

What You Need to Know

- The HL Essay is a 1200-1500 word formal essay and it is based on a literary work studied as part of the course. You cannot use the same work for the IO or the Paper 2¹ for this essay.
- In the IB Language and Literature course², the essay can also be based on a non-literary or collection of non literary text(s).
- You develop a *line of inquiry*, a question that lends itself to an argument focused on how a theme or message is conveyed through literary features.
- The essay is completed in your own time and you should get some feedback from your teacher during the development of the essay.
- You do not have to incorporate secondary sources beyond the text you are working with.
- The essay is worth 20% of your final grade in the HL course, and you can score up to 5 points in the 5 criteria below:

Criterion A	Understanding and interpretation	5 marks
Criterion B	Analysis and evaluation	5 marks
Criterion C	Focus and organization	5 marks
Criterion D	Language	5 marks
Total		20 marks

*source: IB Language and Literature Guide (New Curriculum, 2021)

The paper is *externally assessed*, meaning the final grade given is from the IB Examiner, not from your teacher. However, your teacher will give a predicted grade that is sent to the IB³.

How to Approach the Essay

The essay requires you to construct a focused, analytical argument, examining the work from a broad literary or linguistic perspective. It also requires you to adhere to the formal framework of an academic essay, using citations and references.

Connection to the Learner Portfolio

¹ Paper 2 is cancelled for the 2022 cohort. No announcement has been made for the 2023 at the time this article was written.

² There are 3 IB English courses. The two most common are IB English A: Literature SL/HL, a course focused on literature (Poetry, drama, short stories and novels) and the IB English Language and Literature SL/HL course, focused on literature AND a variety of non-literary (non-fiction) text types.

³ The examiner's grade is independent from your teacher's predicted grade.

The HL essay is based on the exploration you have engaged with in the *Learner Portfolio*⁴. In the lead-up to the drafting of the essay, you must decide which text to focus on for further investigation, and which topic to write about. In choosing the topic, you can consult the course's seven central concepts. You can choose any text with the exception of the texts used for the Internal Assessment (the IO) or the Paper 2.

How to choose a text

Don't wait until the last minute and talk with your teacher about the text you want to use and the focus you are considering. Write your ideas out to make sure your line of inquiry is focused and appropriate for an analytical argument of a paper of this length.

In the case of a collection of short stories, poems, song lyrics or any short literary text, you may choose to use just one literary text from the work. However, It may be necessary to use more than one literary text from the work chosen.

The Language and Literature course only*

In the case of short non-literary texts, it may be necessary to use more than one from the same text type by the same author, for example the same creative advertising agency, cartoonist, photographer or social media user. At least one of these texts must have been studied in class. (If using a text in translation it must be a professional and published translation).

Determining the Topic and the 7 Course Concepts

It's helpful but not mandatory to start with the seven central concepts of the course in generating or determining a topic for the essay. The questions below are meant as starting points for the focus of the essay, not as complete lines of inquiry which should be more specific to the chosen text (see examples of lines of inquiry below).

1. Identity

Questions may include; How is identity represented in the text? How are the characters in the text representative of a group? How does the text reflect the identity of the writer?

2. Culture

Questions may include; How is an aspect of the text representative of a culture or a particular place? How is a group of people or an institution conveyed? How is the text representative of a cultural perspective?

3. Creativity

⁴ An individual collection of student work compiled during the course in which you explore and reflect on the texts throughout the course.

Questions may include; How is the text representative of an individual or collective creativity, or lack of creativity? How is the text a reflection of the creativity of the writer?

4. Communication

How is communication or lack of communication conveyed in the text? How does the text itself communicate with the reader? How are aspects of communication illustrated through literary features?

5. Transformation

How is change or development illustrated in the text? How are characters transformed through action, communication or events in the text? What is the relationship between transformation and the goals, values and beliefs conveyed in the text?

6. Perspective

How is a perspective or different perspectives represented in the text? How is a shift in perspective portrayed? How is the writer's perspective revealed through the text?

7. Representation

How does the text represent a particular theme or message? How are attitudes conveyed? In what way is reality or the world within the text represented?

IB English Language and Literature Guide examples of lines of inquiry

- **Identity**—how does Ralph Ellison, in his novel *Invisible Man*, succeed in making his narrator a convincing spokesperson for the concerns of African-Americans in the 20th century?
- **Culture**—how does Robert Capa represent post-Second World War France to qualify/exemplify the brutalities of the French population on former Nazi collaborators in *La Femme Tondue*? (Language A: language and literature only)
- **Creativity**—how do Mario Testino's portraits manage to convey the personalities of those portrayed in original ways? (Language A: language and literature only)
- **Communication**--which view of love does Matt Groening convey in *Love is Hell*? (Language A: language and literature only)
- **Transformation**--in what ways does The Alan Parsons Project's *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* offer a transformative re-reading of Edgar Allan Poe's tales?
- **Perspective**--how does Mary Shelley's protagonist in *Frankenstein* use the motif of dangerous knowledge to show the perspective of fear and anxiety of excesses in scientific enterprise in early 19th century Europe?
- **Representation**--through what means does Juan Rulfo successfully convey the representation of realistic and non-realistic characters and situations in *Pedro Páramo*?

A Final Note on the Learner Portfolio and the HL Essay

The Learner Portfolio is not assessed but schools are required to keep it on file. It is intended to be a platform for reflecting on the texts studied, facilitating development of independent thinking. The reflections may include responses to cultural perspectives and values, inter-relationships and identities as it relates to topics and themes in the texts studied. The reflections may serve as a springboard for the line of inquiry in the HL essay. For example, you may keep a record of themes present, reflections on how particular passages within the texts reflect those themes, or how themes and passages convey one of the 7 central concepts.