

Language acquisition: Subject-specific guidance

See also: EE generic guide and EE Teacher Support Materials.

Overview

An extended essay (EE) in language acquisition gives students an opportunity to:

- develop their awareness and knowledge of the target language they are studying
- demonstrate their understanding of the culture associated with their target language.

The essay requires students to carry out research based on:

- texts (taken to be any meaningful piece of spoken or written language, eg an article, a book, a play, a poem), or
- specific cultural artifacts, eg works of fine art, architecture, films, radio or television programmes, or lyrics from popular music.

The essay is intended for students who are studying a second modern language. It must be written in the language for which it is registered (the target language) and focus on matters related to the target culture.

Students may **not** write a language acquisition EE in a language that they are studying for their Diploma Programme as language A literature, or language A studies in language and literature.

Students are assessed on the basis of their skills in research and analysis, not their language proficiency.

Language acquisition EEs are divided into three categories:

Category 1	A specific analysis of the language (its use and structure), normally related to its cultural context or a specific text.
Category 2	A socio-cultural analysis of the impact of a particular issue on the form or use of the language: (a) based on an examination of language use (b) an essay of a general cultural nature based on specific cultural artifacts.
Category 3	An analysis of a literary type, based on a specific work or works of literature exclusively from the target language.

Cultural artifacts

For 2(b), “cultural artifacts” include anything concrete or tangible that helps to give insight into the target culture and language, such as:

- **Written documents:** newspapers, magazines, news headlines, articles, books (other than literary), cartoons, adverts, leaflets, brochures or manifestos, laws or policies, historical documents or records.
- **Spoken documents:** screenplays, radio or television programmes, song lyrics, interviews.
- **Visual documents:** works of fine art, architecture (buildings, monuments, etc), films, stamps.
- **Cultural icons:** fashion items and accessories (as a manifestation of culture), food items, dishes (as a manifestation of culture), brands (as a manifestation of culture).

The following do not qualify as cultural artifacts: political events (elections, referendums), historical events, social movements (eg riots), social issues (unemployment, immigration, racism, school violence, the role of women in country X, etc), towns or regions (“travel guide” essays), (minority) ethnic groups, media trends, styles of music, sports, traditions, institutions (school systems, political parties, etc).

Students must write their essay’s category on the essay cover sheet, alongside the subject in which it is registered, eg English B Cat: 2 (b); German B Cat: 3.

Students undertaking the language acquisition EE must have sufficient proficiency in the language to be able to address the assessment criteria. However, superior fluency is neither a prerequisite nor a guarantee of success. The EE requires students to demonstrate skills in research rather than language.

Students who are fluent in the language but who do not demonstrate research skills will score lower than students who are less fluent but fulfil the other assessment criteria.

Choice of topic

Students can pursue their interest in the language through research based on texts (spoken or written records of the language) or specific cultural artifacts, a requirement for the category 2(b) essay.

The essay should consist of the study of an issue in one of the three categories: language, culture and society or literature, or a combination of these.

Students must ensure that the materials they require for their choice of topic do not overlap significantly with any other work they are submitting for the Diploma Programme. For example, they must not use:

- a novel in its original form that they studied in translation for language A: literature.
- the same aspects of a film for coursework in film.

Students risk their diploma if academic misconduct is detected.

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 
An analysis of the way in which Swahili is adapting to accommodate the language of technology	A history of Swahili
What does rap music tell us about contemporary German culture? An analysis of the rap lyrics of Bushido and Sookee (alias Nora Hantzsch)	Rap music in Germany
How do we deal with death? An evaluation of the treatment of the theme of death in Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt's novella <i>Oscar et la Dame Rose</i>	An evaluation of Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt's novella <i>Oscar et la Dame Rose</i>

Treatment of the topic

The research and writing process

- Language acquisition EEs can require more planning than those written in a student's first language.
- Students should read and annotate secondary material written in the target language as this will help with vocabulary and expressions when they come to write the essay. Writing their annotations in the target language will also help.
- Students should draw up a section-by-section essay plan. They should then spend some time gathering:
 - the information they wish to include
 - the vocabulary and structures in the target language they require to convey this information.
- Students should seek guidance from their EE supervisor and/or language teacher regarding the conventions for academic writing that are particular to the target language.

