

ECLASSOPEDIA

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THE ULTIMATE

EXTENDED ESSAY

SURVIVAL GUIDE

2026 EDITION

Everything You Need to Write a Winning 4,000-Word EE

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Welcome to the EE Journey

The IB Extended Essay is one of the most intellectually demanding — and rewarding — tasks in your entire Diploma Programme. Spanning 4,000 words of original, independent research, it gives you a rare opportunity to explore a topic that genuinely ignites your curiosity. But it can also feel overwhelming, confusing, and at times, downright impossible.

That is exactly why Eclassopedia has created this 2026 Survival Guide. Whether you are just beginning to brainstorm your research question or you are deep in your final edits, this guide will walk you through every stage of the EE process — from choosing your subject and crafting a sharp research question, to structuring your argument, citing your sources, and surviving the dreaded Viva Voce.

What is the Extended Essay?

The Extended Essay (EE) is a mandatory core component of the IB Diploma Programme. It is a piece of independent research of up to 4,000 words, submitted in the final year of the Diploma. It is assessed externally and counts toward the bonus points alongside Theory of Knowledge.

Chapter 1: Understanding the EE Framework

1.1 Why the EE Matters

The Extended Essay is worth up to 3 bonus points when combined with Theory of Knowledge (TOK). While those points may seem few in number, they can be the difference between receiving your Diploma and falling just short. More importantly, the EE prepares you for university-level research, independent thinking, and sustained academic writing — skills that will serve you for life.

Beyond grades, the EE signals to universities that you are capable of sustained intellectual inquiry. Admissions officers in the UK, US, Canada, and beyond specifically look for EE topics and scores on UCAS forms and college applications. A well-executed essay on a compelling topic can be a powerful differentiator.

1.2 The Grading Matrix

As of the updated 2023–2026 assessment criteria, the EE is marked on five criteria:

Criterion	Description	Marks Available
A: Focus & Method	Research question, methodology, approach	6
B: Knowledge & Understanding	Conceptual understanding of topic & subject area	6
C: Critical Thinking	Analysis, argument, evaluation, synthesis	12
D: Presentation	Structure, layout, citations, word count	4
E: Engagement (RPPF)	Reflection on the research process	6

Total marks: 34. Grade boundaries are published each year by the IBO. Typically, 28+ earns an A, and 14 or below results in a fail.

Eclassopedia Tip

Criterion C — Critical Thinking — is worth 12 out of 34 marks. That is more than one-third of your entire grade! Every paragraph you write should push an argument, not just describe facts. Analysis always beats summary.

1.3 Key Deadlines in 2026

Each school sets its own internal deadlines, but here is a general timeline to structure your year:

Milestone	Suggested Timeframe
Subject & supervisor confirmed	September (Year 2)
Research question draft submitted	October
First Reflection Point (RPPF)	October–November
First full draft submitted	January
Interim Reflection Point (RPPF)	January–February
Second draft with supervisor feedback	March
Final essay submitted to school	April–May
Final Reflection Point — Viva Voce	May–June

Chapter 2: Choosing Your Subject and Topic

2.1 Which Subject Should You Choose?

The most important decision you will make about your EE is choosing the right subject. There are approximately 60 approved EE subjects across six subject groups. The golden rule is simple: choose a subject you genuinely love — one where your natural curiosity will carry you through the hard months ahead.

However, passion alone is not enough. Consider these four factors when selecting your subject:

- **Access to sources: Can you find enough scholarly, primary, or reliable secondary sources?**
- **Supervisor expertise:** Does your school have a teacher who can supervise this subject effectively?
- **Scope:** Is the subject area broad enough to offer a 4,000-word research opportunity, but specific enough to be manageable?
- **Assessment fit:** Does the subject's EE guide align with your strengths — analytical writing, data collection, lab experiments, or creative interpretation?

