Individuals and societies

An extended essay (EE) in individuals and societies is intended for students who are interested in undertaking research in an area of business management, economics, geography, global politics, history, ITGS, philosophy, psychology, social and cultural anthropology or world religions.

The individuals and societies EE is intended to encourage the systematic and critical study of:

- human experience and behaviour
- physical, economic and social environments
- the history and development of social and cultural institutions.

Students' choice of topic should enable them to recognize that the content and methodologies of the subjects are contestable and that their study requires critical thinking.

Students must have sufficient grounding in the subject under which they submit their essay: reading a textbook or consulting an encyclopedia while writing the EE will not compensate for a lack of proper background knowledge.

For a longer general introduction to the subject areas of individual societies see Individuals and societies: An introduction
Business management: Subject-specific guidance

See also: Extended essay guide and Extended essay teacher support material

Overview

An extended essay (EE) in business management gives students an opportunity to carry out in-depth research in an area of personal interest relating to business management.

The EE gives students an opportunity to develop research skills by:

- reviewing business theories, concepts and principles
- critically analysing their use and application in the business world and their resultant impact on business activity.

The EE requires the application of business management theories, tools and techniques to produce a coherent and structured analytical essay that effectively addresses the research question.

Choice of topic

Students can choose a topic they have encountered during their Diploma Programme business management course. However, they may also choose to investigate issues that fall outside its scope. For example:

- business practices in a specific regional or national context, or
- the practical applications of the work of a particular business management theorist.

Whatever area they choose, students must root their research firmly in accepted business management theories and use the core principles of business management as the basis for their research.

Students are strongly advised to choose a topic that enables them to carry out research and apply business management theories and techniques in a real-world setting. This setting may be an organization, industry or market in a particular region or country, or globally.

Sources of ideas may include:

- an interest in issues raised in the classroom
- aspects of a student's own experience
- current events.

Research questions that do not allow a systematic and meaningful investigation using business management theories, concepts and principles are unlikely to be suitable.

Backward versus forward-looking questions

Students can choose to investigate past event(s). However, they must ensure that their question will enable them to analyse and evaluate rather than simply describe what happened.
A forward-looking question can enable students to search for conflicting sources to arrive at a well-supported argument and conclusion. But the topic should not be so forward-looking that information and results are not yet available: hypothetical questions based on future events are to be avoided.

Examples of topics

These examples are for guidance only. Students must ensure that their choice of topic is focused (left-hand column) rather than broad (right-hand column).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focused topics</th>
<th>Broad topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Application of lean production principles to the NGO ABC</td>
<td>Relevance of lean production for NGOs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance of ethical objectives for very small and very large companies in Canada</td>
<td>The link between ethical objectives and organizational size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Herzberg's motivation theory in productivity improvement at XYZ Ltd</td>
<td>Motivational techniques at XYZ Ltd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The contribution of Just-in-Time production in improving efficiency in the textile industry in Cambodia</td>
<td>Effectiveness of Just-in-Time production techniques</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Treatment of the topic

Sources

Students' research should be broad and detailed, using a range of sources. Excessive reliance on a single source, such as a company's annual report, is unlikely to give students sufficient scope or breadth in their analysis.

Students can include materials sourced from a particular business or organization whose area of business is related to the topic chosen, eg market research companies, industry analysts or think tanks.

Secondary sources

Students should use secondary data as the basis of their EE, supported where appropriate by primary research. The sole use of secondary sources is permitted and will allow students access to all levels of the EE assessment criteria.

(Note that this is similar to the research approach of the SL internal assessment task of the business management course and different to the research approach of the HL internal assessment task, where primary research takes precedence.)

A good range of secondary sources should be consulted, including:

- business management textbooks
- general business management books
- industry analyses
- company reports and data.
Primary research

Students must plan any primary research well so that it yields genuinely additional and significant insights.

Students and supervisors are required to:

- act with tact and sensitivity towards the research subjects
- respect the confidentiality of the organization(s) and people involved.

All the research carried out must address the research question. Similarly, the development of the essay must be related to the research question directly and consistently and must not include information that is unnecessary.

