

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Studies in language and literature

General questions

Should the school inform the IB about the literary works, or literary works and non-literary bodies of work, studied?

Schools do not need to inform the IB about the works (language A: literature) or works and bodies of work (language A: language and literature), studied in a course. What each student needs to complete, and both the student and the teacher need to sign, is the “Works studied” form which must be kept together with the learner portfolio in case the IB requests it.

[Works studied form](#)

Can students choose works or bodies of work they personally want to study, or must all students study the same ones?

Language A courses encourage differentiating instruction, giving students choice and allowing them a greater say in the selection of texts to be studied. It is therefore not necessary for all students in one course to study the same works (language A: literature), or works and bodies of work (language A: language and literature). However, that does not mean that the IB expects language A courses will now become self-taught or that all students will now engage in an individual, autonomous study.

All the works, or works and bodies of work, used for assessment components by students in a taught Language A course need to have been studied and discussed in class. The techniques, strategies and overall methodology suggested by literature circles, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), or differentiation proposals like Carol Tomlinson’s, might help teachers to allow students some choice while at the same time making sure that all works are discussed thoroughly. When an opportunity for student choice is offered, it must be done in such a way as to guarantee that all of the course requirements as regards literary form, period, place and prescribed works are met for each student.

Implementing strategies of this type is not compulsory, nor does it mean that teachers should differentiate in this way all of the time throughout the course. This is just a recommended practice, and the extent to which this is done in a class depends on each individual teacher and the group of students they teach, how comfortable they feel doing it and their assessment of how feasible it is to differentiate instruction in this way in their contexts.

Do all non-literary texts in the language A: language and literature course have to be studied in bodies of work?

Studying non-literary texts as bodies of work is necessary for students to be able to prepare properly for the individual oral and the higher level essay. Enough bodies of work have to be studied before the individual orals are recorded in order for students to have a broad choice from which to select when deciding on the work, the body of work and the global issue they are going to focus on for the individual oral.

After students have decided on the works and bodies of work they will be using for their individual oral, and after they have decided on the topic for their higher level essay, a teacher may decide to teach individual non-literary texts organized around some principle other than authorship. Non-literary texts will be studied, at that stage, in order to prepare students for paper 1, and this component does not require the study of non-literary texts in bodies of work.

For a more detailed discussion of the rationale behind bodies of work, please see the IB blog post

Intertextuality and intratextuality (i): connecting works and bodies of work.

When putting together a work or a body of work (for language A: language and literature), can a variety of authors be grouped together? Can a variety of text-types or literary forms or sub-categories within a literary form be grouped together? Can the texts come from different periods of an author's output?

When a literary work or a non-literary body of work is made up of a number of short texts, these texts have to be written by the same author or produced by the same creator, and they must belong to the same subcategory within a literary form or to the same non-literary text-type.

A work or a body of work cannot combine in it a variety of authors or a variety of literary forms, a variety of subcategories within a literary form, or a variety of non-literary text-types.

A work or body of work can include texts from different periods of an author's or creator's output, eg in the case of a poetic work, the poems need not come from the same book of poetry but may come from different books the poet has published in their writing career.

Can a teacher choose which works (language A: literature), or works and bodies of work (language A: language and literature), from those studied will be used by students for the different assessment components?

No. The student is responsible, with the teacher's guidance, for deciding, from the works or works and bodies of work studied in class, which ones they will be using for each of their assessment components. This is an individual decision for each student as a result of their reflections in the learner portfolio and will probably differ from student to student.

In language A: language and literature, must all the non-literary bodies of work studied be originally written in the target language, or can some be studied in translation?

Non-literary bodies of work may be studied in translation, provided that the translation studied is professional and has been published.

When are essays, speeches, letters and diary entries considered literary and when are they considered non-literary?

These text-types can be literary or non-literary depending on the specific characteristics of the text or collection of texts being considered. Key considerations in making a more informed decision are:

- (i) Is the author of the text(s) on the *Prescribed reading list* or somebody associated with the writing of literary texts?
- (ii) Does the text have literary qualities? Is it of a literary nature?

The latter question is a more elusive one, as its answer will depend on how one defines what makes a text "literary", and that definition may vary. In terms of specific examples, Octavio Paz's essays (*The Labyrinth of Solitude*), would be considered literary in terms of the first question. Asking the second question about these essays will surely produce an affirmative answer, too. However, Frédéric Martel's (*Global Gay: How Gay Culture Is Changing the World*), would tend to be considered non-literary, since there is no apparent aesthetic purpose in them (such as a recurrence of literary devices, an evident preoccupation with style and form, etc.).