2.2 The Most Popular EE Subjects in 2026

Based on global IB data and Eclassopedia student submissions, the most commonly chosen EE subjects continue to be:

Subject Group	Popular EE Subjects
Group 1 — Language & Literature	English, Hindi, Spanish, French
Group 2 — Language Acquisition	English B, French B, Spanish ab initio
Group 3 — Individuals & Societies	History, Economics, Psychology, Geography
Group 4 — Sciences	Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Environmental Systems
Group 5 — Mathematics	Mathematics: Analysis, Mathematics: Applications
Group 6 — Arts / Interdisciplinary	Film, Music, Visual Arts, World Studies

A Note on World Studies EE

The World Studies EE is interdisciplinary and allows you to explore a global issue through the lens of two different IB subjects. It is challenging but deeply rewarding if you enjoy cross-disciplinary thinking. Talk to your coordinator before choosing this option.

2.3 Narrowing Down to a Specific Topic

Once you have chosen a subject, you need to narrow your interest into a specific, researchable topic. This is where most students make their first mistake: they choose a topic that is either too broad or too vague. Consider the following process:

1. Start with a general area of interest (e.g., climate change in Biology)
2. Ask yourself: What aspect of this area do I find most fascinating?
3. Research what has already been written — find the gaps
4. Frame a provisional question around a gap you can explore
5. Discuss with your supervisor and refine

A topic like 'Climate Change' is far too broad. A topic like 'The effect of rising sea temperatures on coral bleaching rates in the Great Barrier Reef between 2015 and 2024' is specific, measurable, and researchable. That is the level of precision you are aiming for.

Chapter 3: Crafting the Perfect Research Question

3.1 What Makes a Great Research Question?

Your research question (RQ) is the spine of your entire essay. Every argument, every piece of evidence, every analysis must connect back to it. A great RQ has five qualities:

- **Focused: It addresses one central issue, not several**
- **Arguable:** It invites analysis and debate, not just description
- **Researchable:** It can be explored using available sources or original data
- **Disciplinary:** It fits naturally within the methodology of your chosen subject
- **Appropriately scoped:** It is neither too narrow nor too vast for 4,000 words

3.2 Research Question Formats by Subject

Different subjects call for different RQ formats. Here are examples across key disciplines:

Subject	Example Research Question
History	To what extent did the Marshall Plan determine the economic recovery of West Germany between 1948 and 1955?
Biology	How does the concentration of ethanol affect the rate of fermentation in <i>Saccharomyces cerevisiae</i> ?
Economics	To what extent has the introduction of congestion pricing in Stockholm reduced vehicle traffic and CO2 emissions?
Psychology	How does sleep deprivation affect working memory in adolescents aged 15 to 18?
English Lit.	How does Kazuo Ishiguro use narrative unreliability in <i>Never Let Me Go</i> to explore themes of memory and identity?
Mathematics	How accurately can the SIR model predict the spread of influenza in a closed population of 10,000?

The 'To What Extent' Formula

For humanities subjects, framing your RQ as 'To what extent...' is highly effective. It signals immediately that your essay will weigh evidence on both sides and reach a nuanced, argued conclusion — which is exactly what Criterion C rewards.

3.3 Common Research Question Mistakes to Avoid

Eclassopedia tutors have reviewed thousands of EEs. These are the most common RQ mistakes we see:

- Asking a yes/no question (e.g., 'Did the Cold War cause the Korean War?') — this limits your analysis
- Being too descriptive ('What were the causes of World War I?') — this invites summary, not argument
- Choosing an unanswerable or unfalsifiable question that cannot be researched with real evidence
- Changing your RQ after you have already written 2,000 words — always confirm it early with your supervisor

Chapter 4: Planning and Research

4.1 Building Your Research Plan

Before writing a single word of your essay, invest time in thorough planning. A strong research plan includes four elements:

6. A confirmed, approved research question
7. An initial bibliography of at least 10 credible sources
8. A working outline of your essay structure
9. A personal timeline with milestone dates

Think of your research plan as a map. You would not start a road trip without one, and you should not start your EE without one either.

