

**Writing an IB Extended Essay:**

**A Guide for ISG Students**

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# OVERVIEW

All of the following is taken from the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme Extended essay guide: First examinations 2013, copyright of the IBO:

The extended essay is an in-depth study of a focused topic chosen from the list of approved Diploma Programme subjects—normally one of the student’s six chosen subjects for the IB diploma. It is intended to promote high-level research and writing skills, intellectual discovery and creativity. It provides students with an opportunity to engage in personal research in a topic of their own choice, under the guidance of a supervisor (a teacher in the school). This leads to a major piece of formally presented, structured writing, in which ideas and findings are communicated in a reasoned and coherent manner, appropriate to the subject chosen. It is recommended that completion of the written essay is followed by a short, concluding interview, or viva voce, with the supervisor.

The extended essay is assessed against common criteria, interpreted in ways appropriate to each subject.

The extended essay is:

* compulsory for all Diploma Programme students
* externally assessed and, in combination with the grade for theory of knowledge, contributes up to three points to the total score for the IB diploma
* a piece of independent research/investigation on a topic chosen by the student in cooperation with a supervisor in the school
* chosen from the list of approved Diploma Programme subjects, published in the Handbook of procedures for the Diploma Programme
* presented as a formal piece of scholarship containing no more than 4,000 words
* the result of approximately 40 hours of work by the student
* concluded with a short interview, or viva voce, with the supervising teacher (recommended).

# EXTENDED ESSAY REQUIRED ELEMENTS

The following is taken from the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme Extended essay guide: First examinations 2013, copyright of the IBO:

The required elements of the final work to be submitted are listed here. More details about each element are given in the “Formal presentation of the extended essay” section. Please note that the order in which they are presented here is not necessarily the order in which they should be written.

* Title page
* Abstract
* Contents page
* Introduction
* Body (development/methods/results)
* Conclusion
* References and bibliography
* Appendices

# FORMAL PRESENTATION

All of the following is taken from the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme Extended essay guide: First examinations 2013, copyright of the IBO:

**The length of the extended essay**

The upper limit is 4,000 words for all extended essays. This upper limit includes the introduction, the body, the conclusion and any quotations, but does **not** include:

* the abstract
* acknowledgments
* the contents page
* maps, charts, diagrams, annotated illustrations and tables
* equations, formulas and calculations
* citations/references (whether parenthetical or numbered)
* footnotes or endnotes
* the bibliography
* appendices.

Essays containing more than 4,000 words are subject to penalties and examiners are not required to read material in excess of the word limit.

**Title**

The title should provide a clear indication of the focus of the essay. It should be precise and not necessarily phrased in the form of a question.

**Abstract**

An abstract not exceeding 300 words must be included with the essay submitted. It does not serve as an introduction, but presents an overview of the extended essay, and should, therefore, be written last.

The inclusion of an abstract is intended to encourage students to examine closely the development of an argument within the extended essay and the pertinence of any conclusions that are reached. It is also designed to allow readers to understand quickly the contents of the extended essay.

The minimum requirements for the abstract are for it to state clearly:

* the research question being investigated
* the scope of the investigation
* the conclusion(s) of the extended essay.

The abstract should be typed or word processed on one side of a sheet of paper, and placed immediately after the title page.

**Contents page**

A contents page must be provided at the beginning of the extended essay and all pages should be numbered. An index is not required.

**Illustrations**

Presentation and overall neatness are important, and it is essential that illustrative material, if included, is well set out and used effectively. Graphs, diagrams, tables and maps are effective only if they are clearly labelled and can be interpreted with ease. All such material that is incorporated into the extended essay must be directly related to the text and acknowledged where appropriate. The use of photographs and other images is acceptable only if they are captioned and/or annotated and are used to illustrate a specific point made in the extended essay.

**Bibliographies, references and citations**

An extended essay must reflect intellectual honesty in research practices and provide the reader with the **exact** sources of quotations, ideas and points of view through accurate bibliographies and referencing. Producing accurate citations, referencing and a bibliography is a skill that students should be seeking to perfect. Documenting the research in this way is vital: it allows readers to evaluate the evidence for themselves and it shows the student’s understanding of the importance of the sources used.

**Failure to comply with this requirement will be viewed as plagiarism and will, therefore, be treated as a case of malpractice.**

**Appendices, footnotes and endnotes**

Appendices, footnotes and endnotes are not an essential section of the extended essay and examiners are not required to read them, so care should be taken to include all information of direct relevance to the analysis and argument in the main body of the essay. An essay that attempts to evade the word limit by including important material in notes or appendices risks losing marks under several criteria.

