

World Studies

These subject guidelines should be read in conjunction with the “Introduction”, “Outline” and “Details—all essays” sections of this guide. Additional guidance on supervising, planning and writing a world studies essay and marked samples of past essays is given in the *World studies teacher support material*—available on the online curriculum centre.

Overview

An extended essay in world studies provides students with an opportunity to undertake an in-depth, interdisciplinary study of an issue of contemporary global significance. World studies extended essays may examine issues such as the global food crisis, climate change, terrorism, energy security, migration, and global health, technology and cultural exchange. Global issues of this nature play out in local contexts—a zero-carbon-footprint city policy in Denmark; a new clean energy technology used by a village in India; the education of migrant children in two contrasting frontier towns. An in-depth examination of local instances of globally significant phenomena provides opportunities for a well-grounded appreciation and understanding of the issue under study.

Complex issues such as these can rarely be adequately understood if only approached from the perspective of a single subject. It is better to approach such issues through interdisciplinary research. The world studies extended essay requires students to identify an issue of global importance and develop a clear rationale for taking an interdisciplinary approach. It provides an opportunity for students to conduct independent interdisciplinary research—research that draws on theories, findings and methods from two or more IB Diploma Programme subjects and integrates them to produce a coherent and insightful analysis of an issue they choose to investigate.

The aims of this interdisciplinary extended essay, while similar to those for single-subject essays, are distinct in important ways. 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 at least two chosen subjects
- develop research and communication skills—including the ability to communicate with readers who have a background in more than one subject/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 and/or challenge one another when used to address the same topic or issue.

Furthermore, in line with the IB’s mission, the world studies extended essay seeks to advance students’ global consciousness. Global consciousness encompasses:

- global sensitivity—a sensitivity to local phenomena and experiences as manifestations of broader developments on the planet
- global understanding—the capacity to think in flexible and informed ways about issues of global significance
- global self—a developing perception of self as a global actor and member of humanity, capable of making a positive contribution to the world.

In the world studies extended essay, global consciousness can be seen as “the capacity and the inclination to place people, objects, situations with which we come into contact, (including the self) within the broader matrix of our contemporary world. An individual exhibits global consciousness when she is attuned to daily encounters with world cultures, landscapes and products; can place such encounters in a broader narrative or explanatory framework of contemporary global processes; and perceives herself as an actor in such a global context”.^{[1] [1]} Boix Mansilla, V, and Gardner, H. (2007). From teaching globalization to nurturing global consciousness. In MM. Suárez-Orozco (Ed.), *Learning in the Global Era: International Perspectives on Globalization and Education*. Berkeley, USA. University of California Press.

Choice of topic

Many topics are potentially suitable for a world studies extended essay. The chosen topic must address both an issue of global significance, and invite an interdisciplinary approach. The most successful topics reveal connections between specific and/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 or more subjects. When choosing a topic, it is important for students to bear in mind that it must encourage analysis and evaluation rather than description and unsupported value judgments.

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

Students may use journalistic or visual material, interviews, or data from the internet, but their essays should not be based solely on such sources. An extended essay in world studies is expected to show that the student possesses a knowledge and understanding of relevant theories, research methods, or findings in the selected IB Diploma Programme subjects.

Treatment of the topic

Students should craft a specific research question that is both interesting to them and challenging. The question chosen should be limited in scope and sufficiently narrow to allow students to examine an issue or problem in depth. It should present the student with the opportunity to collect or generate information and/or data for analysis and evaluation. Many extended essays will address a research question but inquiries designed to test a hypothesis are also viable.

To address their research question students should ask themselves what aspects of the problem they will need to understand and which subject, or subjects, may best equip them with a set of optimal and viable tools to help them develop a sound understanding of the issues. They should consider how bringing two or more disciplinary perspectives to bear might yield a deeper or better account of the issue. World studies extended essays must demonstrate students' capacity to employ insights from the selected subjects and meaningfully connect them to address the topic. It is expected that students will have a good grounding in at least one of the IB Diploma Programme subjects used in the essay. If they are unfamiliar with a discipline used, they must access the relevant syllabus for that subject and be able to identify concepts and modes of thinking used in the essay.