Analysis of primary and secondary sources

Students should be engaged with the analysis of **primary** and **secondary** sources.

Primary sources

This refers to original texts and can be any occurrence of “communicative language”.

- literary—eg books, book chapters, novels, essays, poems, stories, plays
- media—eg interviews, discussions, newspaper headlines, articles
- general—eg historical documents, speeches, advertising, theatre, informal conversations.

Secondary sources

This refers to a scholarly work written about the student's primary source.

Secondary sources include books, journal articles, essays and reviews of the primary author's work. They may also include writing about the author's life, or the genre and techniques relevant to the student's primary source(s).

Culture

If their topic is of a general cultural nature, students should focus on what makes the topic specific to the region, country or countries concerned.

Students can make comparisons with another culture if this helps to answer the research question.

However, they must remain focused on the culture of their target language.

Use and analysis of texts

Students may choose to:

- analyse texts in a detailed literary fashion, or
- use literary texts as a means of exploring the target language or its culture and society.

Quantitative research methods

If students use questionnaires or present statistics, they must show that they:

- understand how the questions were constructed
- can explain the results.

The students must be able to analyse and interpret these results with direct reference to their topic. An example of any questionnaires or surveys used should be included as an appendix.

Photographs and illustrations

Students must label and explain any photographs and illustrations they include. They must also justify their use in relation to the topic.

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. These examples are just for guidance.

Category 1—language

The essay should be a specific analysis of the language (its use, structure and so on), normally related to its cultural context or a specific text.

Language	French
Topic	Idiomatic expressions: geographic influence on the French language
Research question	To what extent does geography influence the use of French idiomatic expressions?
Approach	An investigation into the use of idiomatic expressions in Francophone countries that reflect the local geography.

Language	Mandarin
Topic	The influence of information technology on Mandarin vocabulary
Research question	How has the common terminology of information technology been incorporated into everyday Mandarin?
Approach	A study of the use of foreign terms compared to native terms in information technology and how those terms have become accepted in standard Mandarin.

Language	Spanish
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Topic	Social differences: the use of the diminutive (-ito) form in Quito
Research question	To what extent is the extensive use of the diminutive -ito in Quito, Ecuador, a reflection of class and/or ethnic differences?
Approach	An investigation into the use of the diminutive form in daily conversations among local inhabitants of Quito, Ecuador.

Category 2—culture and society

2(a): Essays of a socio-cultural nature about the impact of a cultural change on language

The essay should consist of a cultural analysis of the impact of a particular issue on the form or use of the language.

Language	Arabic
Topic	The effects of globalization on language and social media in the Middle East
Research question	How has the globalization of social media like Twitter affected the increased usage of political language among students in two international schools in the Middle East?
Approach	An examination of the use of political concepts and terminology by international students in the Middle East through engagement in social media like Twitter.

Language	Japanese
Topic	The relationship between language and changes in society: the case of the Japanese family
Research question	Does Japanese need new words to describe non-traditional family relationships as society changes?
Approach	A commentary on how the use of the words “ <i>shujin</i> ” and “ <i>kanai</i> ” have changed, together with an examination of the social factors that may require new linguistic terms for family relationships to be created.

Language	Dutch
Topic	The language of discrimination in Dutch popular media
Research question	How do the various terms used to refer to foreigners and immigrants in popular media reflect various shades of discrimination in Dutch society?
Approach	A socio-linguistic investigation into the connotation of the various terms for immigrants

and other non-Dutch people used widely within Dutch society that reflect shades of discrimination towards particular racial or ethnic groups.

2(b): Essays of a general cultural nature based on specific cultural artifacts

The essay should be an analysis of a more general cultural nature but be specific to a country or community where the language is spoken. Topics that are too broad and could apply to many cultures (such as globalization, the death penalty or eating disorders) are inappropriate.

