The inquiry project

International Baccalaureate · IB Diploma · Digital Society · SL

IB Diploma Programme Digital Society SL (first assessed in 2024). The internal assessment is the **inquiry project**: your own investigation into the **impacts and implications** of one real digital system for people and communities. It is worth 30% at SL and 20% at HL, and the course gives about 30 hours to it. You submit three things: an **inquiry process document**, a recorded **multimedia presentation** (up to 10 minutes) and a list of **references**. The requirements are the same at SL and HL.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, people in China showed a green health code on their phones to take a bus, enter a shop or visit a hospital. For most people this took a few seconds. But in 2020 China had about 264 million people aged 60 or over, and many of them had no smartphone, or did not know how to use the app. News reports told of older people turned away from buses and stations. In November 2020 the State Council published a plan to help older people with smart technology: places had to offer other ways in, such as paper certificates or help from staff, and to keep accepting cash. A system that made life easier for most people had shut out others. Finding out who gains, who loses and why is exactly what an inquiry project does.

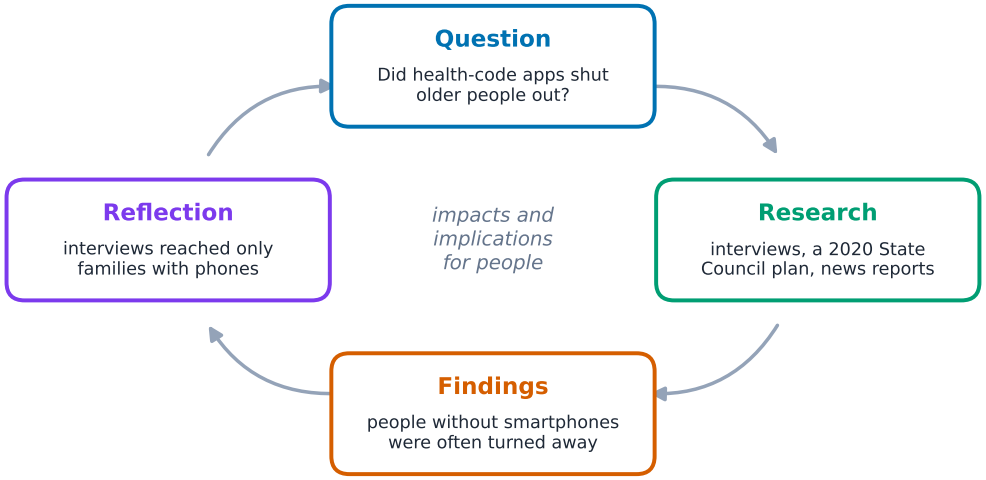
Must-know for the inquiry project:

Part	Key content
focus	one real digital system; one concept, content area and context; a focused question
research	diverse sources, primary and secondary; claim, perspective and origin
impacts and implications	what changed for whom; what it means next
process document	the record of your inquiry, written while it happens
presentation	recorded, up to 10 minutes, several modes, every claim sourced
references	every source listed

The inquiry cycle

The project follows a cycle:

1. **Question**: choose a real digital system that affects people you can find out about, and focus it with the four parts from topic 01: concept + content + context + real-world example.
2. **Research**: collect **primary sources** (your own interviews, surveys or observations) and **secondary sources** (news reports, studies, official documents).
3. **Findings**: explain the impacts (what has changed) and the implications (what follows from it, for whom).
4. **Reflection**: what your inquiry could not see, and what you would do next.



The inquiry cycle, with the health-code project at each stage.

Impact or implication? An **impact** is an effect that has happened ("older people without smartphones were turned away from buses"). An **implication** is what it means or may lead to ("public services that need an app may leave out whoever cannot use one, so they need a non-digital option").

Worked project

- **System**: health-code apps in a Chinese city, 2020–2022.
- **Focus**: power and change (concepts) + data and networks (content) + social and health contexts. Question: "How did health-code apps change older people's ability to move around the city?"
- **Primary sources**: interviews with six grandparents (names changed, with their consent) and a bus driver.
- **Secondary sources**: the State Council's November 2020 plan; news reports; census figures on the older population.
- **Findings**: most interviewees relied on a grandchild to show the code; two stopped taking buses for some months; staff help became common after the 2020 plan.
- **Reflection**: everyone interviewed had a family member with a smartphone, so the people most shut out were not in the sample.

Working with sources

Use the same three questions as in topic 02 (claim, perspective, origin and purpose), and look for real **diversity of sources** : the users, the people who run the system, the government and researchers. A source that disagrees with you is useful: show you have weighed it.

Research ethics matter. Ask people for their **consent** before you interview them, do not show faces or real names without permission, and never collect private data such as ID numbers.

The process document

The inquiry process document is the record of how your inquiry developed. Write it *while* you work, not at the end:

- why you chose this system and this focus;
- the sources you found, and what you learned from each;
- the decisions you made: what you cut, changed or added, and why;
- the feedback you received (for example, from your teacher after a draft), and what you changed because of it.

The presentation and references

The multimedia presentation is recorded, and lasts up to 10 minutes. It should argue, not just show. Use several modes: your spoken explanation, a chart of your survey results, a short clip or photo of the system in use. Show the source of every claim and image on screen. The list of references gives full details for every source you used.

Common mistakes:

- a read-aloud essay with no visuals, or a montage of images with no argument;
- a topic that is too wide ("social media and young people");
- describing the technology without its impacts on people;
- sources that all say the same thing, or no sources on screen.

Checklist

- 30% SL, 20% HL; three parts: process document, presentation (up to 10 minutes), references.
- A focused question on one real system: concept + content + context + example.
- Primary and secondary sources; diverse perspectives; consent.
- Impacts (what happened) and implications (what it means).
- The process document written during the inquiry.
- The worked health-code project.