

World Studies: Subject-specific guidance

See also: EE generic guide and EE Teacher Support Materials

Overview

An EE in world studies gives students an opportunity to undertake an interdisciplinary study of an issue of contemporary global significance.

Interdisciplinary in this context means research that draws on the methods, concepts and theories of two IB Diploma Programme subjects.

Students are required to

- identify an issue of global importance
- identify a local manifestation of the issue of global importance
- develop a clear rationale for taking an interdisciplinary approach and use the conceptual framework and vocabulary of two Diploma Programme subjects.

This provides an opportunity for students to conduct independent interdisciplinary research (not necessarily primary research) that draws on Diploma Programme subjects and integrates them to produce a coherent and insightful analysis of the global issue they choose to investigate.

It should be noted that law and education are not Diploma Programme subjects.

World studies EEs are registered in one of six areas of study: these are not the same as the Diploma Programme subjects. They are:

- Conflict, peace and security
- Culture, language and identity
- Environmental and/or economic sustainability
- Equality and inequality
- Health and development
- Science, technology and society.

The interdisciplinary essay is designed to provide students with the opportunity to:

- engage in, and pursue, a systematic process of research appropriate to the topic—a process that is informed by knowledge, concepts, theories, perspectives and methods from two chosen subjects
- develop research and communication skills—including the ability to communicate with readers who have a background in more than one subject or discipline
- develop the skills of creative and critical thinking—particularly those skills involved in integrating concepts, theories, perspectives, findings or examples from different subjects to develop new insights or understandings
- experience the excitement of intellectual discovery—including insights into how different subjects complement or challenge one another when used to address the same topic or issue.

Furthermore, in line with the *IB's mission*, the world studies EE seeks to advance students' emerging global consciousness. This comprises:

- a sensitivity to local phenomena as manifestations of broader developments on the planet
- the capacity to think in flexible and informed ways in understanding issues of global significance
- a developing perception of the student's own identity (self) as a global actor and member of humanity, capable of making a positive contribution to the world

Choice of topic

Many topics are potentially suitable for a world studies EE. The chosen topic must:

- address an issue of global significance
- invite an interdisciplinary approach.

The most successful topics reveal connections between specific or local places, people, phenomena or experiences and the larger global framework in which they take place.

Topics must invite a critical examination of the issue in light of relevant theories, methods and arguments in two subjects.

When choosing a topic, students should remember that it must encourage analysis and evaluation rather than description, unsupported generalizations and value judgments.

Students must also ensure that they can meet the various assessment criteria within the 4,000-word limit. They should avoid topics that are too broad in scope to permit an in-depth study within the word limit. A limited topic thoroughly researched and with a clear focus is preferable to a broad topic that can only be examined superficially.

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
The sustainability of high-speed rail travel in China: the case of the Beijing–Tianjin high-speed railway line	Sustainability and rail travel
How street art helped to transform black South African communities during apartheid	Theatre and disadvantaged communities
An examination of the extent to which subsistence farmers in the Himalayan foothills are influenced by short-term economic motivations and long-term environmental sustainability in determining their farming practices	Subsistence farming in the Himalayas
The extent to which the policies of the Thai government have prohibited the Karen ethnic group from progressing alongside the rest of Thai society	Government policies that lead to inequality

Students may use journalistic or visual material, interviews or data from the internet, but their EEs should not be based solely on such sources. Students should display a knowledge and understanding of relevant theories, research methods or findings in the selected Diploma Programme subjects.

Treatment of the topic

Students should craft a specific research question that is:

- interesting to them
- challenging
- sufficiently narrow to allow them to examine an issue in depth
- manageable within 4,000 words.

The question should also require the student to collect or generate information and/or data for analysis and evaluation.

Local case study

The local case study can have a number of functions:

- It may illustrate a local manifestation of the issues of global importance.
- It may offer an opportunity to explore the complexities of the issue in a manageable way.
- It may document “best practices” and offer lessons beyond the local focus.

Occasionally, students may choose to compare two local manifestations or examples from different contexts.

Subject knowledge

It is expected that students will have a good grounding in at least one of the Diploma Programme subjects used in the EE.

If they are unfamiliar with a discipline used, they must access its syllabus so that they can identify the concepts, terminology and modes of thinking required for their EE. (Many IB syllabuses contain lists of key concepts.)

The student’s supervisor should be qualified to give advice in at least one of the subjects used by the student. If other subjects are touched upon in the essay and there are appropriate specialists available in the school, students are encouraged to consult them about research, concepts and approaches.