4.2 Finding and Evaluating Sources

The quality of your sources determines the quality of your argument. For most EE subjects, you should draw from a mix of primary and secondary sources. Here is where to look:

Source Type	Where to Find It	Best For
Academic journals	JSTOR, Google Scholar, PubMed	Sciences, Social Sciences
Primary documents	National Archives, Project Gutenberg, UN databases	History, Politics
Books & monographs	School library, Google Books, Open Library	All subjects
News & reports	BBC, The Economist, WHO, World Bank	Economics, Geography
Original data/experiments	Your own lab work or surveys	Biology, Chemistry, Psych
Literary texts	Published editions (cite edition clearly)	English, Languages

When evaluating any source, apply the SIFT method: Stop, Investigate the source, Find better coverage, Trace claims to their origin. Never cite Wikipedia as a source — though you may use it to find more credible references.

Academic Integrity Warning

The IBO treats academic dishonesty very seriously. Any use of AI tools (including ChatGPT or similar) to write or substantially generate your essay content is a violation of IB academic

integrity policy and may result in disqualification from the Diploma. Eclassopedia supports ethical, independent research.

4.3 Taking Effective Research Notes

Good note-taking now saves enormous time later. Use a structured approach:

- Separate your notes by source and always record full citation details immediately
- Use three categories for each source note: Summary, Key Quotes, and My Analysis
- Tag notes by EE section (Introduction, Argument 1, Counter-argument, etc.)
- Never copy entire paragraphs verbatim — paraphrase in your own words as you go
- Use tools like Notion, OneNote, or Zotero to organise digital notes

Chapter 5: Structuring Your Essay

5.1 The Standard EE Structure

While structure varies by subject, a strong EE generally follows this architecture:

Section	Approx. Word Count	Purpose
Title Page	0 words	Title, RQ, subject, word count
Contents Page	0 words	Navigation
Introduction	300–400 words	RQ context, significance, methodology, scope
Body — Main Arguments	2,800–3,200 words	Analysis, evidence, sub-arguments
Counter-arguments / Limitations	300–400 words	Balance, nuance, academic honesty
Conclusion	300–400 words	Answer the RQ, implications, further research
References / Bibliography	Not counted	All cited sources
Appendices (if any)	Not counted	Raw data, transcripts, graphs

5.2 Writing the Introduction

Your introduction does four jobs. It must hook the reader, contextualise your topic, present your research question clearly, and briefly outline the methodology and scope of your investigation. Avoid beginning with a sweeping generalisation like 'Since the dawn of time, humans have...' — examiners see this thousands of times. Instead, open with a specific, compelling statement related directly to your RQ.

A strong introduction for a History EE might open by citing a specific statistic, event, or primary source that immediately signals the importance of the investigation. By the end of your introduction, the reader should understand exactly what you are asking, why it matters, and how you intend to answer it.

5.3 Structuring the Body

The body of your essay should be divided into themed sections or chapters, each with a clear topic sentence, supporting evidence, analysis, and a link back to the RQ. Avoid writing chronologically unless you are in History — thematic structuring is almost always stronger.

Each body section should follow the PEEL structure:

- **Point: State your argument clearly at the start of the section**

- Evidence: Provide specific, referenced data, quotes, or findings
- Explanation: Analyse the evidence — what does it prove and how?
- Link: Connect back to the research question explicitly

Eclassopedia Marking Insight

The most common reason students lose marks in Criterion C is that they describe evidence without analysing it. Evidence alone earns no marks. It is your interpretation of that evidence — your argument — that earns marks. Ask yourself after every paragraph: 'So what? What does this mean for my RQ?'

5.4 Writing the Conclusion

Your conclusion must do one thing above all else: answer your research question. It should not introduce new evidence or arguments. It should synthesise the threads of your body analysis into a clear, direct answer to the RQ, acknowledging any limitations or nuances.

