

Examiners' tips

As you begin the final stages of your exam preparation, three IB examiners draw on their experience to provide you with revision techniques and tips

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Dr Rutherford's top ten tips

Jill Rutherford is a former chief examiner for environmental systems and societies, and principal examiner for paper 1. She is now academic director of Ibicus.

- 1 Answer the question set and be familiar with the command terms and what they mean. You can know loads, but if you 'describe' when you are asked to 'explain', you don't get the marks. Underline the command terms in each question and make sure you do what the question asks you to do.
- 2 Notice how many marks (and lines) are allocated for each part of the question. Don't write less or more than you think is required. Be wary of going over the box size onto extra paper. Usually it is because you are waffling and have not thought through the answer before you start writing. If you have large handwriting, you might need to practise making it smaller.
- 3 Structure your response to make it as straightforward as possible for the examiner to understand what you are saying.
- 4 If you are given reading time, use it well. Scan the paper to get an idea of what is required of you. Then read it more carefully and jot down thoughts, answers, relevant facts, essay ideas etc.
- 5 You don't have to start answering at question 1. If you have a response booklet to write in, do the easy questions first. That will give you more confidence and calm you down if you are worried.
- 6 If there are essays and a choice, spend some time at the start of the exam deciding which to answer. Request some extra response paper and start your essay plans on these. If you mess up the timing, you can hand these in and hopefully gain a few marks. Answer what you think is your second-best essay first. This will get you into the swing of writing and should mean your best essay scores even more.
- 7 Never leave a blank response. Have a go. Often your instinctive answer can be right, or a guess may get a mark.
- 8 Research good examples and case studies that you can use to illustrate your arguments. Make sure you have both local and global examples and that you know what you are talking about. Don't make things up — the examiner will know.
- 9 Write concisely and coherently. Know what you want to say before starting to write. Rehearse your arguments and evaluations on rough paper or in your head.
- 10 Know the grade descriptors for the subject and attempt to meet the grade 7 requirements when you answer a paper. You won't do everything in every answer, but you should try across the whole paper.

Dr Dunn on revising for history

Alastair Dunn sets paper 1 for route 1 history and contributes to the IB history Curriculum Review Committee.

One of the main challenges for you as an IB history student is the quantity of factual content in the course, especially at higher level. However, it is worth remembering that for the timed essay answers in papers 2 and 3, you will not only lack the time to use all the knowledge that you have retained, but even to attempt to do so would run the risk of producing a narrative answer, rather than one that is argument-led and that responds directly to the question.

One solution is to look at high-mark papers produced by past students and carefully check the balance of fact and argument

needed to gain a strong mark. This can often be reassuring if you are worrying that you have to learn everything by rote. It is a good exercise to type out the paragraph from a strong answer and colour-code the relative balance of knowledge, argument, analysis and interpretation.

Another solution is to build your revision around essay plans, in which you not only plan the overall shape of your answer, but also put limits on how much time can be spent on a particular sub-topic. Being mindful of the clock in the planning stage can help you prioritise the factual knowledge that is essential to supporting the key points in a particular paragraph.

Aaron Deupree on English B assessments

Aaron is head of ESL at the Leysin American School, Switzerland, and an IB English B examiner.

For many IB Diploma students whose first language is not English, English B provides a chance to enhance their communication skills through the study of non-literary texts and various genres. However, there may be a misconception that because English B students in English-medium DP schools are exposed to English in most of their classes, they do not need to revise extensively for English B assessments. In fact, specific revision strategies should be undertaken for the various English B assessments in order to obtain success.

Interactive and individual oral

- Improve accuracy, fluency and intonation through repetition and reflection.
- Repeated mock oral assessments offer a chance to practise and receive feedback.
- Audio/video recordings give you a chance to listen to yourself or others and reflect on potential improvements.
- Practice talks allow you to note word and sentence stress as well as intonation, raising awareness of such language features.

Written assignment

- Stress intertextual reading skills to help with writing.
- At standard level, practise taking notes and comparing and contrasting source texts on a particular core topic.
- At higher level, consider the texts in a new light ('...what if?') in order to engage with them in a creative way.

Paper 1

Improve reading comprehension by skimming the text to get the main idea, reviewing the questions carefully to identify exactly what information to scan for, and remembering that all answers should come from the text, not your opinions.

Paper 2

Improve your writing by making a plan; writing in well-organised paragraphs; having a clear beginning, middle and end; and checking for errors once you've finished. Make sure you identify the:

- audience
- language register (slang, informal, formal?)
- format based on text type
- communicative function (inform, persuade, argue?)