

Frequently asked questions about the Diploma Programme

What is the Diploma Programme?

The Diploma Programme (DP) is a curriculum framework designed by the International Baccalaureate (IB) for students in the last two years of high school.

IB students graduating with the IB diploma are able to study at universities all around the world, often with advanced credit. Students report that their involvement with the IB has given them the tools needed to succeed at college. In particular, students comment on their sense of preparedness, self-confidence, research skills and their ability to manage their time. Even more important, they have developed a sense of the world around them and their responsibility to it.

Diploma Programme students study six subjects (three at standard level and three at higher level) over two years and complete three additional requirements: the theory of knowledge (TOK), the extended essay and at least 150 hours of CAS—creativity, activity and service tasks outside of the classroom. In addition to these requirements, students must earn a minimum of 24 points out of a possible 45 points on the final assessments which are externally marked and moderated by the IB, in order to receive an IB diploma.

Theory of knowledge (TOK)

TOK is an interdisciplinary course designed to help students question and understand how they know what they know. Students study how individuals from various disciplines view the world in order to develop their own ways of thinking. By stimulating analysis of knowledge across disciplines, TOK seeks to help students make sense of school and the world.

Creativity, activity, service (CAS)

CAS is an experiential learning component of the DP. Students complete a wide variety of extracurricular, community service and athletic options to fulfill this requirement.

Extended essay

The extended essay introduces students to the demands and rewards of independent work. Emphasis is placed on doing personal research and communicating ideas effectively in order to write a 4,000-word essay in an area of personal interest.

How do colleges and universities view the Diploma Programme?

The DP is internationally recognized as representing one of the highest standards in university preparatory education. More than 1,000 colleges and universities in North America have recognition policies on how they weigh it in admissions, advanced standing, college credit and scholarships.

A list of colleges and universities that grant credit, scholarships and/or advanced standing for DP diplomas and certificates is available at www.ibo.org.



What kind of student is a good candidate for the DP?

The DP is a rigorous course of study for motivated students. That said, prior academic success is less an indicator of ability to earn the diploma than are a student's determination to do his or her best, willingness to be organized in order to complete the work while leading a full, balanced life, and a strong commitment to learning in and beyond the classroom.

Do DP students have time for anything beyond academics?

Absolutely. Most successful Diploma Programme students lead very full lives. They are often members of athletic teams and involved in a wide range of activities. Time management and organization are key skills the IB develops in students.

Are IB programmes considered "gifted" programmes?

The IB does not control how schools designate their Diploma Programme. In some instances, schools choose to designate the programme as selective enrolment via application or as a magnet programme. In other cases, the programme is open to any student.

Do DP teachers receive special training?

All DP teachers receive professional development in the IB's approaches to teaching and approaches to learning from certified IB workshop leaders. This is a requirement for IB World Schools implementing the DP.

Does implementing an IB programme mean my child's school will not teach local or national standards such as the Common Core?

The IB is committed to making sure that students in IB programmes meet and exceed local or national standards.

With the implementation of any IB programme, schools are required to examine their curriculum carefully to ensure that there is alignment with local, state or national standards. More information on the IB and the Common Core is available at

www.ibo.org.

What's the difference between the diploma and certificates?

Not all students choose to take the full course load leading to a diploma. Instead, some take a few DP courses in areas where they have a particular interest or strength, similar to honours and Advanced Placement classes. Certificates are awarded on a course-by-course basis to students who choose not to do the full programme. Students who satisfactorily complete a DP course earn a certificate and may be eligible for university credit.

How does the IB DP differ from other university-preparatory programs such as Advanced Placement and Cambridge?

The IB DP is a two-year comprehensive curriculum with a culminating set of externally graded final exams. IB, Advanced Placement (AP) and other college-preparatory curriculums like Cambridge are all university preparatory, academically rigorous programmes. There are important differences, however, in the content and exams. The DP is a cohesive and comprehensive programme, not a collection of individual courses as is the case with Advanced Placement. The most important distinguishing factor is the core of the Diploma Programme (CAS, TOK and extended essay).

Can you give a specific example of how the DP prepared students for college?

A 2012 study by the Consortium for Chicago School Research found that Diploma Programme students who graduated from 12 Chicago public schools were more likely to attend college, attend a selective college and persist in college for 2 years than a matched comparison group. Additional studies on programme impact are available at

www.ibo.org/research

How can I learn more about the IB and DP?

- Visit the IB website at www.ibo.org
- Attend school meetings and events
- Speak with your school's DP coordinator
- Speak with your child's DP classroom teachers.