A memorable conclusion also points toward wider implications or areas for further research, demonstrating that you see your topic within a broader intellectual landscape. Keep it to approximately 350 words — tight, confident, and conclusive.

Chapter 6: Subject-Specific Guidance

6.1 Sciences (Biology, Chemistry, Physics)

Science EEs are highly valued by universities and allow for original laboratory or field research. The best science EEs feature a tightly controlled experiment with clearly defined independent, dependent, and controlled variables. Your methodology section is crucial — examiners look for rigour, reproducibility, and awareness of error.

Key advice for science EEs:

- Run at least five trials per variable to ensure statistical reliability
- Include error bars, standard deviations, and uncertainty analysis in all graphs
- Use data tables, not just graphs — both are expected
- Your conclusion must discuss limitations of your methodology honestly
- Secondary sources support context and background — original data is the heart of the essay

6.2 Humanities (History, Economics, Psychology)

Humanities EEs reward sharp argumentation, breadth of sources, and nuanced judgement. History EEs must demonstrate source evaluation skills and historiographical awareness — what do historians argue about this event, and where do you position yourself? Economics EEs benefit enormously from real-world data, diagrams, and economic model application.

Psychology EEs should engage with at least two studies or theories and critically compare them. Do not simply describe studies — evaluate their methodology, cultural applicability, and ethical considerations.

6.3 Language and Literature

Literature EEs require close textual analysis supported by literary theory and secondary criticism. Choose two or three key passages from your chosen text(s) and analyse them in depth rather than skimming across the whole work. Examiners want to see you reading like a literary scholar — attending to language, structure, imagery, and narrative technique simultaneously.

If writing about a non-English text, be sure to include both the original language quote and an English translation, and cite your translator.

6.4 Mathematics

Mathematics EEs require a genuine mathematical exploration — not just calculation, but original modelling, proof exploration, or real-world application. The best Maths EEs show creativity: using calculus to model a real phenomenon, investigating a pattern in number theory, or

applying statistics to a genuine dataset. Your exploration must go beyond the curriculum and demonstrate personal mathematical thinking.

Chapter 7: Referencing and Academic Conventions

7.1 Citation Styles

The IBO does not mandate a specific citation style, but it does require consistency. Most schools use one of the following three styles:

Style	Commonly Used In	Format
MLA (9th Ed.)	Literature, Languages, Arts	In-text: (Author Page)
APA (7th Ed.)	Psychology, Sciences, Social Sciences	In-text: (Author, Year, p. X)
Chicago / Turabian	History, Economics, Classics	Footnotes + Bibliography

Ask your supervisor which style your school recommends. Once chosen, apply it with absolute consistency throughout your essay. A mismatched bibliography — half APA, half MLA — will cost you marks in Criterion D.

7.2 What Must Be Cited

Every piece of information that is not your own original idea must be cited. This includes:

- Direct quotations from any source
- Paraphrased ideas from books, journals, or websites
- Statistics, data, or numerical claims
- Images, graphs, or tables taken from other sources
- Theoretical frameworks or models developed by others

The Paraphrase Trap

Many students believe that paraphrasing an idea in their own words means they do not need to cite it. This is wrong. If the idea came from another person's work, it must be cited — regardless of how you phrase it. Failure to cite is plagiarism, even if unintentional.

7.3 Building Your Bibliography

Your bibliography should list every source you cited in the essay, arranged alphabetically by author surname. Use a tool like Zotero, Mendeley, or Cite This For Me to generate formatted citations — but always proofread them, as automated tools regularly make errors.