Use of analytical tools and numerical data

A good essay will demonstrate the appropriate use of analytical tools, often supported by numerical data to assist the discussion and evaluation.

Appropriate analytical tools from the business management syllabus include the following.

- Ansoff Matrix
- BCG Matrix
- Break-even analysis
- Decision tree
- Financial statements and ratio analysis
- Fishbone diagram
- Force field analysis
- Position maps
- Stakeholders analysis
- STEEPLE analysis
- SWOT analysis

Students may also use analytical tools that are not included in the syllabus.

Conceptual perspectives

Strategic and conceptual perspectives on the research question can add to the interest and rigour of the essay, for example:

- the effect of new technologies on organizational innovation
- the cultural and ethical implications of business decisions.

Analysing the data

Use of theory

Students should integrate relevant business management theories, tools and techniques with the evidence obtained by the research throughout the essay.
Students should not present theory as a separate section. An essay that delivers theory as a separate section of the essay and does not apply it to the specific research question is unlikely to succeed.

Students should avoid making assertions using business management theories and techniques if they cannot meaningfully link these to their case study with supporting evidence.

Critical thinking

Students must ask probing questions and look at all relevant factors when considering the information obtained from their research. Information cannot always be accepted at face value.

A critical approach, in which students display the skills of analysis and evaluation, is essential.

Students should indicate unresolved questions, or new questions that have arisen from their study, in their conclusions.

Students should remember that a business management essay must be written in an objective style without personal bias. Conclusions should be derived from the evidence and not based on any preconceptions of the student.

Examples of topics, research questions and suggested approaches

Once students have identified their topic and written their research question, they can decide how to research their answer. They may find it helpful to write a statement outlining their broad approach. These examples are for guidance only.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>An evaluation of the introduction of total quality management in ABC Ltd</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research question</td>
<td>To what extent has the introduction of total quality management (TQM) improved quality at ABC Ltd?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach</td>
<td>• A literature review of how quality management techniques have changed with the introduction of TQM, both generally and specifically in the industry of ABC Ltd.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Selection of relevant indicators measuring quality and collection of the corresponding data for ABC Ltd.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Analysis and evaluation of the ways in which ABC Ltd has adapted its approach to managing quality, and the impact of this on the selected indicators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>An evaluation of the case for strengthening social responsibility practices at multinational XYZ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research question</td>
<td>Should multinational XYZ strengthen its corporate social responsibility practices in the aftermath of scandal X?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Approach                                               | • A review of how various local and international media reported on the reasons for and events around scandal X at multinational XYZ.  
• Analysis of the social responsibility practices at multinational XYZ preceding scandal X, with a particular emphasis on practices and indicators relevant to scandal X.  
• Application of SWOT analysis to these practices.  
• Identification of potential ways of strengthening social responsibility practices from industry leaders.  
• Application of SWOT analysis to these practices.  
• Evaluation, from different stakeholder groups’ perspectives, on whether multinational XYZ should strengthen its social responsibility practices in suggested ways or leave them as is. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Measuring the success of joint ventures: a comparative case study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research question</td>
<td>How successful has the joint venture between ABC Ltd and XYZ Ltd been as a growth strategy for both companies?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Approach                                               | • A literature review of the theoretical benefits and drawbacks of joint ventures.  
• A review on the reporting around the joint venture at the time it happened: what were the reasons given by the companies for the joint venture and how did industry analysts assess the case?  
• An examination of the financial results of ABC Ltd and XYZ Ltd prior to and after the joint venture, and comparison of these results with industry benchmarks.  
• Analysis and evaluation of the qualitative and longer term benefits and drawbacks of the joint venture. |
An important note on "double-dipping"

Students must ensure that their EE does not duplicate any other work they are submitting for the Diploma Programme. In particular, the EE must not be an extension of the internal assessment task. Students must ensure that they understand the differences between the two.

- The HL IA task—a research project—must be based on primary research (e.g., interviews or questionnaires), whereas the EE must be based on secondary research (e.g., academic journal articles or specialized publications).
- The HL IA task is a practical and highly structured piece of investigation leading to practical proposals for action for company management, whereas the EE is a scholarly piece of investigation that does not result in the formulation of recommendations.
- The SL IA task—a written commentary—must be based on secondary research, like the EE, but for the SL IA task, only three to five supporting documents are required, whereas for the EE, there is an expectation of attempting a more academic, broader and in-depth investigation.

