

## 6 Engagement activity

### Synonyms

**component** .... part

**sufficient** ..... enough

**appropriate** ... suitable

A key **component** of the Global Politics course is the engagement activity, where students actively investigate a political issue of their choice and then write an analytical report exploring the issue they have chosen.

Students do this by organizing a project that allows them to research and experience a political issue first-hand. This is followed by writing a 2,000-word report which combines the research, the activity and the analysis of the chosen political issue.

The engagement activity is one of the many aspects of the Global Politics coursework that differentiates it from more traditional courses in social sciences. The coursework activities are intended to allow students to explore and to reflect on the ways in which politics has an influence on, and is influenced by, people at local, regional or global levels.

This section of the book describes the requirements for the engagement activity and offers some practical advice towards completing this essential part of the course. The engagement activity is worth 25 per cent of the overall marks at Standard Level and 20 per cent at Higher Level.

### What is the engagement activity?

The engagement activity is an essential component of the IB Global Politics course. At its core, this project offers students the opportunity to:

- develop in-depth knowledge about a particular topic or subject;
- apply knowledge and theory gained in the classroom by talking to fellow students and professionals;
- receive positive social support from colleagues, professionals, and the teacher throughout the process;
- connect their learning to the world beyond the classroom.

Students need to write a 2,000-word report which shows:

- analysis of a political issue;
- exploration and direct investigation of the chosen issue through an activity they have organized.

The engagement activity tests and develops a number of key skills. Each of these can be thought of as separate stages or tasks to complete:

- 1 Identifying a political issue of interest and planning an effective and suitable activity that will allow the political issue to be properly analysed.
- 2 Researching a political issue through active engagement. Organizing, making sense of, and **synthesizing** evidence gained through the primary activity and secondary research.
- 3 Writing a report which investigates the political issue and binds together information gained through the student's own activity with secondary research.

### Stage 1 – Identifying the issue and the activity

This is a crucial part of the process and **sufficient** time should be devoted to choosing both the political issue and the activity.

It is recommended that students first choose the political issue, then look for an activity or activities that will allow them to explore the issue properly. The combination of a suitable political issue and an **appropriate** activity then allow the

### General vocabulary

**synthesizing** making connections between the activity and the key concepts of the course

student to pose a research question that they will realistically be able to actively investigate and analyse.

POLITICAL ISSUE + ACTIVITY —————> RESEARCH QUESTION

Students should remember the following when choosing their political issue.

- **Will it be possible to organize an activity that allows the student to explore the political issue?**

For example, a student may be interested in Russian air strikes in Syria, but is unlikely to be able to investigate this through their own activity. Instead, local and national issues, close to the student's own community or home country, may be more suitable than choosing issues that are currently grabbing international headlines. For example, issues such as the representation of women in the national politics of the student's home country or the local politics involved in a controversial local infrastructure project are likely to allow the student to get much closer to the actors and politics than, for example, Russian air strikes in Syria.

- **Is the political issue of sufficient depth to allow political analysis?**

It is recommended that the student chooses a political issue first. Some students have been driven towards their political issue because they already have an activity ready and waiting. They then attempted to create a political issue out of an activity that, although **praiseworthy**, is not very political. For example, choosing volunteering in a beach clean-up as the activity and then writing about the politics of volunteering or beach cleaning is unlikely to raise really deep political issues that the student could analyse in their report.

- **Will the chosen political issue be of interest to the student?**

Given the freedom to choose any political issue, students should of course choose something of interest to them.

A good test of a political issue is that it should have the right balance between:

**Accessibility** – can the student actually gain access to, and experience, the political issue directly? Is this possible geographically? Is the activity safe?

**Political content** – is there enough in the issue to analyse? Are there links with the key concepts and learning outcomes of the course?

Once the political issue has been chosen, the student must then plan an activity or activities that will allow them to explore the issue.

Students should remember the following when planning activities.

- **Research question.** It often helps to develop the political issue into a research question that the activity will allow the student to explore.

#### Example 1

If the political issue chosen is 'major rail infrastructure projects in the UK', the student could develop this issue into a research question supported by the activity or activities, such as 'How effectively is the public consulted about a major rail infrastructure project in the UK?' The activity is then designed to include the student interviewing a range of political actors involved in the process (for example, a local member of parliament representing their **constituents'** views; the views of local residents; the views of the business community; the views of the rail company building the project).

- **Multiple perspectives.** The best activities will see students engage with different opinions and viewpoints, so that they can compare these and test the **validity** of opposing views.