How to make your IB credentials stand out in the university application process

As an International Baccalaureate (IB) student, you are distinctive and will bring a unique set of attributes to whatever university or college that you ultimately attend. The challenge is to how to bring those qualities, in addition to grades and standardized test scores, to the attention of admissions officers. Have you considered how best to describe your high school achievements in your university application?

IB Diploma (DP) and Career-related Programme (CP) students:

- know how to do independent research
- have a demonstrated foreign language skill
- contribute a global perspective to current events
- have given back to their communities through volunteerism and community service
- study the language, history and arts of diverse cultures, and approach problems from multiple perspectives
- have above-average time management skills and are exceedingly well-prepared for the rigour of college-level coursework.

Additionally, DP students take a year-long course to develop critical thinking, analysis, and explore ways of knowing (theory of knowledge (TOK)), while CP students bring work-related experience and a career-specific set of skills to their university application or resume.

Five more ways to emphasize your IB strengths:

1. Highlight your advanced writing skills: Completing multiple essays comes easily to IB students given the emphasis the programme places on self-reflection and written expression. IB students can capitalize further on this by using the interdisciplinary model of learning to respond to admissions questions from multiple perspectives.

2. Consider universities that accept individual portfolios:

Some universities allow students to submit individual portfolios of work. The DP and CP programmes place emphasis on the development of a student's abilities over time. IB students will have amassed a significant body of work in their personal portfolios and in the MYP personal project. Portfolio-based applications allow admission officers to understand how an IB student is reflective and critical in their work.

3. Nail the interview: DP students give multiple presentations over their two-year course work. The confidence and experience they develop in these public speaking opportunities will translate into a big advantage when interviewing for university admission, internships and work. Don't forget to mention your creativity, activity, service (CAS) project in addition to your academic credentials.

4. Recommendation letters that pack a punch: The recommendation letter remains a pivotal component of the application package. When soliciting recommendation letters that stand out, consider providing your teachers with an easy-to-reference profile of your high school history beyond academics. Include your extended essay topic, your personal project topic, your CAS project, foreign language abilities, participation in any international programmes of study, extra-curricular activities and course workload.

5. Show your global perspective: IB students have a strong sense of their cultural identity, and respect the values and differences of other cultures. Trained to think globally and act locally, IB students are required to participate in civic engagement through a community service project that ties into some aspect of their coursework.





Key findings from research on the Diploma Programme (DP) core

The International Baccalaureate (IB) Global Research department collaborates with universities and independent research institutions worldwide to produce rigorous studies examining the impact and outcomes of the IB’s four programmes. This resource provides a brief overview of key findings from recent research on the DP core, which includes theory of knowledge (TOK), the extended essay and creativity, activity, service (CAS).

Theory of knowledge (TOK)

In theory of knowledge, students reflect on the nature of knowledge and on how we know what we claim to know.

- A study in **Australia** explored IB alumni and current DP students’ ratings of their **critical-thinking abilities**. Quantitative results indicated gains in the use of critical-thinking skills between the two successive years of the DP. Additionally, second-year DP students reported a significantly greater likelihood of using a range of critical-thinking skills (Cole, Gannon, Ullman and Rooney 2014).

Perceived TOK outcome	Mean score (SD)	Comparison of means (Year 11–12)
Critical-thinking skills	Year 11: 4.23 (1.25)	$t = 3.79$ $p < .001$
	Year 12: 4.50 (1.27)	

Note: $n = 1,242$

Table 1: Mean differences in students’ perceived outcomes of TOK study, by year cohort.

- Examining the longer-term impacts of the DP on students, a **global study** reported the perspectives of a diverse group of alumni from 20–63 years of age. DP alumni reported that in the years following completion of the DP, they were able to more fully appreciate the benefits of participating in **theory of knowledge**, as one former student explained: “*You know, I benefited more from [TOK] after I did it than when I was doing it ... and I probably now get more out of thinking about the things that were presented at that time than I did when I was a student there*” (Wright 2015).
- TOK teachers from across the **world** offered their perceptions of the **impact and implementation of TOK** in IB World Schools. The teachers believed that the main benefits of TOK for students are the ability to critically evaluate information and to recognize and reflect on personal assumptions. The teachers also strongly agreed that teaching TOK has provided valuable professional

