

Introduction to IB Economics assessment: Exam papers and internal assessment

Exam papers

Learning objectives, assessment objectives and command terms

The IB Economics guide (for first examinations in May 2022) contains ‘Learning objectives’ for each syllabus topic and sub-topic. All these appear in the coursebook under the heading **Learning objectives** in the form of bullet points under the corresponding heading where they are explained and discussed. The Learning objectives (LOs) are lists of all the topics that you should be familiar with and

understand for your IB exams. This means that if a topic does not appear anywhere as a Learning objective, you will not be examined on it. On the other hand, you may be examined on any Learning objective that does appear in your Cambridge coursebook.

At the end of each learning objective you will see in brackets one of the following four items: (AO1), (AO2), (AO3) or (AO4). AO stands for **Assessment objective**. There is a progression of AOs that reflects the level of depth at which the topic must be studied, beginning from AO1, which is the lowest level, up to AO3, which is the highest level. The fourth level, AO4, requires skills and techniques that do not correspond to any particular level in relation to the other three AO levels.

Each AO has a group of ‘command terms’ that correspond to the particular AO. The command terms specify the depth of study and skills required for each learning objective in exams.

All this will become clearer to you when you examine Table 1, which explains the four AO levels and the corresponding command terms. All command terms are defined in Table 3 later in this section.

Assessment objective (AO)	Explanation of assessment objectives	Command terms
AO1: knowledge and understanding	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the syllabus contents; provide definitions of syllabus terms	define describe list outline state
AO2: application and analysis	Apply economic theories and concepts to explain actual situations, identify and interpret economic data, and demonstrate effective use of information	analyse apply comment distinguish explain suggest
AO3: synthesis and evaluation	Examine economic concepts and theories, use these to present arguments, make judgements, discuss and evaluate theories and information	compare compare and contrast contrast discuss evaluate examine justify recommend to what extent
AO4: use and apply skills and techniques	Draw correctly labelled diagrams to explain concepts and theories; perform calculations	calculate construct derive determine draw identify label measure plot show show that sketch solve

Table 1: Assessment objectives and command terms

Main features of examinations (external assessment)

Exams (external assessment) consist of two exam papers for standard level (SL): paper 1 and paper 2. They consist of three exam papers for higher level (HL): paper 1, paper 2 and paper 3. Table 2 summarises the main features of each exam paper at standard and higher levels.

	Paper 1 SL	Paper 1 HL
Duration of paper 1	1 hour and 15 minutes	1 hour and 15 minutes
Per cent of total IB score	30%	20%
Focus and structure of paper 1	<p>Students must answer one question out of a choice of three.</p> <p>Questions are drawn from the four parts of the syllabus.</p> <p>Each question is split into two parts, (a) and (b). Students must answer both parts.</p> <p>Part (a) examines AO1, AO2, AO4; it is worth 10 marks.</p> <p>Part (b) examines AO1, AO2, AO3, AO4; it is worth 15 marks.</p> <p>Total marks for paper 1 are 25.</p>	

	Paper 2 SL	Paper 2 HL
Duration of paper 2	1 hour and 45 minutes	1 hour and 45 minutes
Per cent of total IB score	40%	30%
Focus and structure of paper 2	<p>Students must answer one question out of a choice of two.</p> <p>Questions are drawn from the four parts of the syllabus.</p> <p>Each question is split into seven parts, (a), (b), (c), (d), (e), (f) and (g).</p> <p>Part (a) is sub-divided into two parts (i and ii); both parts examine AO1; it is worth 4 marks (2+2).</p> <p>Part (b) is also sub-divided into two parts (i and ii); the parts may examine AO1, AO2, or AO4; it is worth 5 marks (2+3).</p> <p>Part (c) examines AO1, AO2, AO4; it is worth 4 marks.</p> <p>Part (d) examines AO1, AO2, AO4; it is worth 4 marks.</p> <p>Part (e) examines AO1, AO2, AO4; it is worth 4 marks.</p> <p>Part (f) examines AO1, AO2, AO4; it is worth 4 marks.</p> <p>Part (g) examines AO1, AO2, AO3, AO4; it is worth 15 marks.</p> <p>Total marks for paper 2 are 40.</p>	

	Paper 3 HL only
Duration of paper 3	1 hour and 45 minutes
Per cent of total IB score	30%
Focus and structure of paper 3	<p>Students must answer two compulsory questions (there is no choice). Questions are drawn from the four parts of the syllabus.</p> <p>Each question is split into two parts, (a) and (b).</p> <p>Part (a) is sub-divided into several sub-parts. It examines AO1, AO2, AO4; each sub-part is worth 1 to 4 marks, making a total of 20 marks for part (a).</p> <p>Part (b) examines AO1, AO2, AO3, AO4; it is worth 10 marks.</p> <p>There are 30 marks per question, therefore the total marks for paper 3 are 60.</p>

Table 2: Main features of exam papers

It is strongly recommended that you study the sample questions that have been included in the digital coursebook so you can better understand the structure of each of these papers.

