

Literature and performance: Subject-specific guidance

See also: EE generic guide and EE Teacher Support Materials

Overview

A literature and performance extended essay (EE) gives students an opportunity to explore in detail the relationship between a written text and its performance. Students are able to focus on the transformation from one form to another and examine the creative and critical relationship that exists between both.

The adaptation may take many forms: theatre, film, dance, opera and even video games.

Although an EE in this subject may involve an element of creativity, analysis and reasoned argument are fundamental to success.

Choice of topic

A literature and performance essay must include:

- a balanced consideration of the written text and the performance
- an exploration of the ways they function in a creative and critical relationship with one another.

Students should provide those materials that give a good account of both the text and its transformation into any of the genres mentioned in “Overview” above. These materials may include, for example, diagrams and photographs, but students should be aware that the heart of the essay is their written discussion of both forms.

Crucially, the topic should be susceptible to critical analysis. The EE’s central purpose is one of research and analysis. Students must present their perceptions in a reasoned argument well supported by evidence.

Students should make clear the temporal and spatial contexts of both elements: text and transformed production. This will involve a consideration as far as is necessary of the work’s:

- history—both literary and theatrical
- geography
- linguistic circumstances
- ethnic circumstances
- socio-economic circumstances.

While formal elements are likely to be in the foreground, they must not be treated in isolation.

Finally, the essay should indicate, explicitly or implicitly, the appropriate theoretical understanding or awareness of the chosen genres, and should employ terminology appropriate to the form where relevant.

Examples of topics

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

✓ Focused topics	✗ Broad topics
A study of the evolution of identity in a theatrical adaptation of <i>The Color Purple</i>	Identity in <i>The Color Purple</i>
The way narrative motifs in <i>The Berlin Stories</i> present themselves theatrically in the musical <i>Cabaret</i>	Narrative motifs in the musical <i>Cabaret</i>
A study of the portrayal of Christopher Boone in the stage adaptation of <i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time</i> in comparison with the original literary characterization	A study of Christopher in <i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time</i>

Treatment of the topic

The focus of the EE must be on the research and critique of an existing adaptation. Students are not permitted to adapt a text themselves.

The student will first need to identify a situation where a text has been adapted to some form of performance, whether this be theatre, film, opera, dance, music or other contemporary forms of transformation.

The text

The text must be fully available to the student and referenced as such. It must be of sufficient depth and complexity to enable the student to apply critical thinking skills.

Genres for the text may range widely, with poetry, fiction and non-fiction as the most likely starting point. Appropriate literary works may be chosen from any source including the Diploma Programme prescribed list of authors.

Forms such as flash fiction, fan fiction, interactive digital texts and the like may also be viable. Their suitability to this research task must be explored by the student in order to fully satisfy the criteria of the EE. The student should do this in consultation with their supervisor.

Students may choose to use two or more texts, but should always aim for depth rather than breadth.

The adaptation for performance

There needs to be some form of adaptation that can be identified as having its roots in a particular text or even a set of short texts. Such adaptations may take many forms.

Students need to work with both the primary text and the adaptation. They will explore the decisions that have been made for the performance, both generally and in the specific details. The process and the outcomes will form the basis of the student's research question to be explored in the essay.

The focus of discussion in the essay must be:

- critical analysis of both artistic forms—text and performance
- the process of transformation from one to the other, and
- the effects of this transformation.

A narrative approach—retelling the content and sequence of either form—will not meet the demands of the essay.

The student is permitted to include visual material to convey the nature of the transformation, insofar as it is needed to support the argument. All visual material should be clearly annotated to explain its relevance.

Secondary sources, both print and digital, relating to both text and performance, will have a “secondary” role, as the focus of the discussion must be the student’s own exploration and evaluation of the two elements. The purpose of the research undertaken is for students to deliver a critical argument based on their perceptions of the transformation and how meaning and experience are shaped by establishing a relationship between the two forms.

Examples of topics, research questions and suggested 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.

Topic	Jerome Robbins’ choreography of <i>West Side Story</i> and William Shakespeare’s <i>Romeo and Juliet</i>
Research question	The question could be phrased as: “How does the Jerome Robbins choreography of <i>West Side Story</i> transform the original meaning and effect of Shakespeare’s <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> ?”
Approach	The student will need to identify some central aspects of Shakespeare’s play and point out their presence in <i>West Side Story</i> . Then the choreography will need to be closely examined to discern and evaluate how dance has been used to transform and heighten the meanings and emotional effects of the original play. Presumably the student will possess the appropriate vocabulary for discussing choreography.

Topic	Benjamin’s Britten’s transformation of <i>The Turn of the Screw</i> into an opera
Research question	What elements of the original James story has Britten successfully delivered in the operatic version?
Approach	The student will need to select some elements of the original story that Britten has chosen as his focus, analyse how the opera has presented these, and with what degree of success, judged in terms of such elements as suspense and atmosphere.