Teachers should use their professional judgment and discretion when advising students on this important distinction. It is recommended that students are warned about choosing grey area text-types for the individual oral, since if the non-literary body of work chosen could be considered literary, then the dialogue between the literary and the non-literary which the individual oral aims at in the language A: language and literature course would not be achieved.

For a more detailed discussion, please check the IB blog post [Literary or non-literary: that is the question](#).

How many short texts by one author need to be studied for them to constitute a work (language A: literature), or works and bodies of work (language A: language and literature)?

Where more than one text is studied as a work, or as works and bodies of work, the undertaking for the student must be equivalent to studying a full-length work. How many short texts are necessary for this to be the case depends on the text-type, on the length and richness of each of the texts which the work or body of work includes, and on the time devoted to its study.

A film may be cursorily viewed/discussed in two or three hours, but an in-depth study of its elements and how they create meaning, supported by further individualized responses, may offer sufficient breadth and richness to satisfy requirements. Guidance for teachers may include that each work or body of work should offer students enough opportunities to establish a number of connections with the central concepts, the areas of exploration, possible global issues and other works or bodies of work being studied.

Should the texts in a work (language A: literature) or works and bodies of work (language A: language and literature) be linked to a common global issue?

The links of works, or works and bodies of work, to global issues should not be predetermined by teachers when planning their courses or when selecting texts. Ideally, within one body of work there should be a multiplicity of global issues that students could explore. It is the student's task—and not the teacher's—to discover possible connections between works and the bodies of work studied and the fields of inquiry or Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and then formulate a suitable global issue.

How should the idea of authorship be defined for a non-literary body of work?

Short non-literary texts must be by the same creator in order to constitute a body of work. The notion of "authorship" can only be expanded when it is not possible to identify a single creator. This would be the case, for example, of newspaper articles that are not by-lined, or commercials. In those cases, it is possible to apply the unifying notion of authorship to the newspaper where the articles were published, and the brand the commercials advertise (or the agency that produced the commercials).

Articles from different newspapers would not qualify as a body of work, though, even if they were about the same topic or event. Commercials for one same type of product—soap, for example—would not constitute a body of work if they were advertising different brands or if they were from different agencies.

Are the literary forms that writers are associated with in the *Prescribed reading list* prescriptive?

No. Any text written by an author on the *Prescribed reading list* can be studied as a prescribed work even if the literary form it belongs to is not mentioned on the list in relation to its author. The fact that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, for example, is included on the list as a prose: fiction writer does not mean that her prose: non-fiction cannot be studied as a prescribed work.

What is the difference between example papers and specimen papers?

Example papers and specimen papers have different purposes.

Example papers were created at an earlier stage than the specimen papers in order to generate student samples. They are different from a regular examination session paper in that they are not the result of a paper-editing meeting led by the assessment division at the IB Global Centre in Cardiff : each one was created instead by a paper-author working together with the Curriculum Manager.

The rubrics in them are not the final ones.

Specimen papers were produced closer to the release of the guides to provide teachers with a prototype of future examination papers. The procedure for creating them was exactly the same as for a regular examination session paper. Teachers should look at these for the final version of the rubrics of the examination.

How accurate and reliable are the examiner comments on the student samples on the programme resource centre?

The student examples in the programme resource centre and the ones used in workshops were assessed by the principal examiner of each of the components. Principal examiners are experienced examiners who lead the marking process of their components in an examination session. They are therefore the most authoritative voice in relation to the assessment of samples.

Teachers should remember that when marking these samples, principal examiners were facing a new component and applying a new set of criteria. Additionally, their marks and comments for these samples were not standardized and did not go through the regular marking process in an exam session. They should therefore not be considered the final word on the mark a sample may get. They do provide very useful guidance on the way the criteria will be interpreted and on the expectations in relation to students' work.

These student samples will be replaced by authentic ones with standardized marks after the first assessment in 2021.

Is there a prescribed format for the learner portfolio?

No. Students could keep a paper portfolio, an online one or a combination of these. It could be exclusively verbal, or multimodal. Each student should be allowed to choose which format suits their interests and learning style best.

How long should the school keep the portfolios as documentation?

Schools should keep the portfolios until the results of a session have been issued. If the school submits an enquiry upon results (EUR), then the learner portfolios should be kept until those enquiries have been resolved.

Paper 1

What kind of texts will paper 1 include?

In Language A: language and literature, paper 1 will only include non-literary texts. The paper will include two non-literary passages belonging to a different text-type each. One of these texts will be predominantly or exclusively visual.