You may have noticed that adding up the percentages of the total IB score for all the exams does not give 100%. Rather the percentages are:

SL 30% (Paper 1) + 40% (Paper 2) = 70%

HL 20% (Paper 1) + 30% (Paper 2) + 30% (Paper 3) = 80%

The remaining 30% of your marks for SL and 20% for HL come from your **Internal assessment**. This will be explained later.

What the command terms mean

All command terms are listed below alphabetically, together with their corresponding AO levels and meaning.

Command term		Students must:
Analyse	AO2	Bring out essential elements.
Apply	AO2	Use an idea, principle or theory in relation to a particular issue.
Calculate	AO4	Find a numerical answer; you must show your workings.
Comment	AO2	Provide a judgement of something based on some information.
Compare	AO3	Find the similarities between two or more situations while referring to all of them throughout your writings.
Compare and contrast	AO3	Indicate similarities and differences between two or more situations while referring to all of them throughout your writings.
Construct	AO4	Show information in a diagram or in a logical form.
Contrast	AO3	Provide an account of differences between two or more situations while referring to all of them throughout your writings.
Define	AO1	Provide the precise meaning.
Derive	AO4	Provide a new equation or relationship by manipulating one you are given (unlikely to appear in IB Economics).
Describe	AO1	Provide a detailed account.
Determine	AO4	Find the only possible answer.
Discuss	AO3	Provide a balanced account including a variety of arguments, supporting opinion and conclusions with appropriate evidence.
Distinguish	AO2	Show the differences between two or more things.
Draw	AO4	Construct an accurate diagram or graph, using a pencil, using a ruler for straight lines. Draw diagrams to scale. Graphs should have points correctly plotted and joined in a straight lines or smooth curves.
Evaluate	AO3	Make an assessment by discussing strengths and limitations.
Examine	AO3	Review an argument or idea in such a way as to reveal underlying assumptions and interrelationships.
Explain	AO2	Provide details about reasons or causes in order to reveal relevant information.
Identify	AO4	Select the correct answer from several possibilities.
Justify	AO3	Provide well-founded evidence in support of a conclusion.
Label	AO4	Provide the correct labels in a diagram.
List	AO1	Itemise brief answers; no explanation is required.
Measure	AO4	Find a particular value for a quantity.
Outline	AO1	Provide a brief account or description.
Plot	AO4	Indicate the location of points on a diagram.
Recommend	AO3	Propose a desirable course of action to deal with a specific issue, providing evidence and arguments in its support.

Command term		Students must:
Show	AO4	Provide the steps followed in a calculation or derivation.
Show that	AO4	Find the result that is required (possibly using information given) without using a proof (does not generally require a calculator).
Sketch	AO4	Draw a diagram or graph with correct labels, providing a general idea of the required shape, and including relevant features.
Solve	AO4	Find the answer or answers using algebraic, numerical or graphical methods.
State	AO1	Provide a specific name or brief answer; no explanation or calculation is required.
Suggest	AO2	Recommend a solution to the problem or issue in question.
To what extent	AO3	Provide an appraisal of the merits or deficiencies of an argument or concept, with clear presentation of and supporting evidence for arguments and conclusions.

Table 3: Meanings of command terms*

* Based on the IB Economics guide (First examinations 2022). Note that the meanings of the command terms are paraphrased to avoid copyright issues.

Useful suggestions to help you with exams

Here are some general points to bear in mind relating to your exams.