The student's supervisor should be appropriately 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 subject specialists available in the school, students are encouraged to consult them about research, concepts and approaches. However, each student should only have one main supervisor who takes on the role as outlined in the introduction of this guide and who signs the extended essay coversheet.

To do justice to their chosen topic, students will also have to ask themselves how the particular local cases under study illustrate larger processes or issues of global import. They may view a local case as an opportunity to explore the complexities of the problem in a manageable scope or as a way to document "best practices" and offer lessons beyond the local focus. Occasionally, students may choose to compare two small cases from different contexts.

The following examples of world studies extended essays are intended as guidance only. They illustrate that multifaceted questions should be encouraged rather than broad ones that do not clearly state exactly what about the issue is being investigated. 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.

Title	HIV-AIDS and religion: Beliefs and knowledge about HIV-AIDS among members of different religious communities in Mombasa, Kenya
Research question	What do members of three religious congregations (Hindu, Muslim and Christian) in my city, Mombasa, believe, or know about, the causes, transmission and cures of HIV-AIDS, and how might religious beliefs inform these people's views?
Global-local perspective	Concern about the HIV-AIDS epidemic permeates both the developed and developing world. The impact of the disease on individuals and communities is unevenly concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa, where more health education is needed (global). Learning about HIV-AIDS involves informing one's initial beliefs about its causes and cures—beliefs that often intersect with cultural and religious values. This essay examines how religion and learning about HIV-AIDS interact in the particular case of three religious communities in Mombasa (local). Its results show how religion mediates learning about the disease in this particular locality (local). It invites reflection on the importance of attending to religion, as a key dimension of human life in development work more generally (global).
Dimensions and disciplines	To address the question the student might consider the following. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What constitutes popular beliefs versus scientific explanations of HIV-AIDS, its causes and cures? (biology)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How have the three religious communities approached the spread of HIV-AIDS in Kenya and how is illness explained in selected passages of religious texts? (world religions) • How best to collect reliable data on beliefs and knowledge about HIV-AIDS. (social science methodology)
Approach	<p>This choice of topic integrates biology, world religions and social science (survey design). After introducing the problem and impact of HIV-AIDS in East Africa, the student reports on an empirical study in which leaders, adults and youths in three religious communities completed a questionnaire about their views on HIV-AIDS. The multiple-choice questionnaire is structured to capture popular beliefs and misconceptions about HIV-AIDS (its causes, transmission and cure) as well as scientific biological explanation. Results reveal consistent views within religious communities but important differences across them. To discuss these differences the student examines the different reactions religious communities have to the spread of AIDS and draws on sacred text to hypothesize why such differences may exist.</p>
Title	Express yourself! Youth culture: A global phenomenon with local meanings everywhere
Research question	How and why have two Japanese graffiti artists used American hip hop art for the purposes of self-expression and community organization in their country?
Global–local perspective	<p>Key to globalization is the accelerated traffic of cultural products around the world. From McDonalds to hip hop, these products illustrate how our world is becoming more alike. As different cultures interpret and use such products in a variety of ways, they also illustrate how different our cultural outlooks can be. The phenomenon of youth culture as a dynamic sharing of ideas, creativity and forms of expression among young people worldwide is examined. This is achieved by exploring how two Japanese artists combine artistic motifs from their American counterparts with traditional Japanese ideas in their graffiti designs to create new culturally relevant expressions of individuality and independence.</p>
Dimensions and disciplines	<p>To address the question the student might consider the following.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What artistic choices—for example, imagery, style, colour, location— have these artists made, and in what ways do these decisions echo and/or depart from popular trends in American graffiti? (visual arts) • What styles, tastes and ideas characterize contemporary Japanese youth culture? Are they represented in these artists' work? How and why have these artists used graffiti to express their individuality in a culture that emphasizes collectivity? (social and cultural anthropology)
Approach	<p>The student draws from visual arts and social and cultural anthropology to explore graffiti art in Japan. After providing some background on the hip hop movement as a global phenomenon, the work of two Japanese graffiti artists is examined. The student draws on American and Japanese art critics to compare the Japanese works of art to those of American graffiti artists. She shows how contemporary Japanese culture has influenced the style and content of their work by examining symbols that reflect Japanese youth today. The student discusses how and why the artists include cultural critique messages in their work and what these opinions suggest about Japanese society in general.</p>
Title	Weed infestation in fresh water—weed kills fish which in turn destroys the livelihood of fishermen
Research question	What is the impact of non-native aquatic plants on marine and inland environments?
Global–local perspective	<p>The student examines species infestation in the particular case of Lake Maracaibo's ecosystem and fishing industry (local). After considering this case in-depth, a comparison is drawn between similar species infestation cases taking place around the world (global). The student concludes that accelerating trade, and a growing world population, are resulting in increasing activity on the planet's shores, and calls for the development of sustainable approaches to development (global).</p>

