# The HL essay

IB DP English A: Language and Literature HL essay: a line of inquiry in 1,500 words

# The HL essay

- explain the format, rules and criteria of the HL essay;
- narrow a topic into a line of inquiry through a **concept** and the writer's choices;
- plan the structure of a 1,200–1,500-word essay;
- quote, **cite** and draft in the way the essay requires.

# From topic to line of inquiry

- The course has seven **concepts** 概念: **identity** 身份认同, **culture** 文化, **creativity** 创造力, **communication** 交流, **perspective** 视角, **transformation** 转变 and **representation** 再现.
- Linking your topic to one **concept**, and then to a feature of the writer's craft, turns a topic into a question you can answer in 1,500 words.
- *Narrow the topic step by step until the question fits the word limit*
- A good line of inquiry names the work, points to the writer's choices ("how does ... use"), and leaves room for an argument.

# Structure

- **Thesis**: Ibsen's stage objects move from signs of Nora's childlike dependence to signs of the lies her marriage rests on, so that the audience sees her position change before she says it.
- Paragraph 1: the macaroons. Nora eats them secretly because her husband has forbidden them, a small lie that shows she is treated like a child, and that she already resists.

# Structure (2)

- Paragraph 2: the Christmas tree, decorated in Act I and "stripped of its ornaments" at the start of Act II, as Krogstad's threat grows.
- Paragraph 3: the locked letter box. Krogstad's letter sits inside it, and only Helmer has the key: the truth is in the house, but the husband controls it.
- Paragraph 4: the final door. The sound of the door closing replaces all the objects: Nora leaves the "doll's house" itself.
- Conclusion: the objects make the play's argument visible on stage.

# Assessment criteria

- The IB marks the essay on four criteria of 5 marks each.
- Criteria A and B reward what you understand and how well you analyse the writer's choices; C rewards an argument that develops step by step; D rewards clear, academic English.
- A narrow line of inquiry helps with all four, because it gives every paragraph the same job.

# Writing well

- Quote briefly: a few words in your sentence, not long blocks.
- Use the present tense for what happens in the work: "Nora leaves."
- **Cite** 引用 every quotation and every idea from another writer, using one referencing style (for example MLA) and a list of **works cited** 引用文献.

# Writing well (2)

- Your teacher can comment on one draft only, so make that draft complete.
- The essay must be your own work: using someone else's ideas or writing, including text generated by AI tools, without citing it is **academic misconduct** **学术不端**.

# Sources for this lesson

- International Baccalaureate, *Language A: Language and Literature guide* (first assessment 2021), HL essay criteria.
- H. Ibsen, *A Doll's House* (1879), translated by M. Meyer (1965).
- T. Moi, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism* (2006), on *A Doll's House* in performance.
- Modern Language Association, *MLA Handbook* (9th edition, 2021).

# Common errors

- Choosing a topic so wide ("women in *A Doll's House*") that the essay says a little about many things and proves nothing.
- Writing a line of inquiry that does not name the work or point to the writer's choices.
- Using a work you also use in the individual oral or Paper 2.

# Common errors (2)

- Summarising the plot instead of analysing the writer's choices.
- Handing in an incomplete draft; the teacher comments on one draft only.
- Using ideas or text from another writer, or from an AI tool, without citing them.

# Key terms

- **HL essay**: a formal essay of 1,200 to 1,500 words on one work or body of work, worth 20% of the HL grade.
- **Line of inquiry**: the focused question that an HL essay answers.
- **Concept**: one of the course's seven big ideas, such as **identity**, **perspective** or **representation**.

exercises.lol exercises.com.cn

# Key terms (2)

- **Works cited**: the list of sources at the end of an essay.
- **Academic misconduct**: using someone else's ideas or writing without acknowledging it.

# Check yourself

- 1.
- What are the word range, marks and weight of the HL essay? 2.
- Name the seven concepts. 3.
- Narrow "advertising and gender" into a line of inquiry. 4.