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How do I choose a topic I won't regret later?

Your school may organize EE workshops. These are designed to help students progress through the EE with a shared focus at key stages. Support may also be structured differently across subjects. For example, some science subjects need to prioritize experimental work at particular points, which can influence the overall timing and sequence of the process.

If you benefit from regular workshops, you may find it useful to compare what you learn there with the guidance offered in this book.

You can then evaluate which strategies best suit your subject/topic and your own learning style in discussions with your supervisor.

But here is something that is always true: writing 4000 words on a topic you don't enjoy is rarely going to end well. You will need to stay committed for around 40 hours of work, so choosing a topic you care about really matters. If you are still unsure where to begin, try this strategic decision-making checklist to help narrow it down.

EE topic decision checklist

- List your six IB DP subjects, from most enjoyable to least enjoyable.
- Highlight three you take at Higher Level – you will likely feel more confident in those.
- Think of topics you have enjoyed studying in those HL subjects or topics you're excited to explore if you are early in the course. Look at what is coming up in your subject curriculum. Any topics catch your eye?
- If you are well into your DP studies, be careful: **do not** reuse your Internal Assessment (IA) topic. **Your EE must be original and clearly distinct.**
- Choose your top two favourite topics so far. Do a quick search:
 - Are there enough credible, academic sources available (books, articles, databases)?
 - Can a librarian suggest any scholarly sources or research angles?
- Ask yourself:
 - Can I see myself getting more curious about this topic as I learn?
 - Do I feel there is enough to explore, not just surface-level facts?
 - Are there valid, balanced viewpoints I can engage with?

Remember: your goal isn't to be an expert on day one. Your EE is about growing your understanding. So, choose something that

sparks your interest and that you will enjoy spending time on.

Get it right!

You should not use the same topic for your **Internal Assessment (IA)** and your EE. If the same or a very similar topic is submitted for both, you risk being flagged for academic misconduct. IAs and EEs serve different purposes and are assessed using different criteria. If you are considering building on a similar theme, you must approach it with a new research question, a distinct **scope**, and a different context. Always discuss potential overlaps with your EE Supervisor or IB Coordinator before settling on a topic.

In Step 1, you have learned:

- how the EE is about being curious and answering a question that interests you in a structured way
- what a research direction for a Language B EE looks like (themes, sub-themes, topics)
- why you cannot do an EE on a language you have just started to learn
- how to choose a topic you won't regret later.

Managing the process – Plan smart

STEP 2

This chapter will help you to:

- develop techniques to track and review your progress
- build a **timeline** of your EE
- work out who can support you throughout your EE journey
- organize your work so you don't feel rushed at the end
- link your EE experience to your university or career plans during interviews.

How do I stay on track when I have so much else to do?

The IB Diploma keeps you busy, with many subjects all competing for attention. **The key is not doing everything at once, but learning to stay steady, focused, and realistic.** Progress comes from rhythm, not rush.

Stay on track

Start → Plan → Balance → Prioritize → Reflect → Grow



Start and stay consistent

- ✓ Aim for short regular sessions.
- ✓ Protect (set aside) one quiet session a week for EE progress.
- ✓ Missed a session? That's fine, just restart.



Plan smart

- ✓ Make sure every important date for your subjects, Theory of Knowledge (TOK), EE, Creativity, Activity, and Service (CAS), and any university applications is clearly logged and easy to find. Keep your calendar or tracker visible and updated so you always know what's coming next.
- ✓ Begin the week with achievable goals that move your work forward and fit around your other commitments. For example: *Finalize my research question and update it in my RRS, add three new academic sources to my bibliography or write 300 words analysing one key source.*
- ✓ Review your progress weekly: what worked, what didn't?



Balance is a strategy

- ✓ Breaks, movement, and rest make your brain work better.
- ✓ Protect downtime like you protect deadlines.
- ✓ Use short resets (walks, music, quick chat) to recharge.



Prioritize what matters most

- ✓ When everything feels urgent, ask yourself which task will move you forward.
- ✓ Focus first on the task that will make the biggest difference today.
- ✓ Be kind to yourself about what can wait.



