

Examine

Dr Rutherford's top ten tips

Jill Rutherford is a former chief examiner for environmental systems and societies, and principal examiner for paper 1. She is now academic director of Ibicus.

- 1 Answer the question set and be familiar with the command terms and what they mean. You can know loads, but if you 'describe' when you are asked to 'explain', you don't get the marks. Underline the command terms in each question and make sure you do what the question asks you to do.
- 2 Notice how many marks (and lines) are allocated for each part of the question. Don't write less or more than you think is required. Be wary of going over the box size onto extra paper. Usually it is because you are waffling and have not thought through the answer before you start writing. If you have large handwriting, you might need to practise making it smaller.
- 3 Structure your response to make it as straightforward as possible for the examiner to understand what you are saying.
- 4 If you are given reading time, use it well. Scan the paper to get an idea of what is required of you. Then read it more carefully and jot down thoughts, answers, relevant facts, essay ideas etc.
- 5 You don't have to start answering at question 1. If you have a response booklet to write in, do the easy questions first. That will give you more confidence and calm you down if you are worried.
- 6 If there are essays and a choice, spend some time at the start of the exam deciding which to answer. Request some extra response paper and start your essay plans on these. If you mess up the timing, you can hand these in and hopefully gain a few marks. Answer what you think is your second-best essay first. This will get you into the swing of writing and should mean your best essay scores even more.
- 7 Never leave a blank response. Have a go. Often your instinctive answer can be right, or a guess may get a mark.
- 8 Research good examples and case studies that you can use to illustrate your arguments. Make sure you have both local and global examples and that you know what you are talking about. Don't make things up — the examiner will know.
- 9 Write concisely and coherently. Know what you want to say before starting to write. Rehearse your arguments and evaluations on rough paper or in your head.
- 10 Know the grade descriptors for the subject and attempt to meet the grade 7 requirements when you answer a paper. You won't do everything in every answer, but you should try across the whole paper.

s' tips

As you begin the final stages of your exam preparation, three IB examiners draw on their experience to provide you with revision techniques and tips

IBReviewExtras



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Dr Dunn on revising for history

Alastair Dunn sets paper 1 for route 1 history and contributes to the IB history Curriculum Review Committee.

One of the main challenges for you as an IB history student is the quantity of factual content in the course, especially at higher level. However, it is worth remembering that for the timed essay answers in papers 2 and 3, you will not only lack the time to use all the knowledge that you have retained, but even to attempt to do so would run the risk of producing a narrative answer, rather than one that is argument-led and that responds directly to the question.

One solution is to look at high-mark papers produced by past students and carefully check the balance of fact and argument

needed to gain a strong mark. This can often be reassuring if you are worrying that you have to learn everything by rote. It is a good exercise to type out the paragraph from a strong answer and colour-code the relative balance of knowledge, argument, analysis and interpretation.

Another solution is to build your revision around essay plans, in which you not only plan the overall shape of your answer, but also put limits on how much time can be spent on a particular sub-topic. Being mindful of the clock in the planning stage can help you prioritise the factual knowledge that is essential to supporting the key points in a particular paragraph.

Aaron Deupree on English B assessments

Aaron is head of ESL at the Leysin American School, Switzerland, and an IB English B examiner.

For many IB Diploma students whose first language is not English, English B provides a chance to enhance their communication skills through the study of non-literary texts and various genres. However, there may be a misconception that because English B students in English-medium DP schools are exposed to English in most of their classes, they do not need to revise extensively for English B assessments. In fact, specific revision strategies should be undertaken for the various English B assessments in order to obtain success.

Interactive and individual oral

- Improve accuracy, fluency and intonation through repetition and reflection.
- Repeated mock oral assessments offer a chance to practise and receive feedback.
- Audio/video recordings give you a chance to listen to yourself or others and reflect on potential improvements.
- Practice talks allow you to note word and sentence stress as well as intonation, raising awareness of such language features.