Minimum recommended number of sources by subject area:

- Sciences: 10–15 sources (mix of academic papers and textbooks)
- Humanities: 15–20 sources (primary and secondary)
- Literature: 8–12 sources (text + critical commentaries + theory)
- Mathematics: 8–12 sources (textbooks, journals, datasets)

Chapter 8: The Reflections on Planning and Progress Form (RPPF)

8.1 What is the RPPF?

The Reflections on Planning and Progress Form is a mandatory document where you record three reflections throughout the EE process. It is worth 6 marks (Criterion E) and is assessed alongside your essay by the external examiner. Many students underestimate the RPPF — do not make that mistake.

Each reflection should be approximately 100–150 words and is written at three points:

- **Reflection 1: After your initial meeting with your supervisor (early in the process)**
- Reflection 2: At the midpoint of your research/writing (often after your first draft)
- Reflection 3: After your Viva Voce (the final oral reflection)

8.2 What Makes a Strong RPPF Entry?

The IBO is looking for genuine intellectual engagement — not a summary of what you did, but a reflection on how your thinking has evolved. Strong RPPF entries:

- Show intellectual growth: How has your understanding deepened or changed?
- Acknowledge challenges: What was difficult, and how did you respond?
- Reflect on methodology: Did your approach work? What would you do differently?
- Demonstrate curiosity: What new questions has your research raised?

Weak RPPF entries read like diary entries: 'I found three books on my topic this week.' Strong ones read like scholarly reflection: 'Initially, I assumed that economic sanctions were the primary cause of Cuba's economic stagnation, but engagement with primary data from the Cuban National Statistics Office complicated this assumption significantly, leading me to revise my argument toward a more nuanced position.'

Chapter 9: The Viva Voce

9.1 What is the Viva Voce?

The Viva Voce is a short, informal oral interview between you and your EE supervisor, conducted after your essay has been submitted. It typically lasts 10–15 minutes. Its purpose is to allow your supervisor to assess your engagement and intellectual ownership of the essay — and to write your third RPPF reflection.

The Viva Voce is not an exam. You cannot be asked to defend your marks or change your essay. It is a professional conversation about your research journey.

9.2 How to Prepare

Many students feel anxious about the Viva Voce, but thorough preparation removes most of the uncertainty. Here is how to prepare effectively:

10. Re-read your final essay carefully two days before
11. Identify the two or three strongest arguments you made
12. Identify any weaknesses or limitations you are aware of
13. Be ready to explain why you chose your specific research question
14. Prepare to discuss what you would do differently if starting again
15. Reflect on what surprised you most during your research

Common Viva Voce Questions

What was the most challenging part of your research? How did your understanding of this topic change during the process? If you had more time, what would you investigate next? What is the key limitation of your methodology? These are all common and manageable with honest preparation.

Chapter 10: Final Checks and Submission

10.1 The Pre-Submission Checklist

Before submitting your final essay, run through this comprehensive checklist:

Category	Check
Word count	Body text is within 4,000 words (excludes title page, contents, bibliography, appendices)
Research question	Clearly stated on title page and within the introduction
Title page	Includes subject, RQ, word count, candidate number (not your name)
Contents page	All sections listed with accurate page numbers
Bibliography	All sources cited in-text appear in bibliography and vice versa
Citation consistency	Single citation style used throughout without exception
RPPF	All three reflections completed and submitted
File format	PDF submitted as per school requirements
Supervisor sign-off	Supervisor has confirmed authenticity declaration
Appendices	Labelled clearly and referred to in the main text

10.2 Common Presentation Errors to Fix

Criterion D awards up to 4 marks for presentation. These marks are entirely yours to claim — they require no special analytical ability, just attention to detail. The most common presentation errors that cost students marks:

- No contents page, or a contents page without page numbers
- Inconsistent heading formatting throughout the essay
- Images and graphs without captions or source citations
- Exceeding the 4,000-word limit (examiners stop reading at 4,000)
- No page numbers in the footer
- Appendices referenced in the text but not included

10.3 Final Proofreading Strategy

Never proofread your own essay immediately after finishing it — your brain will autocorrect errors you cannot consciously see. Instead, use this three-stage approach:

