The historical investigation

IB DP History internal assessment: the historical investigation (guide first assessed 2017)

The historical investigation

- explain what the historical investigation asks for and how it is marked;
- choose a narrow, answerable question at least ten years in the past;
- identify and analyse two sources in relation to the question;

The historical investigation (2)

- build an argument by theme, weigh evidence and historians' views, and reach a conclusion;
- reflect on the methods historians use and the challenges they face.

Choosing and planning

- **narrow**: a person, a decision, an event or a policy, not "a war";
- **answerable**: the evidence exists and you can reach it;
- **debatable**: historians disagree, or the answer is not simply in the textbook.

Sources, evidence and evaluation

- Section 1 states the question, then identifies **two sources** and explains why each is relevant to it.
- It then analyses both with OPVL from topic 01: origin, purpose and content as the handles, value and limitations **relative to your question**.

Sources, evidence and evaluation (2)

- Use one **primary source** (a document, speech, statistic or memoir from the time) and one **secondary source** (a historian's book or article) if you can: the contrast gives you more to say.
- **Weak and strong evaluation.** Weak: "The memoir is biased because Hoare wrote it." Strong: "Because Hoare wrote in 1954, after the Second World War had made appeasement a word of shame, he had a reason to stress the danger of pushing Italy towards Germany.

Analysis, conclusion and reflection

- Section 2 is **analysis** , not narrative: each part argues one point with evidence, weighs the other side and leads into the next.
- Name the historians who disagree and explain why they disagree (different sources, different questions, different times of writing).
- The conclusion answers the question directly and follows from the argument.
- **A section 2 paragraph, analysed.** "The plan's terms mattered less than its leak.

Sources for this lesson

- International Baccalaureate, *History guide* (first assessment 2017), internal assessment criteria.
- Haile Selassie, speech to the League of Nations Assembly (30 June 1936).
- R. Mallett, *Mussolini in Ethiopia, 1919–1935* (2015); G. W. Baer, *Test Case: Italy, Ethiopia and the League of Nations* (1976).
- E. H. Carr, *What is History?* (1961).

Common errors

- Choosing a question too wide to answer in 2,200 words, such as "Why did the Second World War happen?"
- Choosing a topic less than ten years in the past.
- Analysing sources in general rather than for their value and limitation for **your** question.

Common errors (2)

- Writing section 2 as a narrative instead of an argument organised by theme.
- Reporting only the evidence that supports your answer.
- Writing a **reflection** about history in general that never links back to your own investigation.

Key terms

- **Historical investigation**: the internal assessment: your own research on a historical question, at most 2,200 words.
- **Sanctions**: penalties, such as trade bans, imposed on a state to change its behaviour.
- **Corroboration**: when two independent sources support the same point.

Key terms (2)

- **Historiography**: the study of how historians have interpreted a topic and why they disagree.
- **Bibliography**: the full list of sources used in a piece of work.
- **Reflection**: section 3 of the investigation, on the methods and challenges of history.

Check yourself

- 1.
- What is the word limit, and how are the 25 marks divided between the three sections? 2.
- Narrow "the League of Nations and Ethiopia" into an investigation question. 3.
- Why were the League's sanctions on Italy in 1935 weak? 4.