Unless considered essential, complete lists of raw data should not be included in the extended essay.

Students should not constantly refer to material presented in an appendix as this may disrupt the continuity of the essay.

# MLA FORMAT

At ISG, we format all formal pieces of writing, including the IB Extended Essay, according to MLA guidelines. Students should seek advice from their EE Supervisors regarding MLA format.

# RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SCHOOL

All of the following is taken from the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme Extended essay guide: First examinations 2013, copyright of the IBO:

It is **required** that the school:

* ensures that extended essays conform to the regulations outlined in this guide
* ensures that students determine the subject for their extended essay from the approved extended essay list (in the Handbook of procedures for the Diploma Programme) before choosing the topic
* ensures that each student has an appropriately qualified supervisor, who is a teacher within the school
* provides supervisors and students with the general and subject-specific information, and guidelines for the extended essay, contained in this guide
* provides supervisors with recent extended essay subject reports
* ensures that supervisors are familiar with the IB document Academic honesty
* explains to students the importance of the extended essay in the overall context of the Diploma Programme
* explains to students that they will be expected to spend approximately 40 hours on their extended essay.

It is **strongly recommended** that the school:

* sets internal deadlines for the stages of producing the extended essay, including provision for a concluding interview (viva voce)
* ensures that students have been taught the necessary research skills
* provides appropriate training for supervisors.

# RESPONSIBILITIES OF EE SUPERVISORS

All of the following is taken from the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme Extended essay guide: First examinations 2013, copyright of the IBO:

It is **required** that the supervisor:

* provides the student with advice and guidance in the skills of undertaking research
* encourages and supports the student throughout the research and writing of the extended essay
* discusses the choice of topic with the student and, in particular, helps to formulate a well-focused research question
* ensures that the chosen research question satisfies appropriate legal and ethical standards with regard to health and safety, confidentiality, human rights, animal welfare and environmental issues
* is familiar with the regulations governing the extended essay and the assessment criteria, and gives copies of these to the student
* monitors the progress of the extended essay to offer guidance and to ensure that the essay is the student’s own work (this may include presenting a section of the essay for supervisor comment)
* reads and comments on one completed draft only of the extended essay (but does **not** edit the draft)
* reads the final version to confirm its authenticity
* submits a predicted grade for the student’s extended essay to IB Cardiff
* completes the supervisor’s report (if the extended essay cover is not signed by both the student and the supervisor, the essay will not be accepted for assessment and may be returned to the school)
* provides an explanation in the report in cases where the number of hours spent with the student in discussing the extended essay is zero; in particular, it is necessary to describe how it has been possible to guarantee the authenticity of the essay in such circumstances
* writes a report and presents it to the school’s Diploma Programme coordinator if malpractice, such as plagiarism, is suspected in the final draft.

It is **strongly recommended** that the supervisor:

* reads recent extended essay reports for the subject
* spends between three and five hours with each student, including the time spent on the viva voce
* ensures that the chosen research question is appropriate for the subject
* advises students on:
  + access to appropriate resources (such as people, a library, a laboratory)
  + techniques of information-/evidence-/data-gathering and analysis
  + writing an abstract
  + documenting sources
* conducts a short, concluding interview (viva voce) with the student before completing the supervisor’s report.

The student may work with or consult external sources, but it remains the responsibility of the supervisor within the school to complete all the requirements described above.

# THE VIVA VOCE

All of the following is taken from the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme Extended essay guide: First examinations 2013, copyright of the IBO:

The *viva voce* is a short interview between the student and the supervisor, and is a recommended conclusion to the extended essay process. Students who do not attend the *viva voce* may be disadvantaged.

The *viva voce* serves the following purposes.

* A check on plagiarism and malpractice in general
* An opportunity to reflect on successes and difficulties in the research process
* An opportunity to reflect on what has been learned
* An aid to the supervisor’s report

The *viva voce* should last between 10 and 15 minutes. This is included in the recommended amount of time the supervisor should spend with the student. The following are examples of questions that can be asked, which should be adapted to the particular essay and student.

“I am not clear what you mean on page XXX. You quote Y: could you explain a little more about what this tells us?”