Written assignment

- Stress intertextual reading skills to help with writing.
- At standard level, practise taking notes and comparing and contrasting source texts on a particular core topic.
- At higher level, consider the texts in a new light ('...what if?') in order to engage with them in a creative way.

Paper 1

Improve reading comprehension by skimming the text to get the main idea, reviewing the questions carefully to identify exactly what information to scan for, and remembering that all answers should come from the text, not your opinions.

Paper 2

Improve your writing by making a plan; writing in well-organised paragraphs; having a clear beginning, middle and end; and checking for errors once you've finished. Make sure you identify the:

- audience
- language register (slang, informal, formal?)
- format based on text type
- communicative function (inform, persuade, argue?)

How I got a 7

IB students share advice that can help you get a top grade

One of the remarkable things about the IB is the lack of grade inflation over the years. This means that achieving a 7 in any subject has always been an incredible achievement. Here, a number of IB students explain how they achieved that coveted mark. While not every student is on track to get a 7, every student can certainly learn from the experiences of those who did.

Engage with the subject

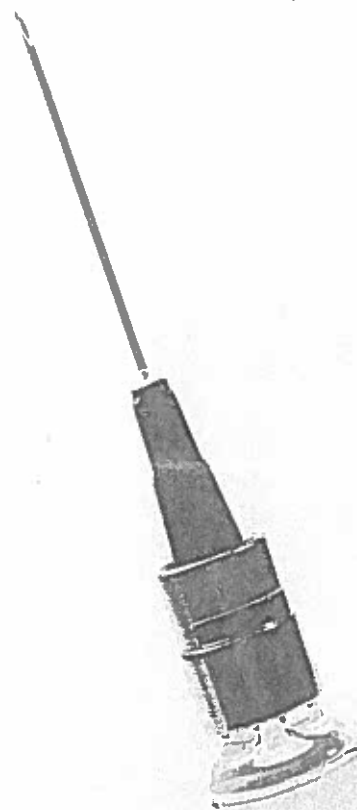
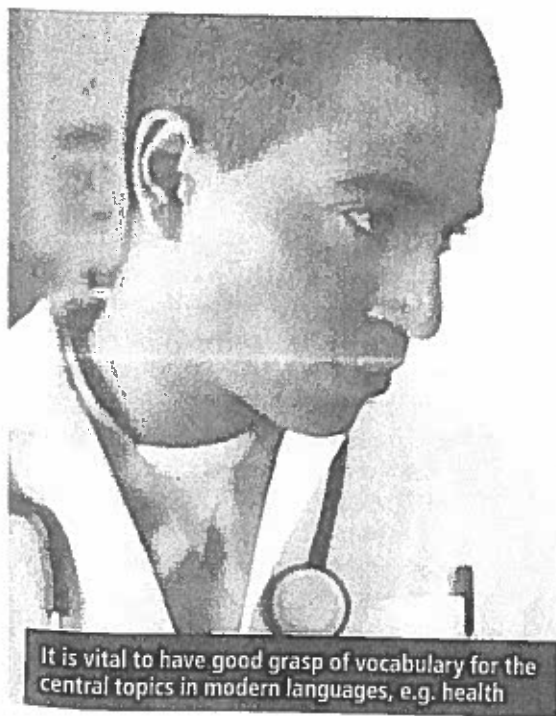
Issy Piper completed her IB Diploma in 2014 at Sevenoaks School, UK. She earned a 7 in both French B HL and Spanish B HL. She is currently taking a gap year and will apply to study Spanish and Russian at university.

In modern languages more than any other subject, you can't just sit down a week before the exam and cram revision to get a 7 — particularly because by the time you sit the exams in May, you've already done 50% of the course. Over the 2 years you will continuously improve, and to score a top grade, my advice would be to focus on each of the different components separately.

For me, being able to actually speak the language is the most important aspect. Take any opportunity you can to practise. Talking to teachers, engaging in debates and making foreign friends are fantastic ways to practise your language. Films are also a great way to absorb the language, and will beat learning grammar any day.