Supervisors play an important role here in guiding students on these distinctions. Students risk their diploma if academic misconduct is found.

Interpreting the EE assessment criteria
Criterion A: Focus and method

(Strands: Topic, Research question, Methodology)

The EE title must be stated in the form of a question that promotes the application of the higher order skills of analysis, evaluation and synthesis, rather than encouraging a descriptive essay.

The research question must be specific and sharply focused on a business problem or issue worthy of investigation. It should require the use of business management theories, tools and techniques. Topics that consider generic or broad issues will restrict the possibility of effective treatment within the word limit and will constrain performance on this criterion.

Students must use secondary resources in the first instance. Students should employ high-level academic research and writing skills, and show that the student is capable of intellectual discovery and creativity.

The essay should be based on a comprehensive review of the literature on the topic selected. It must not end up as a practical investigation resembling a higher level internal assessment.

Any essay based heavily on questionnaires and/or interviews will inevitably lose marks on a range of criteria.
If primary research is conducted it must provide information that is not accessible from secondary sources or that significantly enhances the value of the secondary data presented.

All research conducted, whether primary or secondary, should support specific quantitative and qualitative analysis and evaluation directly related to the research question.

Students must demonstrate that their essay has been well planned and that they have designed an appropriate and coherent approach and structure to address the research question.

**Criterion B: Knowledge and understanding**

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

The sources collected by the student should be relevant to the research question and applied appropriately, so that an argument can be formed and a conclusion(s) reached. The student should use the sources to place their topic into a wider business context.

For example, if the focus of the essay is on the role of social media, the student should be able to explain the impact the social media has on a number of business functions, such as marketing and recruitment.

The student must demonstrate that they have a good grasp of business terminology and that they can use this fluently, accurately and consistently when developing lines of argument. They may need to clarify terms or provide further explanation or definition of selected terms or concepts.

**Criterion C: Critical thinking**

(Strands: Research, Analysis and Discussion and evaluation)

Throughout the essay, the student is expected to present and analyse business data and sources and to evaluate the insights and significance of these for addressing the research question. To score highly against this criterion, the student needs to demonstrate a sophisticated application of analytical and evaluative skills.

An integrated use of research and business theories, tools and techniques is required to develop an argument and to assess the strengths and limitations of various perspectives on the topic under investigation. Essays that are wholly or largely descriptive in nature will score poorly against this criterion.

The student should develop a reasoned, coherent and logical argument in response to the research question. Where appropriate, conclusions to points should be made throughout, and there must be at least one culminating conclusion that summarizes the student’s response to the research question. Any judgments made should be consistent with the argument presented and supported by evidence.

The student should comment on the quality, balance and quantity of the sources and reflect on any bias or limitations that may weaken the strength or affect the objectivity of supporting materials.

The student should point out any limitations or unresolved issues in the research and suggest further action to address these.
Criterion D: Presentation

(Strands: Structure, Layout)

This criterion relates to the extent to which the essay conforms to accepted academic standards in relation to how research papers should be presented. It also relates to how well these elements support the reading, understanding and evaluation of the essay.

Students may provide a section and sub-section structure to their essays, with appropriate informative headings. Sub-headings should not distract from the overall structure of the essay or argument presented.

Any graphs, charts, images or tables from literature sources included in essays 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 and 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.

Too many graphs, charts and tables 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. Any tables should enhance a written explanation and should not themselves include significant bodies of text; if this is the case then these words will 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.