- *Define key economics terms.* You must be sure to include correct definitions of the main economic terms that relate to the topic you are writing about. Be sure to define all the important economic terms that appear in the question you are answering.
- *Use correct diagrams with correct labelling.* Many exam questions, particularly in Paper 1, require you to provide a diagram (and possibly more than one diagram) explaining the economic theory you are discussing and that illustrates your analysis. You must be sure to provide the correct diagram. In addition, it is very important that you correctly draw and label your diagram. Even if you provide the right diagram to illustrate the theory you are referring to, you will lose marks if it is incorrectly drawn or labelled.
- *Link diagrams to your writing in exams.* Whenever you use a diagram, for whatever purpose, you must be sure to explain in your writing what the diagram shows and how it helps you arrive at your answer or conclusion. Answers to questions that do not refer to or explain diagrams are likely to lose marks, even though the analysis and explanations as well as the diagrams may be correct (and the diagrams correctly drawn and labelled).
- *Clearly state and explain the theory or model you are using.* All exam papers, at both standard and higher levels, require use of analytical skills, which means identifying an economic theory, model or concept and applying it to analyse and explain something. When referring to economic theories, models or concepts, you must try to clearly state and explain what these are. You may know and understand a theory, but if you don't explain it clearly, you will not be demonstrating your knowledge and so you may lose marks.
- *What you should do about lists.* You will find that your coursebook often makes lists of items that relate to particular topics (for example, the determinants of demand or supply, weaknesses of fiscal and monetary policies). In some cases the lists may be long. When you encounter long lists, you should bear in mind that your objective is not to memorise all the items in the list. Your objective, rather, is to familiarise yourself with the issues at hand, and then choose at least three or four items listed that you try to understand well and can write about in depth. You are better off learning about fewer items in depth than many items that you understand only superficially.
- *Do not use bullets in your writing.* Whereas mark schemes to IB examination questions are in bullet point form, you should not use bullet points in your answers to questions. Your written work should take the form of essays.

- *Practise writing essays.* You should try to practise writing essays, beginning early in your IB economics course, taking care to include an introduction and conclusion, particularly in the case of questions that require longer responses. (This includes all SL and HL paper 1, parts (a) and (b) questions, SL and HL paper 2, part (g) questions, and HL paper 3, part (b) questions.) Try to organise your answer before you begin to write so that your arguments will be clear, logical and consistent.
- *Write neatly and clearly.* You must take care that you write neatly and clearly. A neat paper makes a good impression. It would be a pity to lose marks simply because your handwriting or your diagrams are not readable. When drawing diagrams use a ruler to ensure straight lines.
- *Manage your time properly in an exam.* It is very important that you divide the total time you have in an exam between the various questions and their parts. For example, in SL paper 1 and HL paper 1, the 75 minutes you have available must be divided between the two questions you must answer. Ideally, you should spend about 30 minutes on part (a) and 45 minutes on part (b). In SL paper 2 and HL paper 2, which contain questions with several parts, it is especially important that you do not spend too much time on question parts that earn you only a few marks, leaving insufficient time for questions that are worth more marks. Note that sub-question (g) is worth 15 marks out of a total of 40, or 37.5% of the total for paper 2.
- *Use examples.* You should try to include examples that illustrate the topic you are writing about. For example, if you are writing about goods that are substitutes or complements, you could refer to some examples of these.
- *Using real-world examples.* A real-world example is an event or a situation or a policy (or some occurrence generally) that exists or has actually taken place in the real world. Of all the IB exam papers there is only one specific sub-question for which you will *in all cases* have to provide a real-world example, at both SL and HL. This is paper 1, part (b). The real-world example that you will have to provide and discuss is in connection with an AO3 command term. As Table 1 indicates, AO3 involves *synthesis and evaluation*, which means that you must:

‘Examine economic concepts and theories, use these to present arguments, make judgements, discuss and evaluate theories and information.’

It must be stressed that to receive high marks in a paper 1, part (b) question it is essential that you provide a real-world example and use it in your response as part of your arguments. In order to assist you in this, a list of all AO3 topics has been included in the digital coursebook that you may refer to. Your teacher will further provide you with real-world examples for each of these topics and will encourage you to find more of these on your own or in groups. Your teacher will also provide you with a model paper 1, part (b) answer so that you can see how it is structured and how you should aim to use your real-world example in your essay.

Internal assessment

As noted earlier, internal assessment has a weight of 30% at SL and 20% at HL in your total IB Economics marks. Internal assessment consists of three essays that you will write, referred to as ‘commentaries’. The commentaries will be based on articles that you will find in the news media. Note that each commentary:

- must come from a different unit of the syllabus, excluding Unit 1; there are three remaining units: 2 Microeconomics; 3 Macroeconomics; 4 The Global Economy
- must come from a different source in the news media; each source must have been published within one year prior to your writing the commentary
- must use a different *key concept* of your IB economics course as a ‘lens’ through which you will examine your topic; you will be introduced to the key concepts in Chapter 1 of your textbook. See ‘*Checklist: Real-world issues and key concepts*’ in the digital coursebook for an explanation of the nine key concepts of this course and where they appear throughout the coursebook.
- must be no longer than 800 words.

Your teacher will provide you with more information and guidance on how you should write your commentaries.