

History: Subject-specific guidance

See also: EE generic guide and EE teacher support material

Overview

The EE gives students an opportunity to undertake in-depth research in an area of interest to them, of local, regional or global significance.

The outcome of the research should be a coherent and structured essay that effectively addresses a particular issue expressed as a research question.

The question should encourage an investigation that lends itself to analysis and critical commentary. Students should avoid straightforward “What” and “How” questions as they tend to lead to narrative treatment. Terms such as “How significant...?” or “How successful...?” are more likely to engage students in analysis.

“To what extent...?” requires an analytical answer, but if students choose this or a similar term, they need to ensure that their task does also require them to consider other factors to answer the question.

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).

✓ Focused topics	✗ 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.

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.

Interpreting the EE assessment criteria

Criterion A: Focus and method

(Strands: Topic, Research question, Methodology)

Students must choose a topic from the human past that is of a meaningful nature. Topics may not discuss events/individuals/movements which have taken place within 10 years of the writing of the essay. For example, an essay submitted for assessment in 2018 must discuss events prior to 2008. Failure to follow this instruction will limit the grade in this criterion to a maximum of 4.

The topic chosen must be expressed in the form of a research question. The research question must be focused and capable of being discussed effectively within the word limit. Students must establish the historical context and significance of the topic and explain why it is worthy of investigation.

Students must demonstrate that they have selected a suitable range of appropriate and relevant sources. An attempt should be made to use both primary and secondary sources where possible. They should demonstrate both factual material as well as the opinions of historians. These sources must provide sufficient material to develop and support an argument and conclusion relevant to the research question.

Effective planning and a well-focused research question tend to go together. A key indicator of this is that students have chosen a comprehensive range of sources that are relevant and appropriate to answering the research question.

Ten-year rule

If the ten-year rule has not been adhered to, a maximum of only 4 marks can be awarded in this criterion.

If the topic or research question is deemed inappropriate for the subject in which the essay is registered, no more than four marks can be awarded for this criterion. This applies to history essays that breach the 10-year rule.

Criterion B: Knowledge and understanding

(Strands: Context, Subject-specific terminology and concepts)

The essay must show that the student understands the place of the research question in a broader historical context; for example, the Marshall Plan with respect to the origins of the Cold War. In other words, if the focus of the essay is the Marshall Plan, students must demonstrate how this focus is relevant to an understanding of the origins of the Cold War.

The student must demonstrate that they understand and can use accurately historical terms and concepts relevant to the research topic.

Where it is deemed useful to clarify meaning or context, students may provide further explanation or definition of selected terms or concepts.

Ten-year rule

If the ten-year rule has not been adhered to, a maximum of only 4 marks can be awarded in this criterion.

If the topic or research question is deemed inappropriate for the subject in which the essay is registered, no more than four marks can be awarded for this criterion. This applies to history essays that breach the 10-year rule.

Criterion C: Critical thinking

(Strands: Research, Analysis and Discussion and evaluation)

In a history essay, “research” refers to a critical engagement with the past through relevant sources. Students must be able to construct, present and support effectively a specific argument or position that provides their response to the research question.

This argument must be supported and developed by an analysis or consideration of the value and limitations of the research material.

Additionally, students must demonstrate that the knowledge gained from their selected sources can then be analysed and, on the basis of this analysis, form an argument and reach a conclusion(s) to the research

Throughout the essay students must present ideas or concepts that relate consistently to the analysis of the research question. The inclusion of ideas or concepts that are not relevant will detract from the value of the analysis and limit the student’s ability to score well on this criterion.

The points contained in the argument and analysis must, at all times, be supported by specific, relevant material chosen from the student’s research.

Students should not present essays that are wholly or largely narrative or descriptive in nature. These do not provide any evidence of analytical skills and will not score well.

In history, the development of a reasoned argument based on the analysis of historical sources may start with a student stating their position in relation to the question posed. This position must then be supported by evidence and developed into a reasoned argument, which culminates in conclusion(s) being given.

A conclusion summarizes the student’s response to the research question. This conclusion must be consistent with the position and evidence presented in the essay. The conclusion may not include material that has not been discussed in the body of the essay.

