

English Extended Essay Guide for 2026 & onward

Language A

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 language A?

An extended essay in language A analyses one or more texts to explore both the effects that the text(s) achieve and the devices the text(s) use to create these effects. It invites you to:

- produce an in-depth study of a topic in language and/or literature
- undertake independent literary criticism
- engage with established critical commentary on the text(s) and/or literary theory through textual analysis.

An extended essay in language A must be based on one or more clearly defined text(s), such as:

- a study of a single literary or language text, originally written in the language in which the essay is written
- a comparative study of more than one literary or language text
- a comparative study of a literary and a language text.

When planning a comparative essay, at least one of the primary texts must have been originally written in the language in which the essay is presented, and for which the essay is registered. The other text(s) may be in translation.

Note: An extended essay in language A must be written in the language for which it is registered. You are not allowed to submit a language A extended essay in the language of your language B subject.

Also, extended essays submitted in language A cannot be based on a text studied as part of your studies in the language and literature course. However, you can base your essay on a different text(s) by an author you have studied during the course.

Choosing a topic

Key requirements

- The topic of an extended essay in language A must be related to the target literature and/or language, and be based on one or more texts.
- You may choose as your topic a social, political or philosophical issue arising from the text(s): the focus must be a literature- or language-based analysis of how the text(s) treat the issue.
- The text(s) should **not** be used as documentary evidence to support the issue; rather, the issue must be discussed within a literary context.

- Choosing a topic that simply applies a generic or theoretical convention to a text is self-limiting, and will not yield the kind of in-depth, critical, literary analysis expected. An example of such a self-limiting topic might be "How does the Harry Potter series reveal the Hero's Journey?".
- The texts you choose for your topic must have sufficient literary merit. They should be of sufficient stylistic originality and complexity to sustain in-depth analysis of content, themes, genre and literary devices, using subject-specific methods and terminology.

Types of text

Texts can include one or more of the following: novels; poems; stories; plays; pieces of non-fiction; images (like print advertisements or photojournalism); extracts; media texts such as newspaper articles, advertising campaigns, radio and television programmes and their scripts; films; songs; electronic texts such as video-sharing websites and apps, web pages, SMS messages, blogs, wikis and tweets; and oral texts such as readings, speeches, broadcasts and transcripts of recorded conversation. The text(s) must be clearly defined, with temporal boundaries when appropriate, e.g. an individual's tweets on a specific topic from January to March 2021.

- If you are planning an extended essay that focuses on **short stories or poetry**, ensure that your selection of texts—your body of work—is robust enough to sustain an in-depth 4,000-word essay. There is no precise number of stories or poems that will work best. But remember that the texts should enable you to consider not only what they say but also how they say it, through both the authors' language and literary devices. The texts should contain enough substance that you can continue to raise and discuss points without overexplaining them or repeating yourself. Determining the best number of stories or poems for your essay will take some effort; rather than focusing on the amount of texts, you might look for complementary texts first—three to four short stories by the same author or three to four poems by the same poet on a particular theme. As you begin to read them analytically, you may realize that three stories yield enough material for an effective comparison and contrast; you may also realize that four poems enable you to deepen your analysis.
- If the text is a **film**, the focus must be clearly on the screenplay (the written or spoken word), its delivery and effect.
- You should try to **avoid biographical, historical, psychological or sociological topics** as they tend to focus away from a literary or language analysis and result in narrative or descriptive essays.

Researching and writing your essay

Literary-based scholarly research is an essential part of your language A extended essay and should include both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources refer to the novels, poems, stories, plays or essays by the author(s) whose work is the focus of your research. Secondary sources are materials written about the work of the author(s), including books (e.g. studies and biographies), individual chapters, journal articles, essays about the work of the author(s), reviews of the work(s), studies of the genre you are writing about, and literary theory. You must integrate into your essay a review of the existing literature on your topic, thereby demonstrating knowledge and understanding.

