

Reading: The Great Gatsby

The IB Extended Essay

Five steps to developing a research question

Choose a subject and topic that is of interest.

Deciding on a subject and topic that is of interest and in which the student is personally invested is important if their motivation is to be sustained throughout the process. The student should be able to identify, in a broad sense, what it is that they are interested in and why.

Carry out preliminary reading.

After deciding on a topic of interest students should undertake some general reading around the issue. Questions they must consider at this stage are:

- What has already been written about this topic?
- Was it easy to find sources of information?
- Is there a range of different sources available?
- Is there a range of views or perspectives on the topic?
- What interesting questions have started to emerge from this reading?

Consider the emerging questions.

The student should now begin posing open-ended questions about their general topic. These questions will usually be framed using the terms “how”, “why” or “to what extent”.

Evaluate the question.

Once possible research questions have been posed they should be evaluated. This evaluation should be based on whether the research question is clear, focused, and arguable.

Clear: Will the reader understand the nature of my research? Will it direct the research being undertaken?

Focused: Will the research question be specific enough to allow for exploration within the scope of the task (that is, the number of words and time available)?

Arguable: Does the research question allow for analysis, evaluation and the development of a reasoned argument?

Consider research outcomes.

Once a provisional research question has been decided upon students should start thinking about the direction their research might take. This could be in terms of:

- suggesting possible outcomes of the research
- outlining the kind of argument they might make and how the research might support this
- considering options if the research available is not sufficient to support a sustained argument. Your research question should be sharp and focused

Start researching your question

Writing the extended essay

The structure of the essay is very important. It helps students to organize the argument, making the best use of the evidence collected.

There are six required elements of the final work to be submitted. More details about each element are given in the “Presentation” section. Please note that the order in which these elements are presented here is not necessarily the order in which they should be written.

Six required elements of the extended essay:

1. Title page
2. Contents page
3. Introduction
4. Body of the essay
5. Conclusion
6. References and bibliography

The title page should include only the following information:

- the title of the essay
- the research question
- the subject for which the essay is registered (if it is a language essay also state which category it falls into; if a world studies essay also state the theme and the two subjects utilized)
- word count.

An important note:

Please note that name of the student or the school should not appear on the title page or on any page headers. This is because the work is assessed anonymously.

The title

The title of your essay should be a clear, focused summative statement of your research, which gives the reader an indication of your research topic. It should not be phrased as a research question.

Examples of Title and Research Questions

Title:

Negative externalities of consumption: Australian policy on cigarette packaging

Research Question:

How effective has the Australian policy of plain cigarette packaging been in reducing the negative externalities associated with the consumption of cigarettes in X?

Title:

Commodification and the body—an ethnographic study of social representations about the human body with relation to organ donation

Research Question:

To what extent can we interpret the negative attitude from laymen towards organ donation as an act of resistance towards the demands of the hegemonic medical model? The case of organ donation in Argentina.

Title:

An exploration of evil as a motivating force in drama

Research Question:

How effectively does Christopher Marlowe present his view of evil in Dr. Faustus?

Title:

The feasibility of wireless networking in a city-wide context

Research Question:

To what extent is wireless networking a feasible alternative to cabled networking within a whole city context?

Contents page

A contents page must be provided at the beginning of the extended essay and all pages should be numbered. Please note that an index page is not required and if included will be treated as if it is not present.

Introduction

The introduction should tell the reader what to expect in the essay. The introduction should make clear to the reader the focus of the essay, the scope of the research, in particular an indication of the sources to be used, and an insight into the line of argument to be taken.

While students should have a sense of the direction and key focus of their essay, it is sometimes advisable to finalize the introduction once the body of the essay is complete.

Body of the essay (research, analysis, discussion and evaluation)

The main task is writing the body of the essay, which should be presented in the form of a reasoned argument. The form of this varies with the subject of the essay but as the argument develops it should be clear to the reader what relevant evidence has been discovered, where/how it has been discovered and how it supports the argument. In some subjects, for example, the sciences, sub-headings within the main body of the essay will help the reader to understand the argument (and will also help the student to keep on track). In structuring their extended essay, students must take into consideration the expected conventions of the subject in which their extended essay is registered.

Once the main body of the essay is complete, it is possible to finalize the introduction (which tells the reader what to expect) and the conclusion (which says what has been achieved, including notes of any limitations and any questions that have not been resolved).

Any information that is important to the argument must not be included in appendices or footnotes/ endnotes. The examiner will not read notes or appendices, so an essay that is not complete in itself will be compromised across the assessment criteria.

Conclusion

The conclusion says what has been achieved, including notes of any limitations and any questions that have not been resolved. While students might draw conclusions throughout the essay based on their findings, it is important that there is a final, summative conclusion at the end. This conclusion(s) must relate to the research question posed.

References and bibliography

Students should use their chosen style of academic referencing as soon as they start writing. That way they are less likely to forget to include a citation. It is also easier than trying to add references at a later stage. For more information on this, refer to the guidelines in the IB document Effective citing and referencing.

Writing the essay takes time but if students have used their Researcher's reflection space and reflection sessions in a meaningful way they should be well prepared to develop their arguments.