

This information is from the *Language A: Literature Guide*:

Higher level essay

Weighting: 20%

The nature of the task

At HL, students are required to write a formal essay of 1,200-1,500 words, which develops a particular line of inquiry of their own choice in connection with a literary text or work previously studied in class. The HL essay offers students an opportunity to develop as independent, critical and creative readers, thinkers and writers by exploring a literary topic over an extended period of time, refining their ideas by means of a process of planning, drafting and re-drafting. The essay requires students to construct a focused, analytical argument, examining the work from a broad literary perspective. It also requires them to adhere to the formal framework of the academic essay, using citations and references.

Explanation of the task

The HL essay is based on the exploration the student has carried out in the learner portfolio. During this exploration process, the student will have investigated a number of works from a variety of different perspectives. In the lead-up to the drafting of the essay, the student must decide which work to focus on for further investigation, and which topic to write about in connection with that work. In choosing the topic, the student can consult the course's seven central concepts. Any work previously studied in class may be selected, with the exception of the works used for the internal assessment and the works the student plans to use in paper 2.

Selection of work

Candidates must select the work and topic for their essay independently; however, consultation with the teacher is essential in this process. Care must be taken to make sure that the chosen literary texts or works are rich enough to support a developed, focused, and analytical argument.

In the case of a collection of short stories, poems, song lyrics or any short literary text, candidates may choose to use just one literary text from the work as their focus. However, students and teachers should bear in mind that the assignment is a broad literary investigation rather than a more narrowly-focused stylistic commentary task. It may be necessary to use more than one literary text from the work chosen in order to achieve this.

Determining the topic

The chosen topic should enable a broad literary focus for the essay. In achieving this focus, the seven central concepts of the course may be a helpful starting point in generating or determining a topic for the essay. While students do not have to trace their essay back to one of the seven concepts and the assessment criteria do not require it, working with one of the seven concepts will allow students to begin their thinking about their topic as they refine their ideas and arguments. The seven concepts are briefly discussed here in relation to the assignment. The Language A teacher support material has more specific examples for further guidance.

Identity

The student might be interested in an aspect of the representation of identity of a particular character or group of characters in the work, or on the way in which the work itself relates to the identity of the writer.

Culture

The student might be interested in an aspect of the representation of the culture of a particular place, institution or group of people, or on the way in which the work itself relates to a particular culture.

Creativity

The student might be interested in an aspect of the representation of individual or collective creativity, or lack of creativity, within the work, or on the way in which the work itself represents the creativity of the writer.

Communication

The student might be interested in an aspect of the representation of acts of communication, or failures in communication, in the work, or on the way in which the work itself represents an act of communication.

Transformation

The student might be interested in an aspect of the representation of transformation or transformative acts in the work, or in the way in which the work itself is a transformative act either of the other works (through intertextual reference to them) or of reality (by means of a transformative effect on the reader's identity, relationships, goals, values, and beliefs.)

Perspective

The student might be interested in an aspect of the representation of a particular perspective or perspectives within the work, or on the way in which the work itself represents the writer's perspective.

Representation

The student might be interested in an aspect of the way in which the work itself represents different themes, attitudes and concepts, or in the extent to which literature can actually represent reality.

Guidance and authenticity

Teachers are expected to guide students throughout the HL essay, from choice of topic to submission of the essay, monitoring and advising them on the process, giving feedback on plans, and helping them stay on task by setting timelines and stages for the essay's development. Help, guidance and support at the beginning of this process cannot be emphasized enough.

At the same time, the student must have autonomy throughout; teachers should not assign works or topics, but should give advice on the appropriateness of ideas, question students to clarify them and make suggestions for avenues that could be explored or ways in which they might adjust their approach.

Teachers are expected to ensure that essays are students' own work and address any academic honesty issues arising before submission of the assessment. It is the teachers' responsibility to make sure that all students understand the importance of academic honesty, in particular in relation to the authenticity of their work and the need to acknowledge other people's ideas. Teachers must ensure students understand that the essay they submit for this externally assessed component must be entirely their own work. While teachers should give regular feedback on students' work, they should not edit or correct their work directly. As students draw close to the end of the writing process, teachers are allowed to give advice to students on a first complete draft in terms of suggestions as regards the way the work could be improved.

This could be done by annotating the draft through comments on the margin. These comments could consist in questions or prompts for further reflection and improvement. Under no circumstances can a teacher edit or rewrite the draft. The next version handed to the teacher after the first draft must be the final one.

Students should make detailed references to their primary source, using such references to support their broader argument about the work. The use of secondary sources is not mandatory. Any sources used must be appropriately cited. Essays must be students' own work, adhering consistently to the IB policy on academic honesty.