A good grasp of vocabulary is key for the written and reading papers, especially vocab relating to the central topics (science and technology, health etc.) Reading foreign language books over the 2-year course means that by the time you sit the reading paper, you will have a strong foundation of vocabulary and will be at ease with written texts. It is also a great way to pick up idiomatic phrases, which can make all the difference in the writing paper.

Finally, in your revision in the run-up to the final exams, make sure you know your grammar inside out. I'd recommend brushing up on it at regular intervals throughout the course — it will make your life much easier.



Understand the concepts

Mayank Agrawal studied mathematics HL at The Village School in Houston, USA, earning his Diploma in 2014. He went on to study mathematics at Swarthmore College.

For my 7 in mathematics, the key was genuine understanding of the material. In middle school, I used to struggle on tests because I would memorise concepts and not really be able to apply them. I never truly understood what I was learning. But in order to get a 7 in HL mathematics, you can't simply focus on memorisation and repetition. Instead you need to be able to explain the concepts and why they work. Without building this intuition, achieving a 7 is extremely difficult. You will be required to bring elements of mathematics from different sections of the course together. Understand the fundamentals of the material and you'll do great.

Don't be intimidated

Adam Herbers earned a 7 in Physics SL at Beaverton High School in Portland, USA. He is now studying at Clark Honors College, University of Oregon.

Probably the most important key to success in IB physics, particularly at standard level, is to not be intimidated by the mathematics involved. The most difficult skill within the course is the ability to take the concepts of physics and apply them to the situations presented in the exam. Once that's taken care of, the mathematics can be accomplished fairly easily.

I found that the best way to bolster this skill was to take questions from the textbook, as well as online exam banks, and simply practise working through the types of problems that would be presented on exams. Not only did this process help familiarise me with the scenarios I would have to grapple with, it also helped me practise understanding exactly what the numbers I was using within these

problems represented. Overall, I felt that by taking the concepts covered both in class and in the book and seeing how they directly applied to practical applications, I was able to obtain a deeper understanding through seeing the concepts in action rather than simply as ideas or theorems.

Learn to argue

Chloe James completed the IB Diploma at Wellington College, UK. She is now studying English literature at Durham University.

To achieve success in a philosophy SL exam, you need to develop a strong argument. A good argument will incorporate a clear personal response, two or more positions, and strengths and implications.

In order to prepare for the first exam I made posters relating to each topic, with sections covering each philosopher, their key ideas, the strengths and implications of their arguments, philosophers who would disagree with or support those arguments, and a line or two of my own personal response. This meant that when I entered the exam and read the questions, I immediately knew which philosophers to include and how to structure the essay. The exam is quite tight time-wise, so I also went through past papers, handing in essays to my teacher to be marked. This turned out to be extremely helpful, as a couple of days before the exam I wrote a similar essay to the one that came up in the paper, meaning that I could utilise my teacher's feedback in the exam.