Be aware that a recently published work may not yet have much critical material written about it, so it may be an unsuitable choice. Also, some "young adult" novels may lack sufficient depth and complexity to allow for a detailed analysis.

When writing your extended essay, take care not to use the essay solely as a vehicle for your personal thoughts and opinions. Instead, first focus your analysis on the ideas within the text(s) as presented by the author(s). Then you can present your considered views of how the author(s) has treated the subject, being careful to ground your analysis in the text(s) and to support it using textual evidence, such as examples and quotes. Writing an essay that simply offers a general overview of the topic or repeats the views of established literary critics will not score well.

Secondary sources provide a framework for a critical analysis of how language, culture and context shape meaning. Summarizing the sources or presenting them without engaging with them critically will not help you to produce a good essay.

Comparative essays need to state clearly what their purpose is, beyond simply identifying similarities and differences between texts. Literary comparisons need to state a compelling and supportable reason for why the texts were selected. Language comparisons need to justify the selection of texts, for example, why certain speeches, advertising campaigns or electronic texts were chosen. The comparative essay also needs to state the temporal boundaries of the texts, that is, which months or years they were published. The essay can briefly discuss how the choice of texts was limited but should not describe the different options considered.

Example topics, research questions and approaches

Note: The following are examples that may help you start to think about your own essay.

However, they should not be interpreted as indicating that a high grade would necessarily be achieved in choosing this particular topic, research question and approach.

Performance in your extended essay is dependent on how effectively your essay combines all three of these in relation to the assessment criteria.

Topic: A critique of social expectations in Victorian drama

Research question: How effectively does Wilde both present and critique social expectations in *The Importance of Being Earnest*?

Outline of approach: Identify various social expectations in the play, for example, of marriage, manners, religion, duty, gender. Through a close reading of the play and attention to language, investigate how effectively Wilde presents and critiques them. Some background research into Victorian society will provide social context, but the focus should be on the play, using relevant quotations to support the interpretation. Secondary scholarly sources should be consulted to support the argument, but they should be considered critically.

Topic: Human and artificial relationships in *Klara and the Sun*

Research question: To what extent and to what effect can Artificial Friends emulate humans to build relationships in *Klara and the Sun*?

Outline of approach: Through close reading, identify the different ways in which Artificial Friends attempt to emulate the human characters around them and build relationships. Through attention to characterization and language, investigate what these relationships show about the possibilities and limitations of technology and humanity. Does Ishiguro privilege one over the other? If so, to what effect? Does he consider them equal? If so, to what effect? Secondary scholarly sources should be consulted to support the argument, but they should be considered critically.

Topic: The role of satire in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Candide*

Research question: How and to what effect is satire used in the travels of the main characters in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Candide*?

Outline of approach: Investigate how each author creates satire and where it is used in each novel. Do they use satire similarly or differently, for similar or different purposes? What effect is created? Is satire an effective way to communicate the authors' messages? Secondary scholarly sources should be consulted to support the argument, but they should be considered critically.

Topic: The function of ghosts in American novels

Research question: What is the function and effect of the different approaches to ghosts in *Beloved* by Toni Morrison and *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James?

Outline of approach: Through close reading and contextual research, investigate how Toni Morrison and Henry James use ghosts differently in these two American novels. What kind of ghosts do the authors create and how do these ghosts haunt the characters in each novel? Some background research into the history of slavery, and excited anticipation of the turn of the century (19th to 20th) in the context of "modernism", should provide the context and the comparative element of the discussion. Secondary scholarly sources should be consulted to support the argument, but they should be viewed critically.

Topic: The effect of sexism in vintage advertisements

Research question: How, and to what effect, do Van Heusen menswear ads (1949–1951) use sexism to promote their clothes?

Outline of approach: Select some Van Heusen print advertisements from the years indicated and investigate how they engage sexism through language and image. Analyse the stylistic features to determine how men, women and clothing are portrayed. What is the effect? How do language and image work together to produce this effect? Sources on rhetoric and visual language should be consulted to support the argument.