However, each student must only have one main supervisor who takes on the role as outlined in the introduction to this guide.

Researcher’s reflection space

The researcher’s reflection space (RRS) is strongly recommended as part of the world studies EE process. It provides a space for candid reflection on the issue being studied and how it relates to a student’s own world view, values and aspirations as global citizens.

The RRS gives students an opportunity to reflect on their work and its progress and reversals in personally meaningful ways. It can take the form of a notebook or a blog.

It is created by students to:

- record notes on their readings
- gather topic-related media clips
- paste selected and marked readings
- reflect upon interviews, data and emerging findings.

Most importantly, it is a space where students can reflect candidly upon their own views and lifestyles, feelings, values, aspirations and commitments as global citizens in relation to the topic under study.

The world studies EE offers an opportunity for students to develop their global consciousness. The RRS is the place where particular moments of such development are documented, enabling students to reflect upon and deepen their personal connections to the problems under study and gain an insight into whether, or how, learning about contemporary world issues informs their values, beliefs or commitments in this key phase of their lives. The best examples of RRS exhibit students' ongoing realization and reflection upon who they are as local, regional and global actors.

The RRS is a document for the student. Students may choose to share a section of the space with their teachers in preparation for a meeting. Supervisors may assign focused reflection tasks for students to include in their space but, fundamentally, this is a student-led space to be owned by the students.

Students are also encouraged to include selected pages from their RRS in the appendix of their EE. Supervisors should refer to the shared sections of this space when they complete the supervisor's report on the EE coversheet. These comments help examiners when they consider the assessment of criterion E: engagement.

It is intended that a well-planned RRS should arise naturally out of the research process and should not involve any extra work.

Before providing examples of typical world studies EE layouts for guidance, it is worth considering some pitfalls to avoid. These include essays that:

- rely on basic information from the internet and everyday common sense rather than employing concepts, theories and findings from Diploma Programme subjects
- merely juxtapose theories, methods and findings from different subjects without any attempt to show how they come together to address the topic in a new or compelling way
- do not make clear the underlying Diploma Programme subjects or justify the subjects chosen
- do not give a strong sense of why the inquiry is important and how it links with a global issue but merely offer a description of the problem under study
- define the problem too broadly, given the 4,000-word limit for the essay, and therefore offer a superficial account.

The examples of world studies EEs below are intended as guidance only. They illustrate that multifaceted questions should be encouraged rather than broad ones.

In each case the essay title provides a sharp focus on an issue of global significance. The research question further articulates the focus of the study.

Topic	Culture, language and identity: music as an expression of political dissent
Research question	To what extent can music be used as a method of political expression against oppressive regimes: a comparison of Shostakovich’s work (1932–45) under Joseph Stalin’s regime with Malek Jandali’s work (2000–) under Bashar al-Assad’s regime.
Approach	By analysing nine musical parameters of two composers as expressions of dissent under repressive regimes in different historical eras, and the contexts in which they were written and their reception, the student draws meaningful comparisons and contrasts using the skills of the historian and those of musical notation.

Topic	Health and development: multiple sclerosis and latitude
Research question	To what extent do geographical factors play a role in the distribution of multiple sclerosis cases in Canada and Iran?
Approach	The essay challenges the suggested theory that MS is associated with high latitudes by looking at recent studies of Iran. Genetic factors and vitamin deficiency (biology), migration and environment (geography) are evaluated to enhance understanding

Topic	Health and development: economic growth and obesity
Research question	How has globalization contributed to dietary changes and obesity in developed and developing countries?
Approach	The essay considers metabolic systems and the role of the endocrine system (biology) and recent qualitative and quantitative changes in diet in Liberia, Brazil and the USA to measure energy imbalance and a nutrition transition resulting from globalization (geography/economics).

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, any data, material or research used in the submission of an assessment task for another subject must not be used in the completion of a world studies EE.

Supervisors play an important role in guiding students in this. Students risk their diploma if academic misconduct is detected.

Interpreting the EE assessment criteria

Criterion A: Focus and method

(Strands: Topic, Research question, Methodology)

The student should identify an issue (topic) of global significance and examine it through one or more local manifestations.

The significance and importance of the global issue must be established in the introduction (this might take rather longer than in other subjects).

In this way the issue is accurately and effectively communicated.