Reflect and adjust

- ✓ At the end of each week, check what's helping or draining you.
- ✓ Adjust your plan.
- ✓ Reflect: *What habit helped me feel more in control this week?*



Stay steady, consistency builds confidence, planning clears your mind, and balance keeps you going. You don't have to do it all at once; take it one step at a time.

Assessment and criteria – Know what you are aiming for

STEP 3

This chapter will help you to:

- know what examiners are looking for
- understand what the five IB criteria are
- work out how to meet each criterion in **Language Acquisition**
- avoid common mistakes.

Before you can write confidently, you need to understand how your EE is assessed and what the examiners are actually looking for. In this section, we will break down the skills you must demonstrate, one by one, and explore how performance can vary within each skill.

Think of the five **assessment criteria** like different colours in a palette: each criterion is its own colour and within each one you can reach different shades depending on how well you meet the expectations.

Essential attributes for success

It's important to know that your essay is marked to reward your work, not to catch you out. The IB has created a clear and reliable **assessment framework** and, if you follow it carefully, your examiner will naturally expect to see each criterion show up in your writing. This means the assessment is built on the assumption that students are genuinely trying to meet the expectations and examiners look for evidence of this throughout your essay.

In other words, **the system is designed to credit your effort, not judge you harshly**. Examiners read your EE asking themselves: *Where are the marks? What can I credit?* Their goal is to recognize every piece of progress

you show. This means that even small efforts such as clearer explanations, better examples, and more accurate **terminology** can earn you marks. Whenever you feel unsure, remember this: every improvement is worth it and it can be rewarded.

The assessment criteria will feel less overwhelming once you see the simple habits that resourceful learners rely on. The IB expects you to approach your work thoughtfully, ask questions, and make informed decisions. These are all part of becoming a critical thinker. But **critical thinking** isn't something abstract or mysterious; it shows up in very practical **attributes** that you use every day.

Understanding the five IB criteria

The attributes described above connect directly to the five **assessment criteria** used to evaluate your EE. Each criterion highlights a core skill that examiners look for. Together, they focus on your ability to:

- plan and conduct effective research
- demonstrate **subject-specific** knowledge and conceptual understanding
- analyse evidence and develop a clear line of **argument**
- discuss your findings critically and evaluate your approach
- reflect thoughtfully on your learning as a researcher.

The 5 assessment criteria in the EE

Criterion A: Framework for the essay	• Is my research question clear and specific? • Have I chosen research methods that truly serve my question? • Does my essay have a clear structure that helps me explain my investigation?
Criterion B: Knowledge and understanding	• Am I using research materials that are relevant to my subject, topic, and research question? • Do I show real understanding by using the correct concepts for my topic? • Am I using accurate and appropriate terminology for my topic?
Criterion C: Analysis and line of argument	• Am I clearly explaining what my research shows? • Does my essay follow a clear and consistent line of argument that links my research question, my findings, and my conclusion?
Criterion D: Discussion and evaluation	• Have I discussed why my findings are important, considered different perspectives, and supported my points with clear evidence? • Have I evaluated the strengths and limitations of my research?
Criterion E: Reflection	• Have I explained what I learned, how my ideas changed, and how I developed as a researcher and learner?

If you're wondering whether your EE is actually meeting the expectations for Language B, treat the questions above as your built-in reality check. They help you check whether you're genuinely on track:

- ✓ Do you have a clear, focused research question?
- ✓ Are you using research methods that make sense for your topic?
- ✓ Are you explaining your ideas in a way readers can follow?
- ✓ Have you considered different perspectives and evidence?
- ✓ Have you reflected on your process and what you learned?

Each criterion encourages you to look at your work from a slightly different angle so you can spot what's strong and what may need more development. It ensures your essay does what a **Language use, Cultural study, or Literary analysis** essay is expected to do.

These questions won't magically write the EE for you (if only!), but they *will* help you catch issues early, strengthen your approach, and feel more confident as you work. Think of them as friendly signposts, not intimidating checkpoints.

English B example: What does an RRS look like in practice?

Let's take a closer look at an example from English B, where a student decides to explore language and identity, focusing on the use of slang on social media.