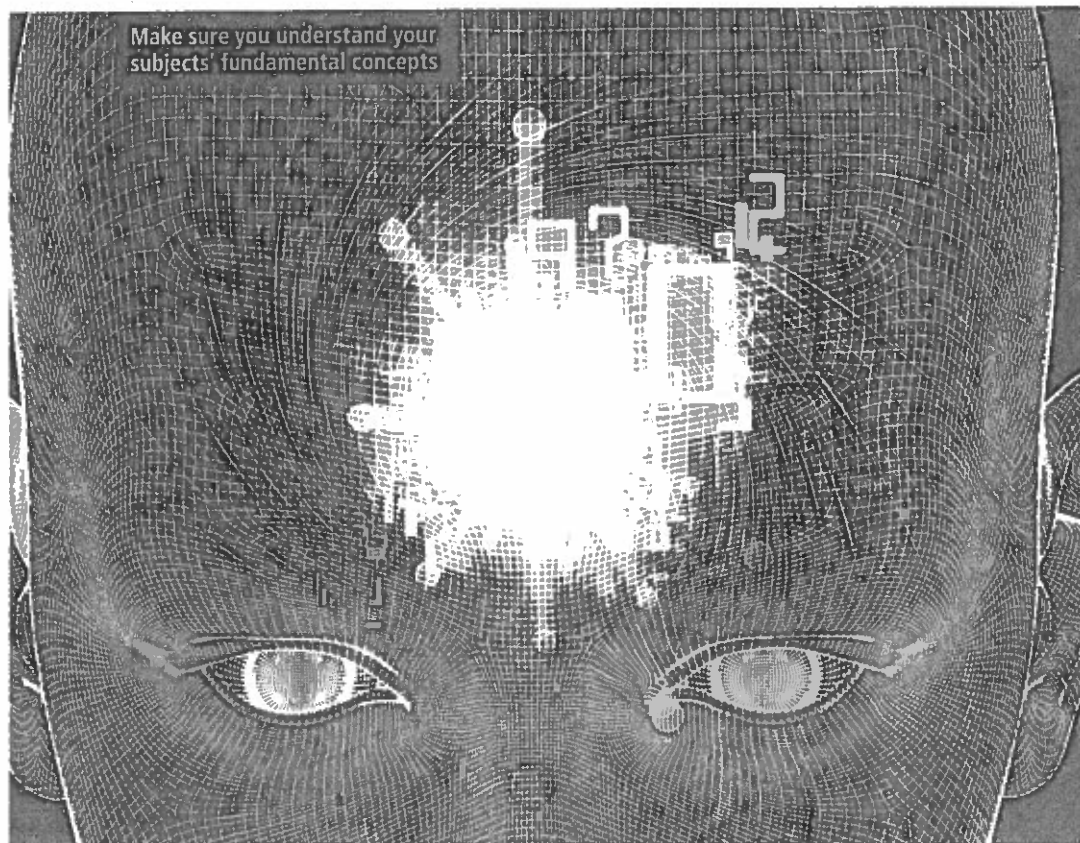
The set text paper is much more difficult to prepare for, as you only have two questions to choose from. I will never forget opening the paper and seeing two questions that I barely understood. However, the philosophy exam is kind inasmuch as you can score highly by applying whatever knowledge you do have in a convincing way through including the correct structural elements. This is particularly helpful if you panic when you open the paper, like I did. I would recommend reading a couple of high-scoring essays and creating some essay plans that mirror their structures. Having a clear idea of how your essay will be structured can really help in the first few minutes of the exam, and I found that clear planning meant that my arguments became more precise and my personal opinion took centre stage, both of which score high marks.

Learn from the past

Joselyn Salazar earned five IB course certificates at The Village School, USA. She earned 7s in French B and Chemistry SL and has gone on to study at the University of Pennsylvania.

As you embark on the hectic and exciting journey that is IB, you may believe that obtaining a 7 is going to be an impossible task. But nothing is further from the truth. Everyone has the potential to earn the highest marks possible.

Make sure you understand your subjects' fundamental concepts



It is not enough to study all the material in the textbook and complete all the coursework that your teacher assigns. In order to obtain a 7, you need to study outside of class, specifically past papers. The IB store has an array of past papers, mark schemes and question banks. Don't be afraid to ask your teachers for practice questions — most have copies of old exams that you can use to revise.

You should focus on learning the objectives and making sure you are familiar with this knowledge. In IB, it is crucial to prioritise learning what will be on the final exam. For most of your classes, various components of coursework will factor into your final grade, so try to get as many points as you can on your internal assessments — these can constitute up to 20% of your final mark.

Apply and evaluate

Mohit Chainani earned his IB Diploma in 2014 at Sha Tin College, Hong Kong. He is now reading business at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.

Getting 7s in business management and economics is not easy. I focused on a few key elements. The first thing to do is to go through the textbook and make sure you understand everything. Learn how you can apply concepts and evaluate them according to the case study (especially advantages and disadvantages). Emphasise understanding the content rather than memorising and regurgitating it — this will help your analytical skills. Put extra emphasis on the finance section — it comes up quite a lot.