* “On page \*\*\* you cite Z. I couldn’t find this reference (for example, website). Could you tell me more about it?”
* “What have been the high and low points of the research and writing processes?”
* “What were the most interesting aspects of the process? Did you discover anything that surprised you?”
* “What have you learned through writing this essay? Is there any advice you would want to pass on to someone just starting out on an extended essay?”
* “Is there anything else that you would particularly like me to mention in my report?”

In conducting the *viva voce* and writing the report, supervisors should bear in mind the following.

* Examiners want to know that students understand any material (which must be properly referenced) that they have included in their essays. This is particularly important in subjects like mathematics. If the way the material is used in context in the essay does not clearly establish this, the supervisor can check the student’s understanding in the viva voce and report on it.
* Minor slips in citation and referencing may lose the odd mark. If there appear to be major shortcomings, the supervisor should investigate thoroughly. No essay should be authenticated if the supervisor believes it contains plagiarism.
* In assessing criterion K (holistic judgment), examiners will take into account any information given in the report about unusual intellectual inventiveness or persistence in the face of unexpected difficulties.
* The report should not attempt to do the examiner’s job. It should refer to things, largely process-related, that may not be obvious in the essay itself.
* Unless there are particular problems, the viva voce should end positively. Completion of a major piece of work such as the extended essay is something for students to feel good about.

# SUBJECT OVERVIEWS

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| --- |
| **Subject Overview – Group 1** |
| * Written in the language for which registered (target language) – best language – could be language A * 3 possible categories (2 literary-focused; 1 language-focused):   + Category 1—Studies of a literary work(s) originally written in the language in which the essay is presented   + Category 2—Studies of a literary work(s) originally written in the language of the essay compared with literary work(s) originally written in another language   + Category 3—Studies in language * For categories 1 and 2, may include works studied in class but ALSO wider reading – topics must be LITERARY in nature * For category 3, main focus is language and culture of language in which EE written (language in a cultural context; language and mass communication) |
| **Subject Overview – Group 2** |
| * Written in the language for which registered (target language) * Focused on matters related to the target culture * RESEARCH essay – the assessment criteria emphasize the importance of research skills rather than linguistic proficiency * Research skills more important that fluency in the language * Develop an argument and demonstrate critical analysis and personal judgment rather than just knowledge * Topics that are merely descriptive or narrative, or that only summarize secondary sources should be avoided. * 3 possible categories:   + Category 1—Language   + Category 2—Culture and society (**a**: essays of a sociocultural nature with an impact on the language or **b**: essays of a general cultural nature based on specific cultural artifacts)   + Category 3—Literature |
| **Subject Overview – Group 3** |
| * In-depth research in an area of personal interest * Local context / perspective valuable * Students should avoid “What if..?” questions and questions which will lead to too much biography or description of the social context. Analysis and evaluation are required. * Economics essays:   + Should not be historical. Should be based on economic information that is no more than 3 years old   + Apply economic theory to real-world situations – analyze and evaluate outcomes of research * History essays:   + Should focus on events older than past 10 years   + Opportunity for critical analysis of source material, not just a summary of general secondary sources   + Best to use a research question |
| **Subject Overview – Group 4** |
| * Must have a clear biological, chemical, or physics emphasis – not more closely related to another subject * Most EE’s will be experimental – students need to have a fairly straightforward experiment which they can conduct rigorously. You or someone else can be the supervising adult. They should avoid experiments for which the outcome is already well documented. Some topics are unsuitable for investigation because of ethical or safety issues. * Biology   + Topic in form of research question, followed by statement of intent outlining research approach   + Essay should incorporate biological theory and emphasis living organisms and life processes * Chemistry   + Essay should investigate a particular aspect of the materials of our environment   + Incorporates chemical principles and theory and emphasizes composition, characterization and transformation of substances, relating to the study of matter and the change it undergoes * Physics   + Topic of personal interest   + Research paper involving hypothesis / model, or a critical analysis that demonstrates argumentation, comparison, or the extraction of relevant information or data. |

