

Research questions, evidence and academic integrity

International Baccalaureate · IB Diploma · Extended Essay

IB Diploma Programme Extended Essay (core component, taken at both levels). The extended essay is an independent, self-directed piece of research, finished as a 4 000-word essay in a chosen subject, with a research question the student formulates and pursues under a supervisor's guidance, three mandatory reflection sessions recorded on the Reflections on Planning and Progress form, and academic integrity throughout (citation, attribution, the author's own voice). This handout teaches the research question, the evidence discipline, integrity and the reflection. All worked examples are original.

Must-know for research questions, evidence and academic integrity:

Family	Content
question	focused, arguable, researchable: the essay lives or dies here
evidence	sources found, evaluated, and made to argue: analysis over description
integrity	citation, attribution, and the author's own voice: no borrowed essay
reflection	three mandatory sessions recorded on the RPPF: engagement assessed
word	4 000 words: structure chosen so the argument fits

The research question

The **research question** must be focused (one bounded case, not a field), arguable (two defensible answers, or the essay reports instead of arguing) and researchable (sources exist that a student can reach). The discipline: the question names its object, its angle and its scope: not 'was the treaty unfair?' but 'did the reparations clauses of the treaty shape the 1923 hyperinflation more than monetary policy?' (a bounded claim two sources can fight over).

Worked example. A history EE question narrowed in three moves: from a book ('the treaty's consequences'), to a field ('the treaty and the German economy'), to a question ('did the reparations clauses shape the 1923 hyperinflation more than monetary policy?'), each move cutting scope and sharpening the argument.

Evidence and the 4 000 words

Evidence is sources made to argue: primary material (the document, the dataset, the score) read closely, and secondary material (the scholars) positioned, not transcribed. The discipline: every paragraph advances the answer (description earns no words), sources are evaluated for **perspective and provenance** (who wrote, when, for whom), and the structure is chosen so the argument fits the **4 000 words** limit: the narrowing move at the start spends words buying focus.

Worked example, continued. The reparations essay spends its words: 500 on the question and historiography, 2 500 on two contested chapters (the London schedule; the Reichsbank's policy), 700 on the counterargument, 300 on the conclusion: the structure serves the argument, not the reading.

Academic integrity

The essay's ground is **academic integrity** : every borrowed idea, quotation and dataset is cited at the point of use with a consistent style, the bibliography lists everything cited, and the argument's voice is the author's own (sources positioned, not pasted). The **citation** that integrity demands is not decoration: it is the trace that lets a reader re-walk the research. The failures: the paraphrased patchwork (borrowed sentences reshuffled), the uncited figure, and the ghost argument (the supervisor's thesis, not the student's).

Worked example, continued. The essay's integrity page: the reparations schedule quoted and cited at the point of use; the two historians named where they disagree (not in a review paragraph); the Reichsbank dataset's provenance stated; the author's voice carrying the comparison.

Reflection and the three sessions

Three mandatory **reflection sessions** with the supervisor frame the journey (early: the question and plan; interim: the writing and its troubles; final: the viva-voce conversation after submission), and the student's written **reflection** on the RPPF is assessed for engagement: what the researcher learned about research, not a diary of hours. The strongest reflections name a real decision (the question narrowed after the sources failed) and what it taught.

Worked example, concluded. The interim reflection: the monetary-policy chapter collapsed when the Reichsbank minutes proved unreadable; the decision (argue the reparations side closely, treat monetary policy through two secondary debates) and the lesson (a question must match the sources a student can actually reach) recorded in 150 honest words.

Checklist

- The question focused, arguable, researchable (question).
- Sources evaluated for perspective and provenance, made to argue (evidence).
- Cited at the point of use; the voice the author's own (integrity).
- Three sessions, the RPPF naming real decisions (reflection).
- The worked reparations essay's structure understood (worked). Boundary notes: the assessor must see the researcher: the question the student's own, the voice the student's own, the reflection honest. All worked examples are original.