding the factors that led to the defeat of the Ottomans as well as the success of the Christian league can be examined and both primary and secondary sources will be used to allow a judgment to be made.

Topic	The 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago
Research question	“I have done my best. I have lost, Mr. Nixon has won.” (Hubert Humphrey) To what extent did Hubert Humphrey lose the 1968 presidential election because of the Chicago Convention?
Approach	General reading is undertaken to aid familiarization with the events of 1968, a year marked by riots, protests and political assassinations. Both primary and secondary sources are used as well as different interpretations accessed to discover the reasons for the defeat of Humphrey, the Democratic presidential candidate. These are identified and assessed to allow a judgment to be made on the importance of the Convention as a factor that influenced the outcome of the election.

Topic	The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in post-apartheid South Africa
Research question	How far did the Truth and Reconciliation Commission achieve its twin aims of establishing the truth and achieving reconciliation by 2002?
Approach	Both primary and secondary resources that outline the Commission procedures and findings are used for background and note-taking. The criticisms of the Commission are also investigated to see how far they can be justified. The end point of 2002 (the year that the Commission came to an end) is included to provide a focus to the investigation and to narrow its scope sufficiently.

Critical analysis and evaluation

Students should not accept uncritically the value and reliability of sources, especially when the authenticity of some of the sources may be questionable.

Students should show awareness of the value and limitations of their main sources through analysing their origin, purpose and content:

- Who were the authors?
- What was the intended audience?
- What were the overt and covert reasons for the production of the source being evaluated?

They should integrate this evaluation into the main body of the essay and not adopt a “stand alone” approach of two sources.

Students can show good critical analysis and historical judgment through a sound assessment of source material and different explanations and interpretations.

Opportunities for reporting and assessing different interpretations will vary with the topic chosen. Students will gain credit for explaining why a historian formed an interpretation, not merely stating it.

The essay's argument

Students should aim to produce an argument that:

- consistently shows good historical understanding
- sets the research question into context
- addresses the research question fully and effectively
- is well substantiated, based on relevant specific evidence with added analytical comments.

An EE in history is a formal essay that is marked according to the assessment criteria. An essay will not score well if students are unaware of these criteria and make no attempt to address them in the work.

An important note on “double-dipping”

Students must ensure that their EE does not overlap significantly with any other work they are submitting for the Diploma Programme.

The history EE and IA

In particular, the EE is not an extension of the internal assessment (IA) for the subject. Students must ensure that they understand the differences between the two.

	EE	IA
Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more generic • requires students to reflect on the process of their own research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TOK-inspired • requires students to reflect on the particular problems and challenges faced by historians using the historical method
Purpose	an academic research paper on a historical event	focuses on historical method

Topic: Students may choose to write their EE and the IA on the same time period or on a similar topic.

Sources: These must be sufficiently different to show clearly that the student has accessed a broad range of both primary and secondary material. In other words, the IA and EE must not replicate sources. If some of the same sources are used, other different sources must also be used for each of the tasks.

Supervisors play an important role here in guiding students on these distinctions. Students risk their diploma if academic misconduct is found.