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| **Subject Overview – Group 5** |
| * The extended essay may be written on any topic that has a mathematical focus – engineering, science, social sciences – and it need not be confined to the theory of mathematics itself. The approach and development of the question must be mathematical. * For ideas look in books about “100 greatest unsolved mathematical problems” * Avoid questions which are too trivial in terms of the mathematics |
| **Subject Overview – Group 6** |
| * Research an area of visual arts of particular interest to student * A coherent and structured piece of writing (with appropriate illustrations) that effectively addresses a particular issue or research question, appropriate to the visual arts (broadly defined also to include architecture, design and contemporary forms of visual culture). The research may be generated or inspired by the student’s direct experience of artwork, craftwork or design, or interest in the work of a particular artist, style or period. This might be related to the student’s own culture or another culture. Personal contact with artists, curators and so on is strongly encouraged, as is the use of local and/or primary sources. * Avoid just summarizing general secondary sources – avoid a topic that covers many areas and/or long time period * Biographical studies of artists must address a relevant issue or research question and arrive at a particular, and preferably personal, conclusion |

# ADVICE ON CHOOSING A RESEARCH QUESTION

Getting the exact research question right is one of the most important parts for both the Supervisor and the student. Some key points to remember are:

* Each EE will be registered with the IB under a subject heading (e.g. English A literature, Biology) and will be marked according to its subject specific content, using the assessment criteria.
* It must be manageable from the point of view of time and the 4,000 word limit. The main trap students fall into is making their research question too broad.
* It is best to avoid topics and questions too well-trodden as they restrict the student’s ability to come to personal judgments.
* The research question will often be presented in the form of a question. This can help students keep the EE focused and may make it easier to come to a conclusion based on a systematic investigation.
* The aim of the essay may also be presented as a statement or proposition for discussion.
* It must be appropriate to the subject in which the essay is submitted.
* It is best to avoid questions which lead to a more narrative and descriptive response. Marks are given for reasoned argument, analysis and evaluation. In particular, students should steer away from topics which are more biographical, unless it is a History EE which is going to lead to an evaluation of their historical significance.
* The IBO EE guide has a great deal of subject specific advice to guide you in choosing the research question.
* Even if the research question is built into the title itself in the form of a question, it must also be clearly stated in **introduction** of the essay and in the **abstract**.

# RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE STUDENT

All of the following is taken from the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme Extended essay guide: First examinations 2013, copyright of the IBO:

It is **required** that students:

* choose a topic that fits into one of the subjects on the approved extended essay list (in the Vade Mecum)
* observe the regulations relating to the extended essay
* meet deadlines
* acknowledge all sources of information and ideas in an approved academic manner.

It is **strongly recommended** that students:

* start work early
* think very carefully about the research question for their essay
* plan how, when and where they will find material for their essay
* plan a schedule for both researching and writing the essay, including extra time for delays and unforeseen problems
* record sources as their research progresses (rather than trying to reconstruct a list at the end)
* have a clear structure for the essay itself before beginning to write
* check and proofread the final version carefully
* make sure that all basic requirements are met (for example, all students should get full marks for the abstract).

# POSSIBLE PITFALLS

There are some obstacles that have a tendency to derail the production of the Extended Essay. Please do everything in your power to avoid the following:

1. Not reading this booklet and being fully informed before you start.
2. Missing any one deadline.
3. Depending on one disk/flash drive only to save all your work.
4. Taking notes on note book paper and not using note cards.
5. Ignoring the words of advice from your advisor, stubbornly insisting that your way is THE ONE and ONLY way to do research.

# REQUIRED READING

1. Subject-specific guidelines from the Extended essay guide (first exams 2013)  
   *Request a copy from your EE supervisor.*
2. MLA writing guidelines: [*www.mla.org*](http://www.mla.org)
3. “IB animal experimentation policy”  
   *Request a copy from your EE supervisor if you are writing an EE in a group 4 subject.*
4. All other documents listed in the appendices are required reading.

# RECOMMENDED READING

1. IB Prepared – Approach your assessment the IB way – Extended Essay
2. Extended Essay exemplars  
   *Request a copy from your EE supervisor.*

# APPENDICES

Please refer to the following documents:

1. Extended Essay – Objectives and Criteria
2. Extended Essay – Research Process
3. Extended Essay – ISG contract – May 2017 candidates
4. Extended Essay – ISG deadlines – May 2017 candidates
5. Extended Essay – Research Proposal Form
6. Effective citing and referencing – Documentation checklist
7. Effective citing and referencing – Elements to be included in the reference
8. MLA Checklist
9. Academic Honesty in the Diploma Programme
10. Are you completing your IB assignments honestly?
11. Extended Essay – Ethical guidelines for extended essays research and fieldwork (May and November 2013 examination sessions onwards)
12. Extended Essay – Interim Reflection
13. Extended Essay – Final Reflection