

# Cross-disciplinary Extended Essay Guide for 2026 & on ward

## Cross-disciplinary subjects

**Note:** Before reading the following guidance, read the “Generic guidance for the extended essay” section in this guide.

### **What is distinctive about an extended essay in cross-disciplinary subjects?**

Separately from the interdisciplinary pathway, you can do a subject-focused extended essay in one of the two DP subjects that are cross-disciplinary: ESS and literature and performance.

The transdisciplinary lens of ESS brings together two subject groups: individuals and societies and the sciences. Meanwhile, literature and performance combines studies in language and literature and the arts.

**Note:** ESS or literature and performance may not be used in combination with another DP subject in the interdisciplinary pathway. This is to avoid the complexity and potential challenges of integrating more than two disciplinary perspectives.

An extended essay in either of these cross-disciplinary subjects will allow you to address a topic of your interest, drawing from the interactions between approaches, theories, concepts and methodologies of their disciplines.

In ESS, your extended essay will combine the knowledge and techniques associated with sciences and humanities, giving you an opportunity to research an environmental topic you want to engage with. You will approach the topic by considering the interrelationships between environmental systems and societies holistically.

A literature and performance extended essay combines an exploration of dual elements: first a written text, then its adaptation to a performance. Your essay, therefore, should be grounded in and begin with the study of a text. It should then explore in detail its transformation and/or adaptation into a realized performance.

## Choosing a topic

Extended essays in ESS and literature and performance can cover a wide variety of topics. What will ground these topics effectively in one of these diverse subjects is the approach. It is not just a matter of content but also the theoretical, conceptual and methodological toolkits of the disciplines in each subject, which will provide insights and allow you to develop well-constructed arguments.

A topic in ESS needs to focus on the interaction and integration of “natural” environmental systems and human societies. Your research topic will focus on an environmental issue coupled with a societal viewpoint, intertwined to help understand the environment and its sustainability. This will allow you to explore how environmental systems and societies function together.

Essays in literature and performance must examine both a written piece and a performance of that text. Novels, poems and prose types other than fiction can be appropriate material for adaptation. Performed elements can take such forms as theatre, film, opera, dance, or digital creations such as video games. Historical, geographic, linguistic, ethnic and socioeconomic circumstances will provide the necessary contexts.

Be aware that a literature and performance extended essay is not an appropriate vehicle for your own original transformation of a text.

## Example topics, research questions and approaches

Subject	Topic and research question	Outline of approach
<b>Environmental systems and societies</b>	<p><b>Topic:</b> Climate change and the California almond industry</p> <p><b>Research question:</b> To what extent is the California almond industry vulnerable to the impacts of climate change?</p>	<p>A detailed analysis of secondary data on temperature, precipitation, diseases and productivity.</p> <p>The essay evaluates the impact of climate change on the almond industry in California.</p>
	<p><b>Topic:</b> Effects of ethnicity and socioeconomic status in the generation of household food waste</p> <p><b>Research question:</b> To what extent does income and ethnicity influence purchase habits, and hence food waste generation, among adults in Hong Kong?</p>	<p>Primary data is collected through an online questionnaire.</p> <p>Research is analysed and compared with secondary sources such as scientific journals and government publications.</p> <p>The essay evaluates the relevance of income and ethnicity on consumption and consequent waste for adults in Hong Kong.</p>
<b>Literature and performance</b>	<p><b>Topic:</b> Sherlock Holmes and Watson as they are depicted in the television production <i>Elementary</i></p>	<p>You will need to consider Conan Doyle’s approach to the relationship between Holmes and Watson, exploring some of the</p>

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	<p><b>Research question:</b> How have the changes in Watson in the television production <i>Elementary</i> affected the portrayal of both Holmes and Watson?</p>	<p>critical work that has been written on this aspect of the original fiction.</p> <p>The treatment of the relationship in <i>Elementary</i> will then need to be analysed, e.g. the quality of this new dynamic, critiquing how it affects the partnership.</p>
	<p><b>Topic:</b> Jerome Robbins' choreography of <i>West Side Story</i>, and of William Shakespeare's <i>Romeo and Juliet</i></p> <p><b>Research question:</b> How does Jerome Robbins' choreography of <i>West Side Story</i> transform the original meaning and effect of Shakespeare's <i>Romeo and Juliet</i>?</p>	<p>You will need to identify some central aspects of Shakespeare's play and point out their presence in <i>West Side Story</i>.</p> <p>Then the choreography will need to be closely examined to discern and evaluate how dance has been used to transform and heighten the meanings and emotional effects of the original play.</p>

## Researching and writing the essay

Although all extended essays must include a literature review as a first step, cross-disciplinary subjects require different types of sources from which to gather information and construct your line of argument. It is important that you understand what constitutes an appropriate primary or secondary source in your chosen subject, as well as which methods are suitable.

Your extended essay in ESS is an opportunity to carry out hands-on work in the laboratory or in the field to develop a sound understanding of the interrelationships between environmental systems and societies. A systems approach is particularly effective for your analysis and interpretation of data. Some research topics are better studied with a combination of primary and secondary data collection, but your essay could be based on secondary data only.

In a literature and performance extended essay, you must offer a balanced comparison of your chosen text and its performance, analysing and evaluating their salient features within the context of their creation to develop a line of argument. Your essay needs to include the use of the appropriate critical terms for each form and provide a clearly structured integration of the originating text and its adaptation.

In a successful cross-disciplinary subject essay, your line of argument reflects the logic of the relevant disciplines combined in that subject, uses specific terminology and follows pertinent structural conventions. It is important that you refer to the ESS or literature and performance subject guides to make sure you are using sources, methods, approaches and research strategies appropriately.

## Considering the assessment criteria

Make sure you use the extended essay assessment criteria to remind yourself of the expected elements of the extended essay. Each of the five criteria (A–E) is accompanied by a guiding question that should be applied to the context of a cross-disciplinary subject. In this way, you can see how the assessment criteria relate to your own essay. It is important that you also refer to the “[Generic guidance for the extended essay](#)” section in this guide for a broader spectrum of advice on using the assessment criteria to inform your writing.

<b>A: Framework for the essay</b>	Your research question should reflect the cross-disciplinary nature of either ESS or literature and performance.
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	<p>Your selection of research methods should be informed by the approaches evident in the ESS or literature and performance subject guides.</p> <p>The structural conventions for the cross-disciplinary subject you have chosen will be derived from the disciplines it combines; it may also be worthwhile reading the corresponding sections of the subject-specific guidance.</p>
<b>B: Knowledge and understanding</b>	<p>Remember that you are observing your topic through the combined lenses that operate within your cross-disciplinary subject. You will be demonstrating knowledge and understanding when you integrate their terminology and concepts effectively into your writing.</p>
<b>C: Analysis and line of argument</b>	<p>Your analysis should produce findings that emphasize and endorse the cross-disciplinary approach that either literature and performance or ESS takes. When you can weave together those findings and synthesize conclusions that answer your research question, you are on your way towards producing a strong line of argument.</p>
<b>D: Discussion and evaluation</b>	<p>Discussion is the key tool that allows you to apply the cross-disciplinary context of either literature and performance or ESS to highlight and balance significant aspects of your findings.</p> <p>Evaluation of the effectiveness of your essay can include appraising the worth of investigating your topic through the lens of this cross-disciplinary subject. How has this deepened, or even changed, your initial ideas about the topic?</p>
<b>E: Reflection</b>	<p>Refer to the <a href="#">“Generic guidance for the extended essay”</a> and the <a href="#">“Reflection and the extended essay”</a> sections of this guide.</p>