

The Arts: An introduction

An extended essay (EE) in the arts provides students with an opportunity to undertake an in-depth investigation into a topic of particular interest to them. Students working on an arts EE must demonstrate in-depth analysis of the subject matter studied, be it dance, film, music, theatre or visual arts. This understanding must be shown in the form of:

- a coherent analysis and interpretation of their chosen area in relation to a posed research question
- the testing and validation of the research and consideration of its effect on the practice of the investigated area of the arts
- development and exploration in a disciplined and imaginative way of an area of study specifically appropriate to the curriculum area chosen
- a link to a practical dimension.

Each subject area poses its own unique set of challenges. Therefore, the approach to the topic of investigation should reflect the particular methodology most appropriate to the arts subject being studied.

Students should have logical and coherent reasons for selecting a particular topic for their essay, a well-thought-out research question and an approach that allows them to develop a reasoned argument.

The process of topic selection

Students should initially identify a broad area of inquiry that they are interested in within the Diploma Programme arts subjects: dance, film, music, theatre or visual arts.

While there may be overlap between the subjects in the arts and common approaches, the research topic must clearly relate to one specific arts area. If a student chooses a research area that blurs the boundaries between two arts subjects, they must ensure that their essay's emphasis clearly lies within the arts subject for which they are submitting it. Crucially, the topic selected should reflect each student's particular interest and enthusiasm within that subject area.

Often, their previous experiences help students to decide on their topic.

For some, the inspiration might be work already undertaken as part of the Diploma Programme course. Alternatively, students may choose to focus on something that has not been part of their studies. Their research may also be inspired by a direct experience of a particular artwork, design, composition or performance, or an interest in the work of a particular artist, style or genre.

Students will then need to narrow down their topic to a research question that allows for specificity and detail. The research question also needs to allow for the investigation to make a purposeful contribution to knowledge and understanding in the subject.

For instance, if a theatre student chooses to explore the use of fans in Restoration comedy, the student will need first to analyse the wider cultural context informing the convention's historical and social meanings. Next, the student must illustrate those meanings by discussing the use of the convention in a stage production of a particular restoration play.

After the careful analysis of a topic and its purpose, students can start working on the structure of their paper.

Literature review—demonstrating knowledge and understanding in context

Conducting literature-based research is an essential element of the EE. Students should review the existing literature on their topic to inform the construction of their own research question and design. Students need to spend time on their literature review (eg by compiling an annotated bibliography) so that they can contextualize their own work. It will also ensure that their essay meets criterion B: knowledge and understanding.

Once they have discussed their choice of topic with their supervisor, students can draw up a research plan, containing the main points to be discussed in the essay. This plan should be flexible enough to allow students to explore the topic in a creative manner, and also to change direction if needed. This may be necessary if students find it difficult to locate supporting material and research data to explore their question.

Students should not be afraid to explore unconventional topics or approaches in their research: originality and creativity are encouraged, as is the use of different research approaches appropriate to their subject area.

Research question

In designing a research question, students should mainly be guided by their interests, but should also consider the relevance of their research. Their research question should be non-trivial and follow from the existing body of literature on the topic, seeking to explore it in innovative ways. The question needs to be specific and sharply focused, stated clearly on the title page and in the introduction of the essay, and fit into one of the five subjects of the Diploma Programme arts group.

Students need to avoid researching a question that is too narrow or too obvious as this will restrict the formulation of reasoned arguments and may prevent them from meeting the assessment criteria. The research question must set an appropriate research context and encourage an investigative approach to the EE.

A well-constructed research question must be specific, should address an appropriate and relevant area in the field of the arts and try to offer an alternative perspective to previous research findings.

When drawing up their research question, students should consider historical and socio-cultural information to increase their understanding of the context of the arts practice or tradition they are investigating.

It will also help students to read critically their primary and secondary sources to determine which will support their own argument. They must demonstrate skills of critical analysis to access the higher levels of the assessment criteria, and this may mean challenging existing arguments rather than simply agreeing with them.

The research question must be explored using research methods appropriate to the subject. These include qualitative methods, as well as the empirical analysis of arts processes or practices and “finished” work (such as artworks, play texts, notations, live and recorded performances and productions).

Students should be reminded that consulting the relevant subject-specific section is vital to ensuring that their essay meets the requirements for that subject.

Research methods

The EE’s emphasis should always be on written analysis, interpretation of one or more pieces of art, music, film, dance, etc and the construction, development and evaluation of a sound argument. Therefore, it is vital that the methodology of the essay is tailored to the research question and allows for an in-depth exploration.

When conducting their research, students should analyse the content of primary and secondary sources.

Primary source material includes play texts, live performances, music concerts, textual analysis, original artworks or designed artifacts, films, scripts, screenplays, scores, personal contacts and productions. Reproductions,

videos, films or photographs and internet images of a high quality are also considered as acceptable sources of information.

A secondary source of information refers to research and subject journals, books, newspaper and magazine articles, interviews and websites. The use of other published materials such as sketches, drawings, pictures, plans, reviews and promotional material is encouraged but should not overwhelm the EE to the detriment of the research discussion.

The research outcome of an arts EE should always include a link with a practical dimension. Where relevant and possible, students may wish to consult practitioners and professionals, such as performers, directors, researchers, writers, designers, painters, sculptors, composers or critics; or they may wish to visit theatres, galleries, museums and arts centres.

Supervisors need to ensure that students are aware of their responsibility to properly cite the resources used and check their work for plagiarism. Citations should adhere to the requirements of the IB and be correctly and consistently applied.

Framework for the EE in the arts

Introduction	An EE in the arts is intended for students who are interested in undertaking research in an area of particular interest to them in the fields of dance, film, music, theatre or visual arts. Qualitative methods are more likely to be used for an arts EE.
Methods most relevant to subjects in this group	<p>Primary methods involve analysis of play texts, live performances, music concerts, original artworks or designed artifacts, films, scripts, screenplays, scores, personal contacts and productions. Reproductions, videos, films or photographs and internet images of a high quality are also considered as acceptable sources of information.</p> <p>Secondary methods include research and academic journals, books, newspaper and magazine articles, interviews and websites. The use of other materials, such as sketches, drawings, pictures, plans, reviews and promotional material is encouraged but should not overwhelm the essay.</p>
Suggestions for possible sources	<p>Use of peer-reviewed journals, newspaper articles, books, e-resources and publications online, specialized academic research engines, unpublished conference papers, previously published essays.</p> <p>Students may wish to interview practitioners and professionals; they may wish to visit theatres, galleries, museums or arts centres.</p>
Particular things to be aware of	Students need to be aware that their work will be checked in terms of the IB's academic honesty policy and so all students must ensure that they are familiar with this document.
Summary	<p>Undertaking an EE is a challenge and so planning is crucial. Students need to start writing their papers early and discuss any emerging difficulties with their supervisor.</p> <p>Supervisors, librarians, practitioners and professionals in the field are a great source of information, advice and support for students.</p> <p>Students writing an essay in the arts should search for primary and secondary sources of information prior to initiating the writing process. The framing of a good research question that is well structured and thought through will aid students in establishing a reasoned argument.</p>
The EE and internal assessments	The EE is not an extension of the internal assessment and students must ensure that they are not using material submitted for any other assessment component as part of the EE submission—see individual subject-specific guidance for more details.