The philosophical analysis

International Baccalaureate · IB Diploma · Philosophy · SL

IB Diploma Programme Philosophy SL (the guide first assessed in 2024). The internal assessment is the **philosophical analysis** : a piece of writing of up to 2,000 words in which you analyse a **non-philosophical stimulus** , something from everyday life that is not itself philosophy. It is worth 25% at SL and 20% at HL, and the course gives about 20 hours to it.

Imagine an advertisement for an AI companion app. A smiling young person sits alone at night, talking to a phone. The slogan says: "Always there. Always understands you." The advert is not philosophy, but it hides philosophical questions. Can a machine *understand* anything? Can a relationship with a program be friendship? Is it wrong to sell lonely people the feeling of being understood? The IA asks you to find one such question in an ordinary object and to think it through carefully.

Must-know for the philosophical analysis:

Area	Key content
format	up to 2,000 words; 25% SL, 20% HL; the stimulus is attached
stimulus	non-philosophical: an advert, photo, cartoon, news story, song lyric, game
issue	a philosophical question that the stimulus raises
analysis	concepts explained, applied to the stimulus, argued, objections answered
voice	your own developed argument, not a summary of philosophers

Choosing the stimulus and the issue

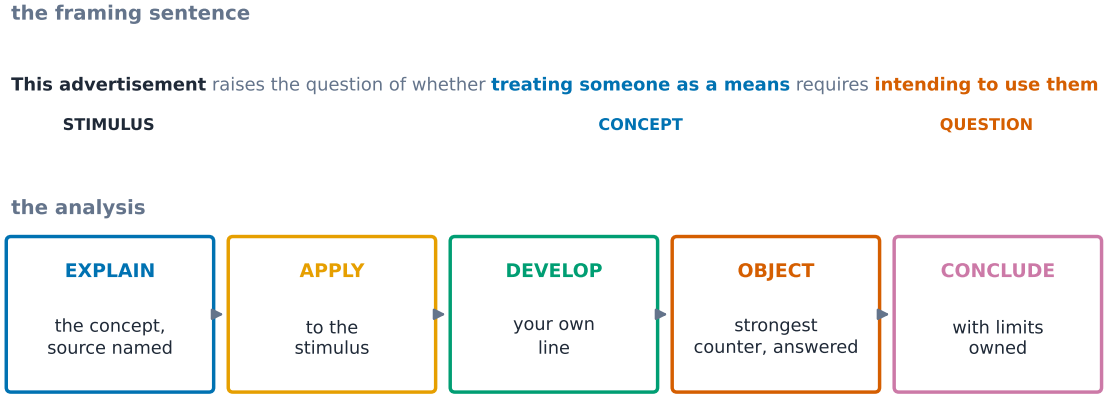
The **stimulus** must not already be philosophy: no textbook extract, no famous thought experiment. Good stimuli are specific and rich: a news photograph, an advertisement, a cartoon, a scene from a film, the rules of a game.

Find the **issue** by asking core-theme questions about it: what does it assume about persons, freedom, knowledge or what matters? A philosophical question is answered by reasoning, not by surveys or experiments.

Not philosophical	Philosophical
How many people use AI companion apps?	Can a relationship with an AI be a real friendship?
Do adverts make people buy more?	Is it wrong to persuade people by using their emotions?

Write a **framing sentence** that joins the stimulus, a concept and the question:

”This advertisement raises the question of whether friendship requires two beings who can both understand each other.”



The framing sentence names stimulus, concept and question; the analysis then makes five moves.

The five moves of the analysis

1. Explain the **concept** precisely, with a source (for example, Aristotle’s three kinds of friendship: for usefulness, for pleasure, and for the other person’s own sake).
2. **Apply** it to the specific details of the stimulus (the slogan “always understands you”; the person alone at night).
3. **Develop** your own argument step by step, not a list of philosophers.
4. Answer the strongest **objection** .
5. **Conclude** with a clear answer and its limits.

Worked example

- Stimulus: the AI companion advert above.
- Issue: can a relationship with an AI be a real friendship?
- Concept: Aristotle’s highest friendship needs two people who each wish good for the other for the other’s own sake.
- Application: the app can give pleasure and usefulness (company, advice), the two lower kinds; the slogan claims more, “understanding”.
- Argument: if the program does not have wishes of its own, it cannot wish good for the user for the user’s sake, so the highest friendship is impossible; the advert sells the feeling of it.
- Objection: we cannot see inside other humans either; we judge friends by their behaviour, and the AI behaves like a friend (a functionalist reply).

- Reply: with humans we have strong reasons to believe there is someone inside; with the app, we know how it was built, and it was built to keep us using it, which is a reason for doubt.
- Conclusion: the relationship may be valuable as a lower kind of friendship, but the advert's promise of being "understood" is misleading; the conclusion depends on the open question of machine minds (topic 01).

Common mistakes: the "gallery" (five philosophers, no argument of your own); the report (all explanation, no position); drifting into psychology or sociology instead of reasoning.

Checklist

- The format: up to 2,000 words; 25% SL, 20% HL; stimulus attached.
- A non-philosophical, specific stimulus; a philosophical question; a framing sentence.
- The five moves: concept, application, argument, objection, conclusion.
- The worked AI-companion analysis.
- Your own voice; avoid the gallery, the report and the drift.