In Language A: literature, paper 1 will include only literary texts which have not been written by authors on the *Prescribed reading list*. The paper will include two literary passages belonging to a different literary form each. Any of the subcategories of these literary forms could in principle be included. Any combination of the literary forms is possible.

The passages included can be either whole texts or extracts from longer texts. The passages will be the same ones for standard level and higher level. Examples of the kind of texts that can be included can be found in the specimen papers and example papers on the programme resource centre.

[English A: language and literature paper 1 specimen paper](#)

[English A: language and literature paper 1 example paper SL](#)

[English A: language and literature paper 1 example paper HL](#)

[English A: literature paper 1 specimen paper](#)

[English A: literature paper 1 example paper SL](#)

[English A: literature paper 1 example paper HL](#)

Must students answer the guiding question?

The guiding question offers a point of entry into the text that the paper authors considered a productive one for the students to explore. It is therefore highly recommended that students follow the guidance offered by the question, and it is expected most candidates will do so.

If a student decides that the point of entry proposed by the question would not allow them to demonstrate their understanding, interpretation, analysis and evaluation of the passage, then they should provide an alternative technical or formal aspect that is prominent in the text to focus their analysis on.

In either case, it is very important that the answer should be very sharply focused on how a particular technical or formal feature helps to construct meaning.

Paper 2

What will paper 2 questions be like?

Paper 2 questions will be based on the central concepts of the course even though they might not make direct reference to them. There will be four questions and these will be the same for both subjects and both levels within the two subjects. Sample questions can be found in the specimen papers and example papers on the programme resource centre.

[English A paper 2 specimen paper](#)

[English A paper 2 example paper](#)

Which are the text requirements for paper 2?

Paper 2 is a literary component, so only literary works may be used for it. Any literary work studied in class may be used **with the exception of those already used for other components**.

The higher level essay

How much guidance can a teacher give the students in the higher level essay?

Teachers may guide students as they make connections in their learner portfolio between the works (language A: literature) or works and bodies of work (language A: language and literature) studied, and the central concepts of the course. But the students must be allowed to decide which work or body of work their essay will be on, what the topic will be, and which approach they will take.

Teachers may only provide feedback—in written and/or oral form—on only one complete draft of the higher level essay. This feedback may consist of prompts or questions but it must not contain corrections or edits to the student's work. After the higher level essay has been returned with teacher feedback, the student can improve the essay and submit a final version.

How many higher level essays can a student write over the two-year course?

It is expected that students will only write one higher level essay but if they write more the teacher can only provide feedback for the first draft of each essay. A teacher must not help students pick the best higher level essay from those they have written.

Should the higher level essay be referenced? Should it contain a bibliography page?

All quotations included in the higher level essays must be properly referenced, in the manner expected of any academic text. Higher level essays must also contain a bibliography page. Any formatting style is acceptable as long as it is used consistently throughout the essay.

Individual oral

What should be done if the student's individual oral is not the expected length?

It is important to ensure beforehand that students have organized and prepared their individual oral carefully to stay within the allotted time and to make the most of the time allowed. This is in part what criterion C assesses, and when preparing the individual oral students should be made aware of this.

The student's individual oral should last approximately 10 minutes. The remaining 5 minutes must be used for subsequent discussion and questioning. The whole individual oral should not exceed 15 minutes. Absolutely no credit must be awarded for anything the student offers after 15 minutes as external moderators are not expected to listen to anything produced beyond this time.

If a student finishes the individual part of the oral before the 10 minutes are over, the teacher should ask discussion questions until the 15 minutes are completed, to help the student develop points that have not been adequately developed.

Can the individual oral be practised in class?

Students should be exposed to the content, format and assessment criteria of the individual oral as early as possible in the course. There should be clarity about what constitutes a global issue and how to formulate one, and there should be class activities aimed at encouraging students to understand a good individual oral.

The individual oral must not be rehearsed with the teacher. Care must be taken when modelling the individual oral in class, as any combinations of texts and global issues used for practice will not be available for any student for the real individual oral.

Should students be discouraged from using the same extracts, works (language A: literature) or works and bodies of work (language A: language and literature), and global issues, or is it acceptable for more than one student to take the same combination?

Given the highly personalized nature of the individual oral, it would be very unusual for two students to have chosen the same combination of extracts, works or works and bodies of work, and global issue. Students are meant to choose their extracts, texts and global issues based on their interests, and it is therefore very unlikely that two students will choose exactly the same combination. One of these elements might coincide, but very rarely will all of them be the same for two students.

On the rare occasions when this happens, teachers should resort to the students' learner portfolios to determine whether the reflection carried out in them is consistent with the final proposal presented by

the students in their outline forms. Students should be able to demonstrate that academic honesty has been respected by referring to the work done in their portfolios.

