**IB Extended Essay—Lesson #8: Choosing Your Subject Area & Topic**

In this lesson you will start need to start making some decisions on the subject area and topic. To complete this lesson you will need to have a supervisor in place. From now on it is essential that you have someone who has understanding of your subject area to guide you and answer questions.

Choosing the subject

For the majority of students the subject area they choose is one that they find interesting, and one in which they have a sufficient body of knowledge. This is because, although you may not be aware of it consciously, studying the subject area gives you a good grounding in the tools, concepts and techniques needed to work in that area. There are four possible scenarios.

#### [**1 - One of your HL subjects**](https://learn.pamojaeducation.com/courses/23/module/2258/lesson/33895/lesson)

The most likely subject area for your extended essay is one of the subjects that you are studying for HL, a subject you are studying at higher depth and are confident to work in.

#### [**2 - One of your SL subjects**](https://learn.pamojaeducation.com/courses/23/module/2258/lesson/33895/lesson)

In some cases you may be taking an SL subject that really interests you, but you were not able to take at HL because it was not offered or there was not a teacher available. In most cases taking an SL in the subject would give you enough background to write an Extended Essay in the subject, but you will need to check with your supervisor.

#### [**3 - A subject you are not studying**](https://learn.pamojaeducation.com/courses/23/module/2258/lesson/33895/lesson)

In a small number of cases, it is possible to write an Extended Essay in a subject you are not studying, but you will need to be able to find a supervisor and then convince your supervisor that you have enough subject knowledge to be able to undertake the work. Remember the subject area must be one recognised by the IB. For example – it is not normally possible to undertake an extended essay in biochemistry as biochemistry is not a subject within the diploma programme.

#### [**4 - World Studies**](https://learn.pamojaeducation.com/courses/23/module/2258/lesson/33895/lesson)

The fourth scenario is to undertake a world studies extended essay. This is an in-depth interdisciplinary study of an issue of global significance.  Find out more about this approach in the section below.

WS has three major qualities:

* Brings together concepts, methods, or forms of communication from two or more disciplines.
* Connects disciplines to solve real world problems, or address complex issues in new ways.
* Clearly rooted in disciplinary knowledge and understanding.

WS must fit within one of six global themes. These are:

1. Conflict, peace and security.
2. Culture, identity and language.
3. Environmental and/or economic sustainability.
4. Equality and Inequality.
5. Health and development
6. Science, technology and society.

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| **World Studies Research Question** | **DP subjects** | **Themes** |
| The sustainability of high speed rail in China: Is the Beijing-Tianjin High Speed Railway Line economically and environmentally sustainable? | **ESS**and **Economics** | Environmental and/or economic sustainability |
| To what extent does the future of sustainable wind power lie in offshore or onshore projects? | **Physics** and **Business Management** | Environmental and/or Economic sustainability |
| Collision of cultures: What is the effect of placing Latin American students with a polychronistic cultural background into a monochronistic United States school system? | **Social and Cultural Anthropology** and **Psychology** | Culture, identity and language |
| How do theatre ensembles such as the Global Arts Corps investigate inherent structual violence in nations such as post-apartheid South Africa and build towards positive peace? | **Peace and Conflict Studies** and **Theatre** | Conflict, peace and security |
| To what extent do the Mountain Pine Beetle infestations on the pine forests of interior British Columbia have an economic impact on the logging industry? | **Biology** and **Economics** | Environmental and/or Economic sustainability |
| To what extent are the countermeasures against Striga Hermonthica infestations on staple crops successful in Sub-Saharan Africa and how will they be influenced by the growing threat of desertification? | **Geography** and **Biology** | Environmental and/or Economic sustainability |
| To what extent has a neoliberal system affected the Mapuche struggle to keep their culture and autonomy in Chile? | **Social and Cultural Anthropology** and **Economics** | Conflict, peace and security |

## Subject-specific guidance

Many subjects have specific requirements about what can and cannot be done with an extended essay.

For example:

* There are requirements in terms of generating data within sciences.
* Consideration needs to be given to word count in mathematics.
* Essays in language B must be written in the language B itself.

It is not possible to give all the detailed specific requirements for each subject here.  You will need to seek advice from your supervisor. So it is essential that you have a supervisor in place by the end of this lesson, to ensure you do not head off in a direction that cannot work.

Remember an excellent extended essay is one that is judged to be excellent against a **specific set of criteria** not an excellent essay in general.

## Choosing the topic

This is a decision which is very personal to you. Generally it is best not to choose a mainstream topic on your subject area. Doing this means you risk coming up with an unoriginal essay that is too close to class work and you risk not undertaking any research of your own.

It often works well to choose a topic area on the edge of the syllabus content or just outside it; one that takes you more deeply into an area of interest. Remember though that it is also perfectly OK to take on a topic not covered in your subject syllabus, provided you have the background to understand it and work with it. To ensure you are on the right lines with your choice, you also need to be able to articulate your motivation for wanting to do this research. If you are unable to explain why you are interested, then it is likely that your topic area will be problematic for you.

Start Planning

Your supervisor will now also give you a series of deadlines to help you structure your time and will discuss any particular requirements for your subject. You should now make up a planning form which details your subject choice, your topic, your motivation and then lists the deadlines agreed with your supervisor. You will return to this in lesson three of this unit.

Please refer to the Planning Sheet exemplar found in Introduction Lesson #1

# **Reflection: My topic and deadlines**

There are two tasks for this assignment.

**TASK 1:** You now need to write down your thinking on your topic. This should be in the following form:

**Subject area:**

**Topic:**

**Motivation:**

You can record this directly in your Journal here - or add a link to any shared document that you have created. This must now be shared with your supervisor and agreed by your supervisor. The process for this should be initiated through your coordinator in school irrespective of whether you are following a fully online support model or a blended learning support model. This may take time and may involve discussion between you and your potential supervisor. It may also involve you repeating the process if your first idea did not work out.

**TASK 2:**You now also need to set down your deadlines in a table (see the checklist in Introduction Lesson #2 for a general timeline). Some suggested milestones are listed below. Again you can record this directly in your Journal or link to a shared document.

* Choose subject and topic
* Find preliminary sources
* Collect resources or data
* First reflection session
* Prepare research question and title
* Interim reflection session
* Write a first draft
* Submit the final essay
* Final reflection session: Viva voce
* Complete the RPPF

**YOU MUST NOT PROGRESS ANY FURTHER IN THIS COURSE UNTIL YOU HAVE A SUPERVISOR WHO HAS AGREED WITH YOUR SUBJECT AND TOPIC CHOICE.**