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 audio-visual 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 and diagrams 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: Process, Research focus)

This criterion is 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). It assesses the overall impression the examiner has with regard to the student’s engagement with the research process and their subject area.
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 chosen, and their relative success
- the Approaches to learning skills they have acquired and how they have developed as a learner
- how their conceptual understandings have developed or changed as a result of their research
- setbacks 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. In order to demonstrate that engagement, students must show evidence of critical and reflective thinking that goes beyond simply describing the procedures that have been followed. 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.
An extended essay (EE) in one of the subjects in individuals and societies gives students an opportunity to undertake an in-depth investigation into a topic of particular interest to them. Students working on the individuals and societies EE must demonstrate in-depth analysis of the subject matter studied, be it business management, economics, geography, global politics, history, ITGS, philosophy, psychology, social and cultural anthropology or world religions. This understanding must be shown in the form of:

- a coherently written and structured essay that effectively addresses a particular issue expressed as a research question
- the development and exploration in a disciplined and imaginative way of an area of study appropriate to the chosen subject
- a critical analysis and evaluation of source material in relation to the chosen research question that is articulated in the form of a reasoned argument.

Students working on an individuals and societies EE should be advised that each subject area poses its own unique set of challenges and that the approach to topic investigation should be different for each subject area. However, across all the subject areas, the topics chosen should encourage the systematic and critical study of:

- human experience and behaviour
- physical, economic and social environments
- the history and development of social and cultural institutions.

Additionally, their topics should enable students to recognize that the content and methodologies of the subjects are contestable and that their study requires critical thinking.

Students should have logical and coherent reasons for selecting a particular topic for the EE. They need also to identify a well-thought-out research question and to adopt an approach that allows for the development of a reasoned argument. Their choice of topic should offer enough scope to provide material for substantial and informative writing, and require students to examine, analyse and evaluate existing views, or propose new perspectives.

The process of topic selection

Students should initially identify the broad area that they are interested in within business management, economics, geography, global politics, history, ITGS, philosophy, psychology, social and cultural anthropology or world religions.

Given the composite nature of the individuals and societies field, students may choose a topic that could be understood through the lens of more than one subject. Where a topic could be approached from different standpoints, such as economics or geography, the treatment of the topic must meet the requirements of the subject that students are submitting the essay for.

Students must demonstrate a sufficient grounding in their chosen subject; reading a textbook or consulting an encyclopedia while writing their EE will not compensate for a lack of background knowledge in the subject.

The most important aspect of topic selection is that it should reflect each student's particular interest and enthusiasm.

Often, their previous experiences help students to decide on their topic.
For some, the inspiration might be work already undertaken as part of the course.

Students might also search e-resources, textbooks, databases and reference guides. Students should be advised that these types of sources should be consulted in conjunction with other relevant research material to support the student’s own original research. The information that students use as a reference in the essay should come from a sound methodology, which is clearly appropriate to the subject and research question posed.

Students’ choice of topic might also be stimulated by work done in class, issues of contemporary debate, discussion, current or past events, private reading or reflection.

The topic should be suitable for effective treatment within the 4,000-word limit. Topics that cover many aspects of the subject and are too broad are unlikely to produce successful essays. Narrowing the scope of the essay will help to ensure a clear focus and allow students to demonstrate detailed and specific knowledge, understanding and critical analysis of their subject matter. Each subject section of this guide provides some examples of more focused topics.

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 the development of their argument. Students need to spend time on their literature review (eg by compiling an annotated bibliography) ensuring that they are able to contextualize their own work and to meet criterion B: knowledge and understanding.

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

Students should be advised to use accurate terminology and subject-specific concepts throughout their essay. They should also show awareness of the value and reliability of their sources, rather than accepting evidence uncritically.

Research question

In designing a research question, students should mainly be guided by their interests, but also consider the relevance of their research. Research questions should not be of a trivial nature and should be worthy of investigation. They should follow from the existing body of literature on the topic, seeking to explore it in innovative ways. They should set an appropriate context and encourage an investigative approach to the essay.

Research questions that do not lead to systematic investigation, critical analysis and detailed understanding are unlikely to be suitable. A well-constructed research question is:

- specific and sharply focused on the particular aspect or area of subject matter being explored
- stated clearly on the title page and in the introduction of the essay
- evident throughout the whole discussion.

Students need to avoid questions that are too narrow or too obvious as this will limit their ability to formulate reasoned arguments. The research question must give an appropriate context and encourage an investigative approach. The EE’s aim is to foster students’ ability to reason and argue, and to learn to critically evaluate sources in support of a reasoned argument.
Students should try to develop ideas around the topic and research questions that take an interesting, novel or creative approach. Alternatively, they can examine existing views and argue against them to a greater or lesser degree. Critical analysis and evaluation are required to access the higher levels of the assessment criteria.

