

Studies in language and literature: An introduction

Students working on studies in language and literature extended essays (EE) must:

- provide logical and coherent rationales for writing on their selected topic
- formulate a clear research question related to the target literature/language
- offer a concrete description of the methods they use
- generate reasoned interpretations and conclusions based on the literature review findings and research question.

The process of topic selection

Students should initially identify the broad area of inquiry that they are interested in. They then need to narrow down their topic by dividing the area into more specific and detailed subtopics.

For instance, a student might be interested in conducting research into “William Shakespeare’s plays”. They could narrow this down to focus on “Representing gender through madness in William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1600) and *Macbeth* (1606)”. With such a specific topic in mind, they may start work on putting together a coherently argued paper.

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

For some, the inspiration might be work already undertaken as part of the course. Students are advised to check the list of authors and their works recommended by International Baccalaureate (IB). These will include works that students have not studied in class but may relate to a particular genre of writing that they are interested in.

Literary works often address philosophical, political or social questions that are discussed in academic journals. Students can refer to such publications, in addition to searching e-resources and databases. Students should use specialized academic search engines as results using standard search engines are not always appropriate for citation in a research paper.

Other excellent sources of inspiration include: unpublished conference papers, previously published essays, book chapters or journal articles published on reputable scholarly websites. A school librarian is well placed to give advice on this.

Lastly, research ideas are often generated through students’ dialogue with their teachers, fellow students and librarians.

Literature review—demonstrating knowledge and understanding in context

Literature-based research is an essential part of the EE. Students should review the existing literature on their topic to inform the construction of their own research question and design. Time spent early on reviewing the literature will guide and improve the students’ work as it will enable them to contextualize their findings.

Students who are undertaking an analysis of one text are also required to undertake a literature review. All students must demonstrate, as indicated by criterion B, knowledge and understanding that is connected to their area of research. This includes placing their own research in the wider context of the discipline. This may include what has already been written, particular perspectives and viewpoints, or critical insights. However, for students analysing just one text, this should not distract from the main focus of the text itself.

Once they have discussed their choice of topic with their supervisor, students can begin to outline the main points to be discussed in their essay.

Research question

When working on their research question, students should be guided by the rationale that what they are writing is important because:

- it seeks to fill a gap in understanding their chosen topic, or
- it offers a resolution to some controversial argument.

The research question should therefore be non-trivial and follow from the existing body of literature on the topic. It must be:

- specific, sharply focused and capable of being answered within a 4,000-word essay
- stated clearly in the introduction of the essay and on the title page
- related to the target literature/language.

Students need to avoid researching a question that is too narrow or too obvious as this will limit their ability to formulate reasoned arguments.

Well-thought-out questions for studies in language and literature extended essay may be based on the qualitative analysis of literature or peer-reviewed articles published in recognized journals.

A well-constructed research question must:

- be specific
- address an important and relevant issue in the field of language and literature
- try to offer an alternative perspective compared with previous research findings.

Research methods

Students' research for an EE in studies in language and literature should be guided by primary and secondary sources.

- A **primary source** refers to novels, poems, stories, plays or essays by the author(s) whose work is the focus of the student's research.
- A **secondary source** refers to a scholarly work, including books, journal articles, essays in an edited book collection, or reviews about the primary author's work, author biography, genre and techniques incorporated in the publication that is the focus of student's research.

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

Framework for the EE in studies in language and literature

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| Introduction | <p>An extended essay in studies in language and literature is intended for students who are writing in language A. The extended essays in this group are divided into three categories:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. studies of literary work(s) originally written in the language in which the essay is presented; 2. studies of a literary work(s) originally written in the language of the essay compared with literary work(s) originally written in another language; 3. studies in language. |
| Methods most relevant subjects in this group | <p>Qualitative methods are used when writing extended essays in this group.</p> <p>Primary methods involve analysing the author’s collection of novels, poems, stories, plays or personal essays.</p> <p>Secondary methods include contextualizing with books, journal articles, essays in an edited book collection, or reviews about the author’s work. The author’s biography, genre and techniques incorporated in the publication are also considered to be part of a qualitative secondary source of research.</p> |
| Suggestions for possible sources | <p>Use of peer-reviewed journals, newspaper articles, books, electronic resources and publications online, specialized academic search engines, unpublished conference papers, previously published essays and book chapters, and single author book, among other sources.</p> |
| Particular things to be aware of | <p>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.</p> |
| Summary | <p>Undertaking an EE is a challenge and so planning is crucial. Students need to remember to start writing their papers early and discuss any emerging difficulties with their supervisor. Supervisors and librarians are a great source of information, advice and support for students. Students writing a studies in language and literature EE should search for primary and secondary sources of information prior to initiating the writing process. The framing of a good research question, which is clear and focused, will aid students in establishing a reasoned argument and maintaining this throughout the essay.</p> |
| The EE and other assessed components | <p>The EE is not an extension of other assessed components and students must ensure that they are not using material submitted for any other assessment component as part of the EE submission—see the subject-specific guidance for more details.</p> |