Topic	Costuming in Flaubert’s portrayal of Emma in <i>Madame Bovary</i>
Research question	How is Flaubert’s portrayal of Emma in <i>Madame Bovary</i> delivered and affected by the costuming in the film version by Claude Chabrol (1991) or that of Vincente Minnelli (2014)?
Approach	The question asks the student to look carefully first at Emma in the novel and how the details of her dress contribute to her overall portrayal in tandem with her actions, words and gestures. Then, choosing a film, the student will need to cite particular instances of costuming, critiquing

	the comparative outcomes as they are viewed by modern audiences. Presumably, some evaluative comments might well ensue from this study.
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Topic	Sherlock Holmes and Watson as they are depicted in the current television production of <i>Elementary</i>
Research question	How have the changes in Watson in the television production <i>Elementary</i> affected the portrayal of both Holmes and Watson?
Approach	The student will need to consider Conan Doyle’s delivery of the relationship between Holmes and Watson, exploring some of the critical work that has been written on this aspect of the fiction. The treatment of <i>Elementary</i> will then need to analyse the quality of this new dynamic, critiquing how it affects the partnership.

An important note on “double-dipping”

Students must ensure that their EE does not duplicate other work they are submitting for the Diploma Programme. For example, the same work cannot be used for the EE that has formed the basis of the written coursework on major playwrights in performance.

The literature and performance EE and other assessment components

An EE in literature and performance is not an extension of any other assessment task for the subject. Students must ensure that they understand the clear distinction between these assessment tasks and the EE.

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

Interpreting the EE assessment criteria

Criterion A: Focus and method

(Strands: Topic, Research question, Methodology)

Students embarking on a research question for literature and performance should be aware that this is an interdisciplinary course. The research question and angle of investigation must involve the relationship between a written text and its adaptation into a performative piece. The adaptation may take many forms: theatre, film, dance, opera and even video games.

Students are expected to explore a question about the nature of the original text and the ways in which it is remediated as performance. The essay should present a clear argument based on the student's view of the transformative process. The angle of analysis should be made clear from the outset of the EE and subsequent development should stay within this critical frame.

Students should not take on too wide or complex an enterprise, such as two very different transformations of a text. The text itself needs to receive ample critical attention so that the analysis of the performative aspect is well grounded.

Criterion B: Knowledge and understanding

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

Context needs to be a part of the investigation, both that of the original text and of the adaptation.

Students will need to carry out background research to ensure that their analysis of text and adaptation is located in time and place.

Students need to display a solid grasp of the text as well as the choices made in the process of adaptation and their outcome. The last element, the effect, is often the best cue as to the student's knowledge and understanding of the materials involved in the transformation.

Students must demonstrate an understanding and knowledge of both literature and performance. They should also address some of the theoretical models governing the adaptation.

Students should use terminology appropriate to both modes of delivery throughout the essay.

Criterion C: Critical thinking

(Strands: Research, Analysis and Discussion and evaluation)

Students should make the angle of analysis clear from the outset of the EE and subsequent development should stay within this critical frame. One measure of success in critical thinking will be the actual choice of the two forms: first the text, and then the adaptation that is paired with it. The student will need to display some initiative in these choices, as well as provide a critical examination that validates them.

The student will need to be well grounded in a careful reading and viewing. They should be ready to give a good account of the text itself with analysis appropriate to its genre. They must also bring some skills in terminology and analysis to the adaptation, addressing its conventions and its delivery.

Students should use critical perspectives and secondary source materials judiciously. They must take care in selecting and using these, so that they do not overshadow their own critical insights.

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.

Generally, the essay should be presented as a continuous text. However, given the EE's interdisciplinary nature and dual focus (the text and the transformation of the text) students may opt to give it a sections and subsections structure, with informative subheadings, if this seems appropriate. The subheadings should not distract from the overall structure of the essay or argument presented.

Any charts, images or tables from literature sources included in the EE must be carefully selected and labelled. They should only be used if they:

- are directly relevant to the research question
- contribute towards the understanding of the argument
- are of a good graphic quality.

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 EE must be contained in the main body of the essay.

Any material that is not original must be carefully acknowledged, with specific attention paid to the acknowledgment 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.

A bibliography is essential and has to be presented in a standard format. Title page, table of contents, page numbers, etc must contribute to the quality of presentation.

The essay must not exceed 4,000 words of narrative. Other visual materials are not included in the word count. Students should be aware that examiners will not read beyond the 4,000-word limit, nor assess any material presented thereafter.

Criterion E: Engagement

(Strands: Reflections on planning and progress)

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, after considering the student's *Reflections on planning and progress Form* (RPPF).

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
- setbacks 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.