The research question must be defined in the form of a question. Students must explore it using research methods appropriate to the subject, which may include both qualitative methods and the empirical analysis of quantitative data. Students must ensure that they have read and understood the parameters in which they are permitted to undertake research within their chosen subject; this includes being familiar with the relevant ethical codes.

Research methods

The EE's emphasis should always be on written analysis, interpretation of data and sources, evaluation, and construction and development of a sound argument. It is vital that the methodology of the essay is tailored to the research question, appropriate for the subject and allows for an in-depth exploration of the research area.

Students should be guided by the methods of research for their given subject. Given the diversity of the subjects covered in this group, the range of research methods available is wide, and in most cases it will be necessary to use more than one method.

Students are advised to check carefully the specific subject guidance as methods appropriate for a particular discipline are not always permitted for the purposes of the EE. For example, psychology students are not allowed to undertake primary research using experiments; in social and cultural anthropology, primary methods should only be used to supplement secondary research; an EE in geography need not place so strong an emphasis on primary field data.

In fact, many successful research topics are based on published data in the form of books, newspapers and magazines, interviews, maps, aerial photographs and satellite images, digital landscape simulations, videos, CDs, DVDs, GIS, diagrams and models.

Research questions in philosophy are explored through an examination of themes and texts. The range of sources that can be used is wide and includes the works of philosophers, dictionaries of philosophy, textbooks and encyclopedias.

Oral and written data from family members to explain past happenings constitutes primary source material in history. Its use is highly encouraged in the history EE, but is not a requirement.

In business management, students can include materials sourced from a particular business or organization whose area of business is related to the topic chosen (for example, market research companies, industry analysts or think tanks). In contrast, EEs in microeconomics allow students to carry out primary research in the form of surveys, questionnaires and interviews.

All areas of research, in all subjects, will necessitate some level of secondary research, even if students also use primary methods. Students must use secondary sources to establish the context of their research and to support the argument and conclusion of the essay. This is an important aspect of demonstrating knowledge and understanding.

An essay that is based solely on secondary data is permitted—if appropriate to the subject—and allows students to access all levels of the EE assessment criteria.

Proper planning of an essay should involve integrating source material in the light of the research question. Secondary sources of information include academic and research journals, books, newspaper and magazine articles and websites. Subject-specific examples are:

- In business management—the appropriate use and application of selected analytical tools, often supported by statistical data to assist any discussion and evaluation (for instance, Ansoff's Matrix, BCG Matrix, Decision tree analysis, etc).
In economics—statistical data collected from national statistical agencies, the IMF, the ILO, the World Bank and the WTO.

In social and cultural anthropology—a critical comparison and evaluation of two ethnographies exploring an anthropological concept.

Supervisors need to ensure that students are aware of their responsibility to cite properly 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 individuals and societies

| Introduction | An EE in individuals and societies is intended for students who are interested in undertaking research in an area of business management, economics, geography, global politics, history, ITGS, philosophy, psychology, social and cultural anthropology or world religions.

Qualitative and quantitative methods are used when writing EEs in this group. |
| --- | --- |
| Methods most relevant to subjects in this group | Primary methods involve content analysis, surveys, questionnaires, oral history, interviews, observation and fieldwork.

Secondary methods include academic and research journals, books, newspapers and magazines, maps, aerial photographs and satellite images, digital landscape simulations, videos, CDs, DVDs, GIS, diagrams and models, websites, analytical tools and statistical data. |
| Suggestions for possible sources | Use of peer-reviewed journals, newspaper articles, books, e-resources and publications online, specialized academic research engines, unpublished conference papers, previously published essays.

Students may wish to interview practitioners and professionals. |
| 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 | 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, librarians, practitioners and professionals in the field are a great source of information, advice and support for students.

Students should search for primary and secondary sources of information prior to initiating the writing process. The framing of a good research question, which is well structured and thought through, will aid students in establishing a reasoned argument. |
| 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. |