However, questions that have arisen as a result of the research and may be suitable for further study may be included in the conclusion.

An evaluation of the relative value and limitations of the sources is an integral part of the analysis of the evidence and the development of a reasoned argument. This evaluation should be integrated into the text rather than contained in a separate section of the essay. It will then provide useful information or insight relative to the source or historian’s opinion that the student is referring to in support of their argument.

Ten-year rule

If the 10-year rule has not been adhered to, a maximum of only 3 marks can be awarded in this criterion.

If the topic or research question is deemed inappropriate for the subject in which the essay is registered, no more than three marks can be awarded for this criterion. This applies to history essays that breach the 10-year rule.

Criterion D: Presentation

(Strands: Structure, Layout)

This criterion relates to the extent to which the essay conforms to accepted academic standards in relation to how research papers should be presented. It also relates to how well these elements support the reading, understanding and evaluation of the essay.

Students may provide a section and subsection structure to their essays, with informative headings. Subheadings should not distract from the overall structure of the essay or argument presented.

Use of charts, images and tables

Charts, tables and images may appear in the body of the essay only if they illustrate or clarify the argument at that particular point. The inclusion of non-relevant or superfluous material will not be rewarded and may actually detract from the argument.

Any tables should enhance a written explanation and should not themselves include significant bodies of text. If they do, then these words must be included in the word count. Students must take care in their use of appendices as examiners are not required to read them. All information with direct relevance to the analysis, discussion and evaluation of the essay must be contained in the main body of the essay. All charts, images and tables must be properly referenced with respect to their origin or source.

A bibliography is an essential structural element, contributing as far as it is visually presented, to criterion D, in addition to the other presentation requirements: title page, table of contents, page numbers, and so on.

While there is no explicit penalty in criterion D for exceeding 4,000 words, students should be aware that examiners will not read beyond the 4,000-word limit, therefore affecting the application of multiple criteria. Criterion D specifically may be impacted if, in exceeding 4,000 words, one of the structural requirements of the essay (for example, the conclusion, or important illustrative material) is unassessed by the examiner because he or she is not required to read beyond 4,000 words.

Any material that is not original must be carefully acknowledged, with specific attention paid to the acknowledgement and referencing of quotes and ideas. This acknowledgment and referencing is applicable to audiovisual material, text, graphs and data published in print and electronic sources. If the referencing does not meet the minimum standard as indicated in the guide (name of author, date of publication, title of source and page numbers, as applicable), and is not consistently applied, work will be considered as a case of possible academic misconduct. Incomplete references and those that do not meet the minimum requirements as detailed in the *Effective citing and referencing* document are not penalized

in criterion D, but examiners are required to alert the IB to candidates who overlook these minimum requirements, for further investigation. Criterion D assesses references and bibliography purely on how they are presented (for example, consistent, laid out in an appropriate academic manner).

Criterion E: Engagement

(Strands: Process, Research focus)

This criterion assesses the student's engagement with their research focus and the research process.

It will be applied by the examiner at the end of the assessment of the essay, and is based solely on the candidate's reflections as detailed on the [RPPF](#), with the supervisory comments and extended essay itself as context.

Students are expected to provide reflections on the decision-making and planning process undertaken in completing the essay. Students must demonstrate how they arrived at a topic as well as the methods and approach used. This criterion assesses the extent to which a student has evidenced the rationale for decisions made throughout the planning process and the skills and understandings developed.

For example, students may reflect on:

- the approach and strategies they chose, and their relative success
- the [Approaches to learning](#) skills they have developed and their effect on the student as a learner
- how their conceptual understandings have developed or changed as a result of their research
- challenges they faced in their research and how they overcame these
- questions that emerged as a result of their research
- what they would do differently if they were to undertake the research again.

Effective reflection highlights the journey the student has engaged in through the EE process. Students must show evidence of critical and reflective thinking that goes beyond simply describing the procedures that have been followed.

The reflections must provide the examiner with an insight into **student** thinking, creativity and originality within the research process. The **student** voice must be clearly present and demonstrate the learning that has taken place.