

World dance studies

International Baccalaureate · IB Diploma · Dance · HL

IB Diploma Programme Dance HL (first assessment 2016; 2014 guide). This topic equips the externally assessed DANCE INVESTIGATION (25% HL): a formal written report of no more than 2 500 words analysing the similarities and differences between two dance styles drawn from different dance cultures and/or traditions, one familiar and one unfamiliar to the student. This handout teaches the comparative method, the elements to compare and the report. All worked examples are original.

Must-know for world dance studies:

Family	Content
styles	two styles from different cultures or traditions: one familiar, one unfamiliar
elements	actions, space, dynamics, relationships: what to compare
contexts	historical and current: how each style lives now
report	formal written report, at most 2 500 words, sources attributed
analysis	similarities AND differences, explained not listed

Choosing the two styles

The **dance investigation** compares two styles from different **dance cultures** or **traditions**, one familiar to the student and one unfamiliar: the pairing must have contrast value (styles so alike that the comparison is decorative) and shared instruments (so the comparison is fair: both have communicative movement to analyse). The unfamiliar style is studied through research AND physical engagement: the course's physical and theoretical understanding.

Worked example. A student trained in studio contemporary (familiar) investigates hula kahiko (unfamiliar): both use the torso as the primary communicator, but the training, function and transmission differ.

The comparison: elements and contexts

The comparison runs on the **dance elements**: actions (what the body does), space (level, direction, pathway), dynamics (weight, time, flow), relationships (to partners, group, audience). Each similarity or difference is then explained through **context**: the historical context of each style and its current context (who performs it, where, for whom, how it is taught).

Worked example, continued. Element: both styles centre the torso (similarity); context: contemporary isolates the torso as trained mechanics for an audience that watches, while hula kahiko's torso carries text (the hands speaking the chant), performed within a living ceremonial practice (difference explained by function and transmission).

A second element compared: dynamics. Contemporary trains weight changes as craft (the drop into the floor as trained release); hula kahiko keeps weight low and steady, the grounded base that lets the text be carried (power used for meaning, not display). The report reads both through function: one aesthetic, one ceremonial, so the same element answers two purposes.

element	studio contemporary (familiar)	hula kahiko (unfamiliar)	explained by context
TORSO (actions)	isolated as trained mechanics	carries the text: the hands speak the chant	watched by an audience vs living ceremony
WEIGHT (dynamics)	drop into the floor as trained release	low and steady: a grounded base for text	aesthetic purpose vs ceremonial purpose

Name the element in both styles, then let context explain the difference.

The report

The report is formal written work of at most 2 500 words: a comparison with a spine (the two styles named, the elements chosen, the contexts researched), sources attributed throughout. The discipline: every claim about a style is evidenced (described movement, cited source); the similarities and differences are analysed (explained by context), not listed; and the conclusion weighs what the comparison taught, including the student's physical engagement with the unfamiliar style.

Worked example, concluded. The report's conclusion: studying hula kahiko physically changed the student's own contemporary practice (the torso as carrier of meaning, not only of technique): the investigation's finding is a connection, not just a catalogue.

Checklist

- Two styles, different cultures, one familiar and one unfamiliar (styles).
- Claims made through the elements, described and evidenced (elements).
- Historical and current contexts researched, differences explained by them (con-texts).
- The comparison analysed, sources attributed, engagement included (report).
- The worked contemporary-and-hula investigation understood (worked). Boundary notes: the examiner must see the making: compositional decisions visible, sources attributed, the performance interpreted. All worked examples are original.