If academic dishonesty were suspected at the moment of submission of the outline forms to the teacher, the school would have to proceed as dictated by their academic honesty policy and ask one or both of the students to submit a different proposal.

What kind of guidance can teachers give students?

Teachers can support students as they work on their portfolios throughout the course, making connections across works (language A: literature) or works and bodies of work (language A: language and literature), and with fields of inquiry or Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Once students have formulated a global issue in connection with the works or works and bodies of work they will use for the individual oral, part of the reflection that will occur in the portfolio will concern which two extracts are the best representation of that global issue.

The teacher may guide and help the student in this reflection too. The last opportunity teachers have for providing feedback on the choices made by students for their individual orals will be when students submit their outline forms. After the outline form has been returned to the student with feedback, teachers cannot provide any more support or guidance.

Under no circumstances are students permitted to rehearse the individual oral with the teacher.

[Individual oral outline form](#)

What kind of questions are teachers expected to ask in the five minutes after the student has delivered their individual oral?

The starting point would be to ask about aspects of the extracts the students have brought which are relevant to the global issue, but which students may have not covered adequately. Students may be asked to go into greater depth regarding how authorial choices have constructed meaning in relation to the global issue. If the student has done this adequately already, they may be asked to expand on the relationship between the global issue and the whole of the works (language A: literature) or works and bodies of work (language A: language and literature) they have chosen, i.e. beyond the extract.

If none of these is possible—because the student has completed all of them successfully throughout the 10-minute oral—the teacher might ask the student to reflect on the process they went through in choosing the global issue and the two works, or works and bodies of work. They could discuss how they selected the extracts and how the portfolio helped.

How many global issues must the student talk about in the individual oral?

The student is required to focus on only one global issue connecting the two works (language A: literature) or the work and body of work (language A: language and literature) chosen. The global issue is the element that gives the individual oral cohesion and coherence.

How much time during the individual oral should be spent explaining how the extract relates to and reflects the works (language A: literature) or works and bodies of work (language A: language and literature) from which it was taken?

The student should be demonstrating their knowledge and understanding (criterion A) and their analysis and evaluation (criterion B) of both the extract and the work or body of work from which it was taken. There should therefore be a balance between the time spent discussing both : approximately the same amount of time should be spent discussing the presence of the global issue in each.

What can students bring with them when the individual oral is recorded? What needs to be submitted to the IB?

Students must bring the two unannotated extracts and the outline form. They cannot bring anything else with them. Only the extracts need to be submitted to the IB, together with the recording. The outline form needs to be kept by the school, but it will not be submitted unless the IB requests it.

How long should an extract from a graphic novel be? In the language A: language and literature course, what could an extract from a multimodal text such as a film look like?

As regards the length of the extract in texts such as graphic novels, the guide says: “In forms where the number of lines may not be applicable, teachers should be guided by the volume of text that can be discussed in sufficient depth in the time available.” This will vary from text to text, so we cannot provide definite guidance on the length of the extract, but care has to be taken that the amount of text in the extract is not unmanageable.

In the case of multimodal texts such as films or TV series, the extract should consist of both a part of the script and a number of stills that correspond to that section of the script. This is required in order for the student to be able to do justice to at least the verbal and visual layers of the multimodal text.

Does the extract need to consist of continuous lines of text, or could it consist of short extracts from the whole of the work or body of work which are pieced together according to a common global issue?

The extract must consist of continuous lines of text. Students must not create an extract by picking and choosing the most relevant bits from different parts of a work or body of work and putting them together. There cannot be interruption or ellipsis in an extract. Students will have a chance to refer to the rest of the work or body of work when they connect the part to the whole.

What should students take into account when formulating a global issue?

When identifying and formulating a global issue, students must bear in mind that it should have significance on a wide/large scale, be transnational, and have an impact on everyday local contexts. They should bear in mind that the five fields of inquiry included in the guide do not constitute in themselves global issues, but they are meant to provide a broad starting point from which a more specific and narrower global issue may be formulated. The teacher support material, in the section titled [“Incorporating global issues into learning and teaching”](#) offers more detailed guidance on how to formulate global issues in a way that is appropriate for the individual oral.

Is there a preferred way of organizing the individual oral?

Students are free to decide whether they feel more comfortable with a text-by-text approach or with a more integrated approach which makes the connections between the two texts explicit. The individual oral is not a comparative task, so the connections between the texts do not need to be made explicit. Whichever approach students choose, though, they should make sure they devote the same time to each work (language A: literature) or work and body of work (language A: language and literature) they have chosen and that the connection to the global issue is always focused on.