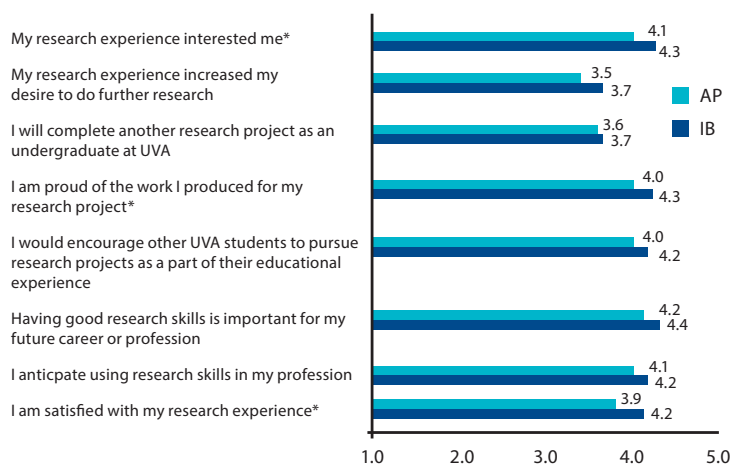
development for them, as it has enhanced their own critical thinking as well as understanding of content and connections across disciplines (Bergeron and Rogers 2016).

Extended essay

The extended essay is an independent, self-directed piece of research, culminating in a 4,000-word essay.

A series of studies explored student experiences with the extended essay in the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada.

- A study at the University of Virginia (UVA) in the **United States** explored how the experience of completing the **extended essay** prepares students for university-level research and academic success. In comparison to Advanced Placement (AP) students, former DP students were more likely to report that they: felt prepared for university coursework involving research; had executed a research project at UVA; were proud of their research; intended to conduct future research; and found their research skills to be important to future success. Several of these differences were statistically significant (Inkelas, Swan, Pretlow and Jones 2012).



Note: * indicates statistical significance, $p < .05$ (Bonferroni adjustment was used to adjust for potential Type 1 errors).

Figure 1: IB and AP alumni’s perceptions of engagement with research.

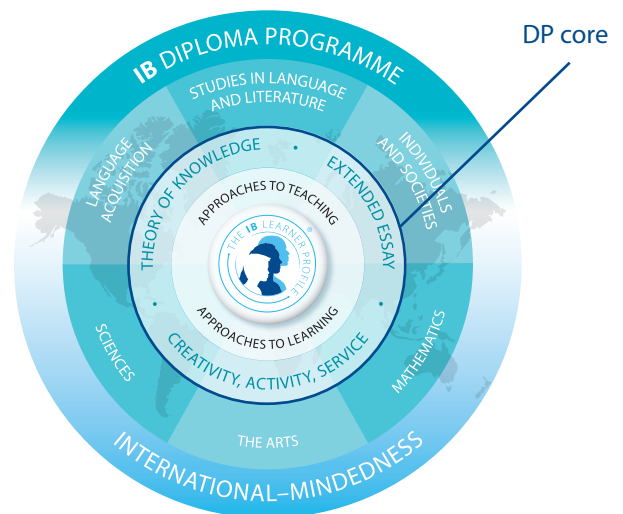
Key findings from research on the Diploma Programme (DP) core

- Another study investigated the **high school research experience** of former DP students at two universities in the **United Kingdom**. DP graduates reported that they enjoyed and valued their extended essay experience and believed it helped them to develop their critical- and independent-thinking skills (Wray 2013).
- The final study in this series explored the impact of the **extended essay** on student success at a university in **Canada**. DP graduates indicated higher ratings than their non-IB peers on self-regulated inquiry learning and were also less likely to view learning primarily as memorization. Former DP students perceived a number of benefits of the extended essay, including developing enhanced organization, reading, writing and analytic skills (Aulls and Lemay 2013; Aulls and Peláez 2013).
- A study in **Argentina, Canada and the United States** explored the **implementation and impacts of CAS**. Both students and coordinators reported a range of impacts of student participation in CAS, including helping students to: develop an ethic of service; become more caring, open-minded and reflective; and develop more self-confidence and maturity (Billig 2013).
- Investigating the **“academic civic-mindedness”** of DP students in the **United States**, student and teacher interviews indicated that the frequent use of discussions, debates, presentations, writing assignments and teamwork in DP classes helps students to develop the skills that are necessary for civic engagement. Furthermore, in comparison with a nationally representative sample of 12th grade students, DP students scored higher on 9 out of 10 items that tested their knowledge of US government structure, functioning and history (Saavedra 2014).

Creativity, activity, service (CAS)

In creativity, activity, service (CAS), students complete a project related to these three strands.

- A Jeff Thompson Award winner conducted a study on the use of **reflection within CAS** in six IB World Schools in **Turkey**. The findings suggested that all of the schools were encouraging reflection before, during and after CAS activities, as outlined in the *Creativity, activity, service guide*, and that schools were “moderately successful” in providing feedback on student reflections. The author, however, also recommended that schools require fewer but more authentic reflections, use varied forms of reflection and allow flexibility in the timing of reflections (Perry 2015).



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For more information, please contact research@ibo.org or visit <http://www.ibo.org/research>.