

Examination preparation guide

This guidance is addressed to students.

Organising and relating your notes to the syllabus

The process of examination preparation should commence from the beginning of your two-year course. The time you spend on good organisation from the outset and throughout the course will pay you back many times over when you are into the final revision period. If you are well organised, your revision will go much more smoothly than otherwise and will certainly be less stressful.

Place a copy of the syllabus for each sub-topic at the front of your notes when you begin the first sub-topic, and do the same for each subsequent sub-topic. Number each page of your notes and write the page range of your notes alongside each section of the syllabus for the sub-topic. For example:

Sub-topic 4.01

- *Solar radiation drives the hydrological cycle [first bullet point under 'Knowledge and understanding', page 47 of the Environmental systems and societies guide]. Pages 1–3 [of your notes]*

By continuing this process throughout the course, you will be able to:

- correlate your notes with all the sections of the syllabus (and your textbook)
- access your notes quickly when you want to revise a particular topic
- easily spot any gaps in your notes.

You should check at the end of each sub-topic and fill any gaps then, rather than putting it off until later.

Use well-chosen headings and sub-headings in your notes, keeping in mind the wording of the syllabus at all times. Clearly highlight key terms, significant concepts and case studies.

IB and other resources

The International Baccalaureate (IB) and other publishers have produced a wide range of resources to help you prepare for your IB exams. Resources produced by the IB include:

- individual papers and markschemes
- examination and markscheme packs
- IB Questionbanks, which allow you to create customised tests quickly
- the IB Prepared series, which provides practical support and guidance to help you prepare for your exams and assessment.

Your teachers will undoubtedly use these resources, but there is no reason why you should not have access to them as well.

With a new syllabus, the most important examination guidance comes in the form of the specimen papers provided prior to the beginning of the course by the chief examiners. The



specimen papers provide examples of what to expect in the first series of examinations. Markschemes are supplied with the question papers.

Careful use of past papers from the previous syllabus should also prove useful. Your teachers can provide guidance in terms of the questions from the previous syllabus that remain relevant for the current syllabus. With time, of course, the bank of past papers relating to the current syllabus will gradually build up.

After every exam session, the chief examiners produce a subject report. This document summarises the conclusions of the team of examiners in terms of students' responses to each question. It is useful to read the subject report alongside the markscheme when you are analysing a past paper.

IB exams are as much about application and interrelatedness of the material as about content. So, in the final revision period, constant practice using specimen papers and past papers is the key to success. You will steadily learn how to apply the knowledge you have to better effect.

It is likely that a range of other resources, such as revision guides, will be produced by some major publishers. Look carefully at what is available and choose the resource(s) that are most appealing to you in terms of both content and style.

Stages of revision

There are a number ways you can organise your revision. Besides the order of topics and sub-topics, you should become aware of the connections between the different topics and sub-topics. These are noted in the *Environmental systems and societies guide* for each sub-topic under the heading 'Connections'.

Within your revision schedule of topics and sub-topics, try dividing your revision into the following three parts:

- key terms
- general content and concepts
- case studies.

You can think of this structure as a 'revision ladder' beginning with the most basic content and ending with the most detailed.

Much of your revision will be done on an individual basis, but it can be very productive to work in pairs, particularly with regards to key terms, where it is relatively easy to test each other. For example, you could revise key terms in sets of five and award two marks for a perfect answer, one mark for a partial answer, and zero for an incorrect answer. Go through this process a number of times until you have scored a perfect ten out of ten.

For case studies, you can summarise each case study in ten bullet points that condense the most important aspects of the study. Remembering the bullet points should provide a framework to prompt you about your wider knowledge of a particular case study.

Revision methods

When you revise, use the method or methods you find best. First, try out as many methods as possible, because you won't know how useful a revision technique is to you until you have tried



it. Methods include highlighting, note cards, lists, spider diagrams and mnemonics. Your teachers may well try out various revision techniques in class.

Whatever revision techniques you opt for, make your revision active rather than passive. This means constantly challenging yourself with small tests and other tasks, not just reading through your notes.

