

IB Psychology Extended Essay - Student planning sheets

Choosing a topic

Answer the following questions to help you choose a topic.

- What areas of psychology genuinely interest you? Consider themes such as memory, mental health, social influence, or development.
- What significant terms, concepts, and keywords describe your topic? These terms will be key when searching online catalogues, databases, and psychology journals.
- Which IB core concepts (such as bias, causation, change, responsibility, measurement, perspective) could relate to your chosen area?
- What peer-reviewed articles, textbooks, or systematic reviews can you find on this topic? Use Google Scholar to test different keyword combinations.
- What do the articles tell you? Highlight important passages and make brief notes on what you find thought-provoking or useful.

Narrow your focus to the topic that engages you most and discuss it with your supervisor.

Writing a research question

Follow these steps to help you formulate a strong research question:

- Identify the psychological construct or phenomenon you want to investigate (e.g., social media and self-esteem, memory and emotion).
- Clarify the scope of your focus (e.g., adolescents, cross-cultural samples, clinical populations).

- Define the theoretical lens through which you will approach the topic (e.g., social comparison theory, schema theory, cognitive-behavioural model).
- Draft your research question in a focused form, often beginning with “*To what extent...*,” “*How far...*,” or “*What is the relationship between...*”.
- Test your question for clarity and feasibility – can it be answered within 4,000 words using secondary data?

EE planning sheet

Research Question

Core Constructs / Theories

(e.g., schema theory, cognitive dissonance, sociocultural models)

Scope / Population of Interest

(e.g., adolescents, clinical samples, cross-cultural focus)

Key Studies / Sources

(List 4–6 initial studies or reviews you plan to use)

Ethical Considerations

(e.g., sensitive topics, vulnerable groups, informed consent in primary studies)

Planned Structure / Argument

(Brief outline of how you will organise themes, theory, and evidence)

Supervisor Check-in (Due date: _____)

Notes:

—

Ethical considerations checklist

Before finalising your topic, reflect on ethical issues in the studies you plan to use:

- Were participants given informed consent?
- Did the study involve deception, and was it justified?
- Were vulnerable groups (children, clinical populations) involved?
- Were participants protected from physical or psychological harm?
- Was debriefing carried out in the original study?
- Does the study respect cultural and social sensitivities?

By including this evaluation in your essay, you demonstrate awareness of how ethics shape psychological research and strengthen Criterion D.

Self-marking and reflection sheet

Before submission, ask yourself:

- Have I used peer-reviewed sources consistently?
- Does every study paragraph connect to my research question?
- Have I analysed findings, not just described them?
- Have I acknowledged contradictory evidence or cultural limitations?
- Have I explained how constructs were operationalised in the studies I chose?
- Is my use of psychological terminology accurate (e.g., ecological validity, demand characteristics, triangulation)?

- Is the essay within 4,000 words and correctly referenced?
-

Researcher's Reflection Space (RRS) prompts

Use your RRS to capture insights during the EE process. Possible prompts include:

- *"What theory best frames my research question?"*
- *"How have my ideas changed as I found more sources?"*
- *"What methodological issues (bias, validity, ethics) are most relevant to my topic?"*
- *"Which study has been most useful so far, and why?"*
- *"What have I learned about my own approach as a researcher?"*

Reflections like these provide the material needed for the 500-word reflective statement at the end of the process.