Topic: The use of rhetorical techniques in motivational speeches

Research question: How effectively do Steve Jobs and Michelle Obama use rhetorical techniques to inspire their particular audiences?

Outline of approach: Through a careful analysis of the rhetorical and emotive devices in Steve Jobs's commencement speech at Stanford University (2005) and Michelle Obama's commencement speech at Tuskegee University (2015), investigate how the speakers make and support their arguments. Some research into the context of the speeches (their settings, people discussed within the speeches) will help illuminate how the speakers use both content and devices to motivate their audiences. Compare and contrast how they use both similar and different strategies. Sources on rhetoric should be consulted to support the argument.

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 language A. 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 of this guide for more complete advice on using the assessment criteria to inform your writing.

A: Framework for the essay	<p>Consider whether you have provided an effective framework for your literary or language-based essay. Check that your research question and your choice of texts, research methods and structural conventions are all suitable for your topic and this subject area.</p> <p>Structural conventions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an introduction that explains your topic and the focus of your essay, and informs the reader which texts you will be writing about • body paragraphs that build an argument using textual support from primary and secondary sources • a conclusion that considers your answer to the research question in the light of your close readings of primary and secondary sources. <p>You may organize your essay using sections and subsections, with appropriate headings, although you should take care that sections do not lead to a fragmented essay and that headings are not distracting.</p>
B: Knowledge and understanding	<p>Consider whether you have used sources, terminology and concepts that are relevant to an essay on literature or language.</p> <p>Terminology refers to the words that describe the techniques an author uses to create meaning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In a literary essay on a novel or in a language-based essay on a speech, you might note how metaphors and alliteration are used.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you are studying poetry, you might comment on how rhyme and enjambment are employed. • If you are writing on drama, you might consider the role of stage directions, props and sound effects (the “plastics” of theatre). • If you are analysing a film, or even a series of print ads, relevant terminology can include the types of shots used: e.g. high angle, close-up. <p>Concepts refer to an idea that occurs throughout a work, such as: dystopia; tragic hero; artificial intelligence; intertextuality; appeal to emotion; logic; authority.</p>
C: Analysis and line of argument	<p>Focus on literary analysis instead of plot description, and include a line of argument that links your analysis to the research question and the conclusion.</p> <p>Literary analysis has two components, as follows.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of some characteristic or element in the text • Explanation of the significance or effects of what has been identified <p>So, when you are analysing a text—whether it is literary, language-based or multimodal—you should first identify something within the text and then explain its significance or effects. This leads to an understanding of the meaning of the text.</p> <p>Your explanation could also be considered the answer to a “so what?” question. For instance, in an essay about Gothic fiction, you might identify the various ways in which a ghost haunts a character. You would then want to explain the significance or effects of those hauntings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “So what” that the character is haunted by the ghost in a certain way? What is the effect on the character? • What does that type of haunting say about the ghost? • What is the significance of this haunting in the text as a whole? • How does this haunting illuminate the text? <p>Identifying elements of a text such as actions, relationships and concepts is not enough: analysis needs to include an explanation of their significance or effects.</p>
D: Discussion and evaluation	<p>Consider what a balanced discussion of the findings of your essay looks like in a literary or language-based essay, and ensure that the supporting evidence you have used is appropriate. Evaluate your essay by weighing up the strengths and limitations of your essay.</p> <p>A balanced discussion considers multiple points of view, as well as your own, regarding a text or texts. The discussion is supported using logic and facts obtained through a close reading of both primary and secondary sources. You can also think of balance with respect to a comparative essay as giving equal attention to each of the primary texts you are analysing, instead of privileging the discussion of one text over another.</p>
E: Reflection	<p>Refer to the “Generic guidance for the extended essay” and the “Reflection and the extended essay” sections of this guide.</p>