Revision timetable

Work out a sensible timetable that you can keep to. You need to be mindful of the demands of all of your subjects so that you can accommodate everything in a balanced way. Have regular breaks and give yourself little rewards when you complete a revision period successfully. Make a careful note of what you have done in every revision period.

Command words and question analysis

When answering any question, it is really important to respond directly to what is being asked. The command word or words in any question tell you what you should be doing. Command words include 'describe', 'explain' and 'evaluate'. There may be more than one command word in a question. If you are not completely sure of the meaning of a command word, you are unlikely to produce the direct answer required to gain a good mark. Use the glossary of command terms in the *Environmental systems and societies guide*. The command words are in three sets according to the objectives of the syllabus:

- Objective 1 includes six command words
- Objective 2 includes nine command words
- Objectives 3 and 4 include 18 command words.

You also need to be clear about the focus of the question in terms of content. Are you being asked to comment on one issue or more than one issue? If the latter is the case, you need to try to produce a reasonable balance between the different parts of the question.

Markbands

The IBO recommends that teachers make the markbands available to you. The markbands make you clearly aware of:

- what is required for a good answer to a question
- the differences between a poor answer, a satisfactory answer and a good answer.

When you study the markbands, you will realise that it is possible to give a poor answer without making a mistake, by answering at a very low level of detail. When answering a question, vague statements invariably lead to low marks, while precise and detailed statements result in high marks.

In the exam

In terms of the external assessment, you have to be prepared to tackle questions of a varied nature.

Paper 1: This paper accounts for 25 per cent of the total assessment. You will be provided with a range of data in a variety of forms (maps, graphs, photographs, text, and so on) relating to a specific, previously unseen, case study. You will answer some short-answer questions based on



the analysis and evaluation of the data in the case study. The questions test assessment objectives 1, 2 and 3, and all of the questions are compulsory.

The best preparation is to complete as many past papers as possible once you have covered the areas of the syllabus that individual papers are based on. The case study analysis questions in the textbook should help to build up your skills base for paper 1. Another important strategy in preparation for this paper is to develop your analytical skills when studying the variety of illustrations presented in the textbook.

It is important to answer all of the questions as directly as possible. Given the time and writing space available, you can't afford to veer away from the point.

- Underline the command word(s) to ensure that you answer the question directly and completely. If there is more than one command word, try to ensure that you provide a balanced answer.
- Ensure that you understand fully the maps, graphs, etc. provided. What does each piece of information show? Underline the title. Is there a scale, key, north point or any other additional information provided? Such additions could be crucial to providing a good answer to the question.
- Refer to all the information provided that is relevant to the question. It could be that a good answer requires you refer to information in more than one form. You must refer to the data in detail rather than giving a generalised answer.
- At the beginning of the exam, make a note of the parts of the syllabus the case study covers. Use the knowledge and understanding you have built up over the duration of the course to help you provide good answers to the questions.
- Look at the mark allocation for each question. This provides good guidance for the depth of answer required.

Paper 2: This paper accounts for 50 per cent of the total assessment. There are two sections in this paper: A and B. Section A consists of short-answer and data-based questions for a total of 25 marks. Section B is worth 40 marks. In Section B, you are required to answer two structured essay questions from a choice of four. Each question is worth 20 marks.

The strategy for tackling section A is similar to that for paper 1. Prior to the exam, try to ensure that you are confident in analysing data in a wide range of formats (maps, graphs, photographs, text, and so on).

Section B tests your knowledge and understanding in more detail. As you have a choice of questions in this section, it is important to select wisely. With more time and space available for this section of the paper, it is very important that you think in terms of producing a brief plan for each sub-section of your essay. In your plan, note the key terms appropriate to the question, so that you can show the examiner the full extent of your knowledge. Make sure that from the first sentence you are answering the question directly. A brief plan should ensure that you follow a logical sequence of argument. Where appropriate, refer to case studies and quote data. Make the best use possible of the knowledge and understanding you have accumulated over the duration of the course. A brief concluding statement is useful, as it helps you to be sure you have answered the questions directly.



Conclusion

Without doubt, good organisation is the key to success. Make sure you are well organised from the beginning of the course. If you get into good habits from the start, there is every chance that you will continue with such a structure and keep exam pressure to as reasonable a level as possible.