Dimensions and disciplines	<p>To address the question the student might consider the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is the tender balance of natural ecosystems maintained and how do species compete for resources within them? (environmental systems and societies) • How will I develop criteria to monitor biodiversity and diagnose infestation? (environmental systems and societies) • What incentives lead companies to follow more or less sustainable practices? (economics)
Approach	<p>The student surveys the deliberate and accidental transplanting of aquatic species by human activity as the global issue and considers some worldwide examples such as parasitic plants and algal blooms. The local case study explains the science of a particular weed infestation on Lake Maracaibo and other waterways nearby. The consequences for lost human livelihoods (for example fishing, shipping) are considered, and through interviews with academic experts some realistic proposals are evaluated with a view to solving the problem.</p>
Title	<p>Infant nutrition practices in a comparative perspective: The use of powdered milk in developing and developed countries</p>
Research question	<p>How does baby formula affect the health of infants, and why is it such a popular alternative to mother's milk in the Philippines and Canada?</p>
Global–local perspective	<p>By comparing newborn feeding practices in two clinics, one in the Philippines (local) and the other one in Canada (local), the student demonstrates how similar behaviours can be rooted in reasons that differ greatly in different parts of the world (global).</p>
Dimensions and disciplines	<p>To address the question the student might consider the following.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive and negative effects of baby formula on infants' health. (biology) • The presence of baby formula products in each country—investment, sales, advertisements, government advisories and regulations on the use of baby formula (business and management). Mothers' beliefs about their babies' health and nutritional needs. (psychology)
Approach	<p>The approach here integrates (human) biology, business and management (marketing), and psychology. After explaining the debate about the effect of baby formula on infants' health, the student reports an empirical study in which 20 mothers with newborn babies in two public hospitals (Philippines and Canada) completed a questionnaire about their babies' nutritional needs, their awareness of government recommendations on the use of baby formula and their feelings about the advertisement campaigns. Results revealed different rationales for the popularity of baby formula consumption.</p>

A weak essay in this category would be one that:

- does not give a strong sense of why the inquiry is important and how it links with a global issue
- defines the problem too broadly, given the 4,000 word limit for the essay, and therefore offers a superficial account
- is largely based on common sense, media or basic information from the internet rather than employing concepts, theories and findings from the subjects involved
- uses subjects (knowledge or methods) without a clear and coherent idea of why these are warranted in the inquiry
- juxtaposes theories, methods and findings from different subjects without any attempt to show how they come together to address the topic in a relevant or compelling way
- offers merely a description of the problem under study without providing a critical examination (for example one that explains, compares, critiques, analyses the topic under study in depth).

Researcher's reflection space

The researcher's reflection space is strongly recommended as part of the world studies extended essay process, providing a space for candid reflection on the issue being studied and how it relates to students' own world views, values and aspirations as global citizens.

The reflection space gives students an opportunity to reflect on their work 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, or reflect about

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

The world studies extended essay offers an opportunity for students to develop their global consciousness. The reflection space 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 reflection space exhibit students' ongoing reflection about who they are as local, regional and global actors.