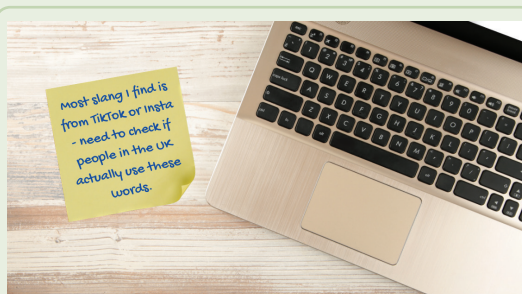
The student is interested in how slang helps people express belonging within a group and whether users realize that their choice of words might also exclude others. At this *early* stage, the student is still exploring broad directions such as:

- Why do teenagers use slang on social media?
- What kinds of slang are most common among British teens online?
- Does slang help people feel like they belong to a group?
- Do people realize that some slang might leave others out?

This is the *initial* phase of the EE journey, where ideas are still forming and the student uses the RRS to brainstorm, record first impressions, and identify possible research paths.

How your ideas begin to grow in your EE journey

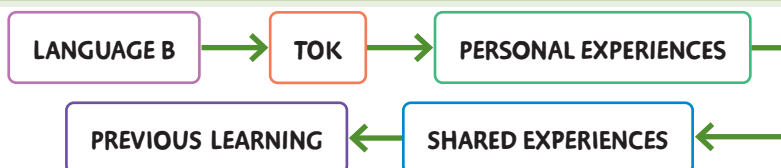
Early stage: Prompt questions



It can start with something small: a quick note or a thought scribbled in your RRS.

- Why am I interested in this topic?
- What is slang? How do people define it?
- Where do I actually see slang being used most?
- Do I change how I speak depending on who I'm talking to? How and why?
- Has anyone ever asked me to stop using a word because it didn't fit the situation?

Building on what I already know



You can create your own flowchart to show the concepts or prior knowledge you already have about your topic. It helps you visualize where your ideas began.

- Which of the Language B five themes connects most closely to my topic?
- From Theory of Knowledge: what TOK discussions relate to language as a way of knowing or language shaping identity?
- From my personal and shared experiences:
 - Have I ever experienced moments where language included or excluded me?
 - What shared experiences (at school, online, with family) have shaped how I think about communication and belonging?



You can start exploring your topic in simple ways by researching reliable sources, talking to peers, running a short survey or analysing real examples. Choose one method you could try first and record what insights it gives you.

Simple methodology options

- Library or online research to collect key theories or definitions
- Peer conversations to notice how slang changes in different groups
- Short survey to spot trends or shared expressions
- Interviews to find examples of awareness and identity in **language use**.

A well-organized RRS acts as your compass, helping you spot main ideas, make meaningful connections, and support your writing throughout the process. It allows you to explore your curiosity while being guided and supported by the educators and mentors around you, a habit that will continue to serve you well at university and beyond.

In Step 4, you have learned:

- what the RRs is and how it can help you to push your reflections further and turn first thoughts into academic insight
- how it is best to update your RSS as you advance through your EE journey
- that the RSS is a great tool that will support your supervisor meetings and help you fill your RPF
- that there are many ways to keep and organize your RRS (but we show you one example so you can get a better idea of what it can look like).

How to keep track of everything I've read and collected

Staying organized is essential for a successful EE. You will read and collect a lot of material and it is easy to lose track unless you have a clear system. Your main tool is the Reflection Researcher's Space (RRS).

Keep track of ideas and of your process in your RRS

When you encounter a source that makes you think, approach it as follows:

Case study: French B

You are analysing an **eco-fiction** in which the author **integrates** scientifically informed material to reinforce the credibility of the narrative. You are at an early stage of your EE process, investigating whether this text is a viable option and carrying out preliminary research to identify emerging ideas and to begin formulating a RQ.

