

IB EXTENDED ESSAY

LESSON #1

WHAT IS THE EXTENDED ESSAY?

Below is a fictional dialogue between two people discussing the Extended Essay. Read through the content, review the key points and follow the task at the end of the lesson.

(Person A): I'm so worried about this Extended Essay I've been told I have to do! I don't think I can do it

(Person B): Don't worry - many students feel like this! You can do it! I did the IB DP and completed my extended essay in Psychology. I've now just finished my first year at university, studying Sociology.

(A): I don't know how or where to start! What topic did you choose? How and why did you choose it?

(B): I looked at the representation of women in the media through different cultures. It's an area that I have been interested in for a while and when it came up during my psychology discussions, I thought this was something I could research this further. Also living in a multi-cultural setting meant that I could see different examples first-hand. I wanted to study Sociology at university, so I know this would help me. I had to write about my academic experiences at school when I was applying to university, so I used my experience of writing my extended essay for this and it really impressed my professors.

(A): What's the most important thing about choosing a topic?

(B): Well remember that you'll be working on this for between 6 and 9 months so the most important thing is to choose a topic that you are interested in. Think of something that you really want to know more about. There are rules and guidelines which you will learn about, but you have lots of choice.

(A): So how long does the essay have to be? And how do you start writing?

(B): Well the IB requires up to 4000 words. Because you have the time and the support, and you and your supervisor will break it down into manageable chunks, it won't seem very long. So don't worry. Once you get started with the process, you will find it is very manageable. Two years ago this was the longest essay I ever had to write. However, now I am here at university I often have assignments that are that length and it seems normal. Actually the danger is that you'll want more than 4000 words at the end, which is not allowed.

(A): When did you start writing it? Can I leave it until right at the end of my course – I'm so busy with other things at the moment?

(B): I think that it is really important that you structure your time. You will have series of deadlines agreed with your supervisor – it is really important that you stick to these. The whole IB Diploma taught me about time management and I think writing the extended essay really emphasized the importance of this.

(A): How long did it take you to write it?

(B): I spent about 40 hours working on the essay and I started in February of my first year and finished at the start of November in my second year. This is why it is important that you set deadlines. You don't want to leave it until near the end!

(A): But it's so much work – is it worth it?

(B): Well - at university you'll be asked to research, plan, structure and write essays or reports of 4000 words or more, as part of your courses. The extended essay is a way of teaching you how to how to do this. It gives you a chance to learn and practice some skills that will be really useful at university and in the workplace...and when you get to university, those long essays will be familiar and much less scary.

(A): So what skills did you gain that you've been able to use at university?

(B): I think the EE was one of the most useful things I did as part of my Diploma Programme. I got some great experience in so many areas: decision-making, understanding and engaging with data, managing my time effectively, different methodologies, successes and challenges, and appropriate sources. These are things I need to work with all the time at university. The IB now also requires you to focus on regular reflection during the EE process. So you do all those things and then reflect - finding out what worked well, what didn't and so on. This skill is so important. It improves my learning, my research and in the end saves me time!

(A): So do you think that was the most useful thing you learned?

(B): Well it was important but I think the main skill everyone gains is actually how you go about undertaking effective research. I learnt how to identify reliable sources, how to research both in a physical library and using the Internet, how to structure what I found and how to write efficiently about it. By the end of it the process I had a good idea of how to actually do research. These are all things that have really helped me now I am at university.

(A): Was there anything specific to your subject?

(B): Because I did my extended essay in psychology I also had to think about the ethics associated to my project. If you are working with humans or animals in any way then this needs to be a primary consideration. Even in something as simple as having a conversation with someone! There are IB guidelines on ethical research that you need to agree to follow. They are there to keep you and those that you research safe.

(A): So who will help me through all this?

(B): Well you'll get a supervisor who will help and advise you. I did my Extended Essay through the Pamoja course. It gives you support and structure all the way through.

(A): Is there anything else I need to know?

(B): Yes don't forget the Extended Essay is worth points for your diploma. Along with the Theory of Knowledge, if you do a good job you can get up to three points.

(A): And how's it marked?

(B): It's marked against a set of five criteria. At this early stage you don't need to worry about them. Just make sure that you are familiar with them before you start any consolidated research or any writing. And ask advice if you are unsure. Your supervisor is there to help!

(A): Thank you so much. I feel I can make a start now



KEY FACTS

So important facts to remember are:

1. It needs to be no more than 4000 words long.
2. It should take about 40 hours.
3. You will have a supervisor to help you.
4. You decide on the area of research, the title and the research question.
5. It is marked against a set of criteria.
6. It is part of your overall point score in the Diploma Programme

GETTING THE FACTS RIGHT

You may well have heard quite a lot about the Extended Essay from your peers, from former DP students, from your teachers in school and from the Internet. One of the dangers with information like this is that it often starts off slightly inaccurate but with repeated telling becomes more inaccurate. The danger being that by the time you hear it, it becomes wholly inaccurate and sometimes contradictory.

TASK: REFLECTION: MY INITIAL RESPONSE

How do you feel about the extended essay after this initial lesson? Write a 150 word response in your journal/blog.

If you have set up a shared online document (Google Doc, MS Office Online etc.) please include the link here so that it can be shared with your supervisor.

If you have any questions, you can also ask those here. But please remember - we have only just started this unit. You may find that some of your questions are answered in the next few lessons. So perhaps just make a note of any questions about those topics for now, and check back with your supervisor later!

(Note: This assignment is not graded - it will just be reviewed by your supervisor, when you get one.)