The reflection space 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 may also include selected pages from their reflection space in the appendix of their extended essay. Supervisors should refer to the shared sections of this space when they complete the supervisor's report on the extended essay coversheet. These comments help examiners when they consider the assessment of criterion K: holistic judgment.

It is intended that a well-planned researcher's reflection space arises naturally out of the student research process and should not involve any extra work.

Interpreting the assessment criteria

Criterion A: research question

In world studies, the research question must focus on an issue of contemporary global relevance that the student has investigated; at the same time, this is an interdisciplinary essay and the research question must clearly invite an integrative approach involving dimensions that are typically studied in the different disciplines.

Criterion B: introduction

The introduction should explain succinctly the significance and context of the topic and why it is worthy of investigation. A brief overview as to how the research question links a precise or local issue to a global development should be included. Key concepts or categories should be defined and related to their academic context. A good introduction should explain how the research question requires an interdisciplinary approach, which IB Diploma Programme subjects should be used and why, and offer definitions of key concepts selected from these subjects. The introduction may also include an outline of the essay; it should not include irrelevant background material.

Criterion C: investigation

The materials, sources, data and evidence considered should be relevant to the study and deployed appropriately in the essay given the perspectives of the IB Diploma Programme subjects being used. Students are expected to employ theories, methods and findings from two or more subjects. While journalistic and media sources are permitted, the essay should also include perspectives based on selected subjects. Successful essays may include subsidiary questions that organize the research design and the reporting of findings.

Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

Students should select concepts, theories, perspectives, findings or examples from two or more subjects, demonstrating a sound grasp of the knowledge bases, modes of understanding, and methods of communication of the different subjects. They should place the issue in academic context and 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 or more 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.

Criterion E: reasoned argument

Students should present their ideas in the form of a logical and coherent argument that is relevant to the research question. Ideas 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. In addition, successful interdisciplinary essays scoring a level 3 or 4 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.

Criterion F: application of analytical and evaluative skills appropriate to the subjects

Students should analyse and evaluate their evidence in a manner appropriate to the question asked and the IB Diploma Programme subjects employed in the essay, for example, assessing the reliability of sources and evaluating the implications of research reports. At the highest level 4, students should demonstrate effective and nuanced analysis and evaluation of information and findings, as well as evaluation of the success and limitations of their own integrative approach to the issue.

Criterion G: use of language appropriate to the subject

The use of language must be effective and include terminology and concepts relevant to the issue and subjects under study. Students should bear in mind that contested or ambiguous terms may need to be defined and that their work should be accessible and acceptable to audiences from the different subjects being integrated.

Criterion H: conclusion

The essay should have a conclusion consistent with its argument indicating how understanding has been advanced by the integration of perspectives from different subjects. In some cases this may lead to new insights and new questions in relation to the global issue studied.

Criterion I: formal presentation

This criterion relates to the extent to which the essay conforms to academic standards about the way in which research papers should be presented. Essays that omit one of the required elements—title page, table of contents, page numbers, are deemed no better than satisfactory (maximum level 2), while essays that omit two of them are deemed poor at best (maximum level 1).

Criterion J: abstract

The formal abstract should include:

1. the research question
2. how and why it was investigated, including the subjects involved and how they were brought together
3. the conclusion.

Criterion K: holistic judgment

Qualities such as personal engagement, initiative, and depth of understanding, insight, inventiveness and flair are assessed under this criterion. Special attention will be paid to signs of an emerging global consciousness where students demonstrate an awareness of issues around them, an understanding of the world in which we live, and a sense of themselves as global citizens. The award of achievement level 2 requires that the essay shows some evidence of a range of these qualities or clear evidence of one of the qualities. The awarding of higher achievement levels 3 and 4 requires that students show considerable evidence of global consciousness, which may be reflected in one or more of the following:

- personal reflections embedded in the essay
- the researcher's reflection space—extracts of which can be placed in the appendix
- the supervisor's account of the *viva voce*.