What I read:	• A published interview, in French, of the author about his scientific research • Reviews explaining how the author used scientific research to support an ecological novel • An article on scientific communication in fiction
What I found out:	The author blends scientific French with reflective, philosophical French language. I also noticed features: rhetorical questions, personification, logical connectors, and simplified scientific explanations ('vulgarisation scientifique').
Why it was useful:	It helped me see how the ecological message is communicated through specific choices in French: scientific terminology , balanced sentence structures, and accessible explanations that guide the reader.
Ideas that emerged:	Perhaps the switch between scientific register and narrative/poetic French influences how the reader perceives nature. I might compare passages to see how the tone changes.
Questions I now have:	Which French terms or scientific expressions are most frequent? How do rhetorical questions in French shape the message? Does the mix of registers increase credibility?
Possible lines of argument:	• Scientific French strengthens the ecological message. • Rhetorical devices guide the reader's interpretation. • Is the blend of fiction and scientific knowledge a typical French strategy that shapes how nature is represented?



Assessment skill

This case study illustrates possible steps leading to the development of lines of argument, showcasing the thinking needed to demonstrate **Criterion C** (see **Step 2**).

Keep track of your sources

As you go along, you will screen each source that looks like a potential lead, either to help you refine your RQ or later in the process to present different viewpoints on your topic. Step by step, a bit like an investigator, you bring different elements into the spotlight to build your conclusion.

Therefore, it is essential to keep a simple list of your sources as you go. Here are examples of what your table could look like, using a fictional but realistic source.

Completed source tables

Source type	Newspaper article
Title	'Les forêts du futur: vers une nouvelle conscience écologique?'
Where is it accessible?	Hyperlink saved in my EE folder, also available through the school library's digital newspaper archive.
Last accessed	12 September 2025, 18:45
Author	Martin, C.
When was it published?	Published on 3 May 2023. I need to consider how recent this is and whether it reflects current ecological debates in France.
One sentence about why this source matters	This article helps me understand how contemporary French media discusses the relationship between humans and trees, which connects directly to the environmental message in the novel I'm analysing.
Where can I find my notes on this source?	RRS Folder → Section 2 → 'Media sources on ecology' (mind map entry dated 12/09/2025)

Source type	Interview I conducted
Title	Interview with Mme Dupuis (French teacher) about scientific language in environmental fiction
Where is it accessible?	Audio file + transcript saved in my EE folder, original notes in my notebook
Last accessed	10 September 2025, 17:2
Author	Interview conducted by myself (student researcher)
When was it published?	Conducted on 8 September 2025 (not published)
One sentence about why this source matters	Mme Dupuis's explanation of how scientific vocabulary is used in French literature helped me understand register shifts in my primary text.
Where can I find my notes on this source?	RRS Folder → Section 4 → 'Interview insights on language registers'

STEP 9

Using AI with purpose – Stay in control of your ideas

This chapter will help you to:

- understand how you are allowed to use AI in your EE and how to maximize its use
- identify what you need to do to keep your own thinking at the centre of your EE
- understand when you should acknowledge that you have used AI in your EE
- evaluate the information AI gives you so your work isn't impacted by its **limitations** and **biases**
- use AI responsibly and ethically.

Get it right!

AI is developing quickly and the tools available today may look very different tomorrow. Because of this, and because schools often have their own rules, this book does not recommend particular tools by name. Instead, our focus is on principles that will help you use any AI responsibly. When we talk about 'AI tools', we mean the kind of software, sometimes called **generative AI**, that can create text, summaries, or ideas in response to questions you ask it.

What's allowed and how to use AI in your EE

AI is for inspiration and ideas

The IB encourages the use of AI and we hope that you will also be willing to interact with new technologies in creative ways. However, there are some clear guidelines to follow if you plan on using AI as a tool to support and assist your EE journey. The EE is an assessed independent work. For this reason, AI should only be used occasionally and its use should be clearly acknowledged.

There are many ways in which AI can help you. Try to think of AI as your helper or personal assistant: it could easily help you create a schedule and remain organized. It could also help you locate some information you may vaguely remember.

For example, I wanted to read a book, years ago, but I had forgotten its title. AI was a wonderful aid to my unreliable memory: I remembered the name and the year of the radio programme in which that book had

been mentioned. I also recalled some details that had made the book attractive to me. By asking me more and more precise questions, the AI was able to get further details from me, and I finally found the book after years of unsuccessful searching online.