The research question should appropriately connect the global issue to the local manifestation. Early in the essay, students should:

- explain or justify their research question
- identify the IB academic disciplines and appropriate key concepts they are going to use
- explain why the research question requires an interdisciplinary approach and indicate the benefits of an integrative approach
- highlight the materials, sources, data and evidence from the two subjects they will be using, with some explanation of why they have been chosen.

Students must show clearly that they have chosen a suitable range of relevant sources. These could be primary or secondary.

Primary sources include:

- works of art
- film
- music
- interviews
- self-generated survey data
- reports of experiments.

Secondary sources should be capable of conveying academic context or be susceptible to academic evaluation, though journalistic, online and media sources are permitted.

Students' sources must provide sufficient evidence to develop and support arguments that are relevant to the research question.

Criterion B: Knowledge and understanding

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

Students should select concepts, theories, perspectives, findings or examples from two Diploma Programme subjects. They need to demonstrate a sound grasp of:

- the knowledge bases of the different subjects
- modes of understanding of the different subjects
- methods of communication of the different subjects.

Students should demonstrate familiarity with the terminology and usages of the subjects. They should place the issue in academic context and where possible indicate the limitations of individual subjects in terms of considering the issue.

The award of achievement levels of 2 or above requires evidence that two subjects have been used in the essay. Higher levels (3 or 4) require increasingly explicit awareness of the strengths and limitations of the individual subject concepts or ideas.

Students should show that they understand the conceptual framework of both subjects, even of one they are not studying for the Diploma Programme. For example, if a student is using history to explore an issue, they must use the skills of the historian such as establishing causation, partiality, reliability of sources etc. Simple narrative is never enough.

Use of language must be effective and include terminology and concepts relevant to the issue and subjects under study. Students should define contested or ambiguous terms when necessary. The essay should be accessible and acceptable to audiences from the different subjects being integrated.

Criterion C: Critical thinking

(Strands: Research, Analysis and Discussion and evaluation)

Research can incorporate the methodologies of the two subjects chosen, such as:

- experimental laboratory work
- library and online research
- generation of primary data through questionnaires
- or many others.

Research should be undertaken with the same integrity as within individual subjects. It must be relevant to the research question. Students should address the value and limitations of research materials.

Students should analyse and evaluate their evidence in a manner appropriate to the research question and the Diploma Programme subjects employed in the essay.

Students should present their ideas in the form of a logical and coherent argument that is relevant to the research question. The argument should be substantiated with evidence and examples. Straightforward descriptive or narrative accounts that lack analysis do not usually advance an argument and should be avoided.

Successful interdisciplinary essays require an **integrative** argument or explanation—that is, the different subjects should be coherently brought together to address the question through, for example:

- a complex causal explanation

- a leading metaphor
- a model
- an analogy.

At the highest level, students should demonstrate:

- effective and nuanced analysis and evaluation of information and findings
- evaluation of the success and limitations of their own integrative approach to the issue.

In a world studies EE there is an element of risk: it may be that evaluation of the findings of a two-subject approach leads to new and original conclusions, or that conclusions are uncertain, or that it is not possible to make conclusions. Failure to integrate the two subjects' analyses into the conclusion or to reach a firm conclusion will not prevent the award of high marks: no news is still news so long as it is true to the research question. Indeed, such outcomes can be used to review opportunities for further research and research lessons learned.

Criterion D: Presentation

(Strands: Structure, Layout)

This criterion assesses the extent to which the presentation follows the standard format expected for academic writing and the extent to which this aids effective communication.

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

Use of charts, images and tables

Any charts, images or tables from literature sources included in the essay 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.

Large tables of raw data collected by the student are best included in an appendix, where they should be carefully labelled. It is not necessary to include all responses to questionnaires; a single sample is sufficient. Tables of processed data should be designed to clearly display the information in the most appropriate form. Graphs or charts drawn from the analysed data should be selected to highlight only the most pertinent aspects related to the argument. Too many graphs, charts and tables will detract from the overall quality of the communication.

Only processed data that is central to the argument of the essay should be included in the body of the essay, as close as possible to its first reference. 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.

The RRS is a particularly valuable aspect first included in the world studies EE. While reflection is incorporated in assessment through the *Reflections on planning and progress Form*, it is strongly recommended that students record the EE journey and feel free to submit a sample from the RRS in the appendix. It will provide benefits in preparing for reflection sessions, decision-making and the analysis and evaluation elements of the EE.

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. Graphs, figures, calculations, diagrams, formulas and equations 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.