For paper 1, know the case study inside out. Don't slack on details. When you are allocated questions to do from the list of preparation questions, be an overachiever — don't do 20 questions, do 30. The exam questions are similar to these, so you are essentially answering potential exam questions months before you actually do them.

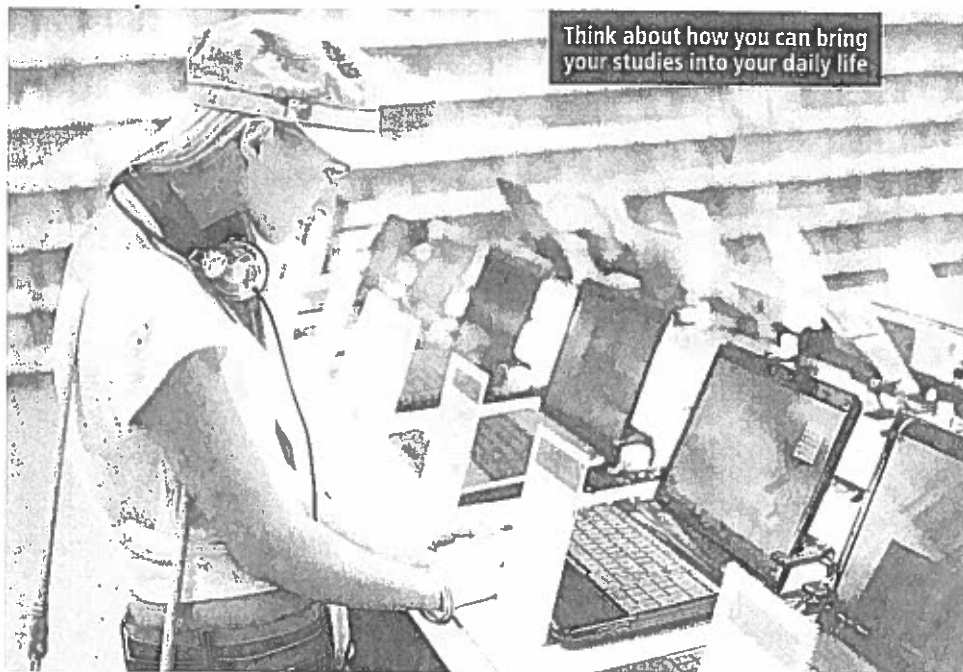
In the exams, keep asking yourself 'how?' and 'why?' when you make points to ensure you have explained them fully and haven't gone off track. Keep referring back to the case study. This is why it's about understanding, not regurgitating.

Bring IB business into your daily life. Keep an eye out for any advertising campaigns or marketing strategies, and consider them from an IB perspective. For example, notice pricing strategies when you go shopping and consider other pricing strategies that could be used.

Focus on themes

Micol Foa graduated from Southbank International School, UK, in 2013. She achieved a 7 in history and is now studying at King's College London.

The IB programme prepared me well for university, especially the skills I learned in history and my extended essay. You should make notes efficiently throughout the year and keep them concise. Focus on themes rather than the chronological order of events, use mind maps and tables, and make one set of notes per topic. This will provide you with all the information you will need to revise, and you won't find yourself searching through multiple booklets and textbooks before an exam. It will also be helpful when writing essays.



Think about how you can bring your studies into your daily life



Approach essay topics thematically rather than chronologically, reread the question before starting each new paragraph to make sure your essay is focused on answering the question, always answer the demands of the question rather than trying to reproduce an essay you have done previously, and spend 5 minutes making a plan before starting the essay. Practise using the facts you have learned in an analytical way by writing lots of essay plans for past questions. Regarding source work, use the reading time to plan your own knowledge basis to question 4 in your head and note how to incorporate the sources as you go, keeping to the suggested time limit for each question (5, 5, 15, 15 and 20 minutes).

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