16. Wait 24 hours, then read the essay aloud to yourself — your ear catches what your eye misses
17. Ask a friend, parent, or tutor to read it for clarity and logical flow (not to edit — to give feedback)
18. Use spell-check and grammar tools (Grammarly, LanguageTool) as a final pass — but never rely on them exclusively

Chapter 11: Wellbeing and Time Management

11.1 Managing EE Stress

The Extended Essay is written alongside two years of IB coursework, Internal Assessments, Theory of Knowledge, CAS, examinations, and the rest of life. It is natural — and common — to feel overwhelmed. Here is what Eclassopedia recommends for sustainable EE wellness:

- **Chunk the work:** Divide the essay into small, achievable weekly tasks rather than treating it as one massive project
- **Protect your supervisor meetings:** Arrive prepared with specific questions and use every meeting productively
- **Build in buffer time:** If your draft is due in March, aim to finish it in February
- **Celebrate milestones:** Finishing your research question, completing your bibliography, submitting a draft — these are all worth acknowledging
- **Talk to someone:** If the EE is affecting your mental health, speak to your school counsellor, a parent, or a trusted teacher

The Eclassopedia Promise

At Eclassopedia, we believe every student is capable of writing an excellent Extended Essay with the right support, strategy, and mindset. The EE is not about genius — it is about persistence, curiosity, and care. Trust the process, ask for help when you need it, and remember: the knowledge you gain is yours forever.

11.2 Working With Your Supervisor

Your supervisor is not your editor, your co-author, or your counsellor — but they are your most important academic ally during the EE process. The relationship works best when you are the one driving it. Come to every meeting with:

- A specific question or problem to discuss
- A written update on your progress since the last meeting
- Draft sections for feedback, clearly labelled
- A proposed plan for what you will do before the next meeting

Supervisors give feedback — you decide what to do with it. They can suggest angles of inquiry, warn you of dead ends, and help you calibrate your scope. But the intellectual decisions are always yours.

Chapter 12: Key Resources and Further Support

12.1 Official IB Resources

Always consult the official IBO materials for the most up-to-date requirements. The most important documents are:

- The Extended Essay Guide (published by the IBO, updated for 2026 assessment sessions)
- Your subject-specific EE guide — available for every approved EE subject
- The Academic Integrity Policy (available on the IBO website)
- My IB — the official IB student portal where you access your RPPF

12.2 Eclassopedia Resources for EE Students

Eclassopedia offers a comprehensive suite of resources designed specifically for IB Diploma students. Our team of expert IB tutors and former examiners provides:

- **One-to-one EE mentoring sessions (research question development, draft review, Viva Voce prep)**
- Subject-specific EE workshops — live and recorded — across all major subjects
- The Eclassopedia EE Planner: a free downloadable timeline and milestone tracker
- Model EE examples with annotated examiner commentary
- The Eclassopedia IB Study Hub: 24/7 access to notes, past papers, and video lessons

Visit us at eclassopedia.com to explore our full range of IB support programmes. Our students consistently outperform global IB averages, and we would be honoured to support your journey.

12.3 Quick-Reference: Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Definition
EE	Extended Essay — 4,000-word independent research paper
RQ	Research Question — the central question your essay investigates
RPPF	Reflections on Planning and Progress Form — three written reflections
Viva Voce	Final oral interview with your supervisor after essay submission
Criterion E	The RPPF criterion, worth 6 marks, assessed externally
PEEL	Paragraph structure: Point, Evidence, Explanation, Link

TOK	Theory of Knowledge — combined with EE for up to 3 bonus points
IBO	International Baccalaureate Organisation — the governing body
Primary Source	Original first-hand evidence (experiments, diaries, speeches)
Secondary Source	Analysis or interpretation of primary sources by others

You have got this.

The Extended Essay is one of the most challenging things you will do as a student.

It is also one of the most meaningful.

Eclassopedia believes in you — now go and write something brilliant.

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