Essays of a general cultural nature must be based on specific cultural artifacts.

Language	Portuguese
Topic	Social tension in Brazil in the 1960s as depicted in the lyrics of selected popular protest songs performed by Zelia Barbosa
Research question	To what extent did songs of protest reflect the growing social tensions in Brazil under the military dictatorship in the 60s?
Approach	An investigation into the thematic content of Brazilian protest songs.

Language	Japanese
Topic	Women's traditional roles in Japan and the role the media plays in perpetuating them
Research question	To what extent are Japanese advertisers perpetuating traditional views of women's roles in Japanese society?
Approach	An analysis of the role of women in television adverts shown at peak family viewing times.

Language	English
Topic	Racial profiling and the perpetuation of stereotypes: a case study of the Arizona Senate Bill 1070
Research question	To what extent does Arizona Senate Bill 1070 and other similar legislation in Arizona reflect the state's targeting of specific minorities for "profiling", thus perpetuating common stereotypes?
Approach	An analysis of Arizona Senate Bill 1070 as a catalyst for racial profiling of Mexicans in Arizona.

Category 3—literature

The essay should be an analysis of a literary type, based on a specific work or works of literature exclusively from the target language. In the case of a comparison of texts, all texts must originally have been written in the target language.

Language	French
Topic	North African symbolism in <i>L'Étranger</i> by Albert Camus
Research question	How does Camus use sensory imagery in his novel <i>L'Étranger</i> ?
Approach	An analysis of the images of the setting and physical elements that reveal the emotional distance of Meursault.

Language	Japanese
Topic	Mystery and suspense: an examination of Akagawa's novel ##### (<i>Mikeneko Holmes</i>)
Research question	How does Jiro Akagawa create suspense in the detective novel##### (<i>Mikeneko Holmes</i>).
Approach	A commentary on the techniques used by the author to create suspense and thereby intensify the element of mystery in##### (<i>Mikeneko Holmes</i>).

Language	Spanish
Topic	The use of narrative voice in Mexican novels
Research question	How does Juan Rulfo effectively use both first and third person in his novel <i>Pedro Páramo</i> to merge the worlds of the living and the dead?
Approach	A textual analysis to reveal the narrative techniques used by the author to create the “magical” atmosphere of the novel.

Interpreting the EE assessment criteria

Criterion A: Focus and method

(Strands: Topic, Research question, Methodology)

The research topic is best defined in the form of a sharply focused question stated early in the essay and on the cover page. The purpose of the research investigation must be outlined in the introduction and should clearly fit one of the three required categories for language acquisition EEs. The methodology used, or the approach to the topic chosen, should also be addressed early in the essay. The student's personal experience or personal opinion is rarely relevant here.

For **category 1 (language) and category 2 (culture and society) essays**, the introduction must make clear how the chosen topic is specific or of special interest to the target culture and/or language. Overly broad topics on society, social movements or general media issues should be avoided.

For **category 3 (literature) essays**, the research question is an analysis of a literary type and all texts considered must be originally written in the target language. It is not necessary that the setting or subject matter be directly related to the culture. For example, *Romeo and Juliet* is set in Italy. It is, however, also possible to approach a category 3 essay considering the cultural context of the society for which it is written.

A clear and precisely stated research question, evidence of a well-informed logical treatment of the topic and an appropriate approach or method of study all contribute to constructing a well-planned essay.

Criterion B: Knowledge and understanding

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

Students must consult authentic reference materials, mainly, but not exclusively, written in the target language, depending on the category of essay being undertaken. Students need to demonstrate an ability to use appropriate material from their sources and references in order to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the topic within its cultural context. Students should strive to integrate primary and secondary material to inform the wider context and implications of the question. For all three essay categories, when considering the wider context, historical or biographical background need only be included if directly relevant to the research question. Students should strive to make relevant cultural connections where appropriate.

For **category 1 (language) and category 2 (culture and society) essays**, this knowledge must be based at least partially on primary sources. Primary sources can be chosen from, for example, specific cultural artifacts such as advertisements, song lyrics and legal documents, or from a variety of texts such as poems, graphic novels, and brochures or pamphlets.