In the same way, when you start thinking about your EE in Language Acquisition, you might only have a vague idea, based on something you studied before – maybe a theme like 'youth culture', 'immigration', or a film you once watched in class. At first, it feels fuzzy, like a half-remembered detail, but with the right **prompts**, AI can help you bring those ideas back to life and guide you towards initial ideas for your essay, without needing to pin down the final **research question (RQ)** just yet.

AI tools: what works and what to avoid

Aim	Is AI acceptable? (conditions)	Examples (in Language B context)
Starting the EE		
Brainstorming research topics	⚠️ Only <i>after</i> you've thought about your own interests and talked with your supervisor. The final choice must be yours. You must carry out your own investigation once the suggestions have been generated.	❌ Don't ask: Give me an EE topic in Latin American history. ✅ If stuck: Suggest 5 broad themes in Latin American history I could discuss with my supervisor.
Refining a research topic	⚠️ OK <i>after</i> you and your supervisor have agreed on a general direction. Use AI only to check options, not to choose for you.	❌ Don't ask: Make me a narrow question about women's rights in France. ✅ OK: I want to study women's rights in 20th-century France. I'm thinking of time periods like the 1920s or 1960s. Can you list possible focuses?
Explaining concepts	✅ OK to get a simple explanation, but always double-check with your notes, textbooks, or teacher.	✅ Explain Spanish surrealism in simple words so I can compare with my notes.
Organizing and planning the EE		
Managing time/making a timeline	✅ OK to help you organize deadlines.	✅ I have a 4000-word EE due on October 15. I can work 5 hours per week on weekends. Make me a week-by-week plan.
Making an essay outline	❌ Not OK to ask AI to do this for you.	❌ Make my EE outline on Lorca's plays.
Improving your outline	⚠️ Only <i>after</i> you've made your own outline based on your own research and preliminary notes, and only in agreement with your supervisor.	✅ Does the order of my ideas support a clear argument if my conclusion is X?

Sample interim RPF entry

At the start of my essay, I thought that translating Arabic proverbs would be enough to demonstrate cultural knowledge. However, as I started gathering material, I realized that what I had was just a long list without analysis. This was frustrating because I could not see how to shape it into a research essay. During my first meeting, my supervisor encouraged me to think about methodology, which at first sounded too advanced for a Language B essay. I began reading some examples of linguistic analyses and saw that even simple methods could help me. For instance, I tried looking at the literal meaning and then the hidden meaning of certain proverbs. A proverb about 'bread and salt' is not just about food but also about loyalty and friendship. This made me realize that the language of proverbs contains cultural values. I am now beginning to group the proverbs into themes, such as hospitality and family. This feels like the start of a clearer framework, and I already feel more confident.

Word count: 170 words

Get it right!

⚠ Your RPF must be written in the **same language as your EE**.

How do I start?

When writing your reflections, sometimes the hardest part is getting started. The following sentence stems can help you express your ideas clearly and academically.

Use them as starting points, then adapt them to your own EE. These stems are not scripts to copy, but scaffolds to help you write more thoughtful and authentic reflections that show your growth as a researcher.

Sentence stems to help you start

Sentence stem	Example in Language B
<i>By engaging with others, I realized that...</i>	<i>By discussing interpretations with my Language B teacher, I realized that I had misunderstood a cultural reference in the novel, and that stopped me from going off in the wrong direction.</i>
<i>This helped reassure my supervisor that my essay is genuinely mine because...</i>	<i>Explaining my choice of sources to my supervisor reassured her that my argument was based on my own analysis rather than AI summaries.</i>
<i>I noticed a gap in my evidence when ... which led me to...</i>	<i>When comparing different newspaper articles, I noticed a gap in my evidence about linguistic registers, so I decided to collect additional examples from youth magazines.</i>
<i>Rethinking my structure allowed me to...</i>	<i>Rethinking my structure allowed me to present the cultural context first, which made my literary analysis clearer.</i>
<i>Reflection is one of the most effective ways to catch mistakes, as I discovered when...</i>	<i>Reflection showed me that my survey questions were too broad, so I narrowed them to get more precise data.</i>
<i>This avoided an unnecessary detour because...</i>	<i>Checking with a first-language speaker avoided an unnecessary detour into a mistranslation of a key phrase.</i>