For **category 3 literature-based essays**, all primary texts analysed must have originally been written in the target language. While secondary sources may help provide a framework, the quality of the student's understanding of the primary text(s) forms the main focus of the analysis.

The use of language must be appropriate to the topic and category chosen. For example, a category 3 essay should contain reasonable use of expected literary terminology in the analysis of the work(s).

Effective communication in language acquisition EEs includes reasonably correct use of vocabulary, sentence structure and grammar, as well as the selection of a register and style appropriate to the chosen topic. However, the mark awarded for criterion B is not a mark for grammatical accuracy. Whether a style is appropriate or not depends on common practice in the specific target language or culture. For example, it would be reasonable to expect more use of the passive voice in a German B extended essay than in a French B extended essay.

Criterion C: Critical thinking

(Strands: Research, Analysis and Discussion and evaluation)

Students should give their essays depth by developing an argument based on the research that results in relevant, meaningful conclusions that are consistent with the evidence presented. Personal views or assertions should not simply be stated, but need to be supported by evidence and reasoned argument. Critical thinking in this context will show knowledge and use of persuasive analysis and argument to support the interpretation or point of view expressed. Second-hand interpretations or viewpoints that are derived solely from secondary sources, or are purely descriptive or narrative in nature, will not be rewarded.

For **category 1 (language) and category 2 (culture and society) essays**, a mere compilation of facts, a description of events or a list of features will not suffice.

For **category 3 (literature) essays**, students must be aware that straightforward description of a literary text through plot summary or narration of the action does not advance an argument and should generally be avoided (although, where a little-known text is under discussion, a brief description may be appropriate).

Appropriate research should involve interrogating primary and secondary sources in light of the research question, so that the views of others are used to support the student's own argument and do not serve as a substitute for that argument. Students are encouraged to look critically at the secondary sources that they read. For example, it may be helpful for a student to challenge a statement by a critic instead of simply accepting it.

For **category 3 (literature) essays**, the relevant information to support the argument of the essay should mainly come from the primary text, although consulting a range of secondary sources may also be helpful.

If students make use of internet-based sources, they should do so critically and circumspectly in full awareness of their potential unreliability.

Criterion D: Presentation

(Strands: Structure, Layout)

This criterion relates to how closely the EE conforms to accepted academic standards for the way in which 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 appropriate, informative headings. This will be dependent on the particular stylistic conventions of individual languages and category of essay chosen; thus, students need to be aware of the appropriate format for their chosen subject.

Use of charts, images and tables

Any visuals must be prudently selected and used only if clearly relevant to the topic being discussed.

Students should be careful not to think that images and charts speak for themselves. Any illustrative material used within the body of the essay to help clarify an argument needs accompanying discussion or analysis in order to be effective. If analysing an advertising campaign, for example, the student may find it useful to include the image within the text for easy reader reference and to aid the flow of the essay.

Students must not include illustrative material in the appendices if they are relevant to the analysis, discussion or evaluation of the essay—they must be contained within the body of the essay. There should be no addition of superfluous material as appendices as examiners will not refer to this material.

Any material that is not original must be carefully acknowledged, with specific attention paid to the acknowledgment and referencing of quotes and ideas. This process 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), or is not consistently applied, the 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. Graphs, figures, calculations, diagrams, formulae and equations are not included in the word count. Students should be aware that examiners will not read beyond the 4,000-word limit, or assess any material presented past this point.

Criterion E: Engagement

(Strands: Process, Research focus)

This criterion is 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). It assesses the overall impression the examiner has with regard to the student's engagement with the research process and their subject area.

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 chosen, and their relative success
- the *Approaches to learning* skills they have acquired and how they have developed as a learner
- how their conceptual understandings have developed or changed as a result of their research
- setbacks 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. In order to demonstrate that engagement, students must show evidence of critical and reflective thinking that goes beyond simply describing the procedures that have been followed. 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.