#### Synonyms

**praiseworthy** ... excellent

#### Subject vocabulary

**constituents** people living in a community who are represented by an elected representative, particularly in the UK

#### General vocabulary

**validity** credibility and accuracy

### Example 2

If the political issue is the representation of women in politics, it will be important to gain access to the views of both men and women on the obstacles and possible solutions. Students should therefore avoid interviewing a single source, for the same reasons given in Example 1.

- **Design.** Activities must be designed to support investigating a specific political issue, not the other way round. Some students rely on an activity that has perhaps been organized for another purpose, such as work experience in business or volunteering in a school. The students then find it difficult to build a really strong link between the activity and the political issue. The best activities will be designed with the specific political issue in mind.
- **Organization.** Designing the best engagement activity is likely to take time. A key test for students will be contacting a range of political actors and setting up activities or appointments, finding public events to attend, etc. Some students may have high-level contacts in politics or business that they may wish to use, but these are not necessary for an activity to be successful. In fact, some of the best activities are those that interact not with senior politicians but **grass-roots activists** or communities affected by bigger political decisions. It is recommended that teachers and students begin this process early in the first year of study. The activities can be carried out during the holiday period between the first and second years of study. The report is then written in the early part of the second year of study.
- **Simulation activities.** These can be very good, but there is a risk that activities such as Model United Nations (MUN) or other simulations become too theoretical and distant from real-life events. It is also the case that if students are doing the same engagement activity as others in their class, each student should study a different research question, or provide their own angle on the question. This is harder to do in MUN-style activities. Students should, wherever possible, root themselves in analysing how politics really works. Combining a simulation exercise with an activity that allows the student to explore the issue through real-world events is better than a simulation exercise alone (for example, visiting a refugee charity to explore its work and then carrying out a simulation exercise which explores the difficult choices experienced by the political actors involved).

### Subject vocabulary

**grass-roots activists** people involved in political campaigning at local community level

### Stage 1 activities

Political issue and research question	Good activity	Less good activity
Representation of women in UK politics  'Why are women under-represented in elected political office in the UK?'	The student has no links with any female MPs but writes to their local council and meets female councillors, interviewing a variety of actors about their experiences, the challenges they have faced.	The student has links with one female MP and chooses to interview this MP about her experiences.  No other activity organized.

Political issue and research question	Good activity	Less good activity
	<p>The student might then organize any of the following:</p> <p>To attend a panel discussion on female representation in politics.</p> <p>To interview aspiring female politicians from a university politics society.</p> <p>To interview male councillors comparing their experiences.</p> <p>To conduct secondary desk-top research on the barriers faced by women in politics.</p>	
<p>The refugee crisis in Europe</p> <p>'What are the challenges faced by a national NGO in responding to the European refugee crisis?'</p>	<p>The student takes part in a role play activity, playing the role of an NGO trying to <b>lobby</b> EU governments to take more action.</p> <p>The student might then organize any of the following:</p> <p>To visit a national NGO involved in the refugee crisis and interview grass-roots activists on the challenges they face.</p> <p>To conduct an online interview with a more senior representative from the NGO.</p> <p>To attend a panel discussion where NGOs debate the challenges they face.</p>	<p>The student takes part in a role play activity, playing the role of an NGO trying to lobby EU governments to take more action.</p> <p>No other activity organized.</p>

### Subject vocabulary

**lobby** try to persuade the government or someone with political power that a law or situation should be changed

### General vocabulary

**side-lined** given lesser priority than other content

## Stage 2 – Carrying out the activity

Students should remember the following when carrying out activities.

- **Keep the research question in mind.** There is a risk that when the activity begins, it becomes driven by the people or groups that the student is meeting or working with. It is worth the student being clear with those they are meeting, working or volunteering with, what it is that they are trying to get out of the activity. This does not mean that they will not be able to offer something in return. But it is not uncommon for students to carry out work experience where the original point of the activity (researching a political issue) becomes **side-lined**.
- **Effective note-taking.** Students should be organized with their note-taking so they have a clear record of the activity when they come to write about the activity. The notes from interviews need to be included as appendices to the report. Students should seek permission from those they are working with before recording interviews.

- **Gaps where secondary research is needed.** As students carry out the activity, it is worth noting where the activity has raised questions that need further investigation. Are there different perspectives that need to be examined? Could any of these be explored with another, smaller-scale activity, perhaps with another contact recommended by the organization or individual that the student has been working with?
- **Links to the prescribed content and key concepts.** A key skill in writing the report is to make connections between the activity and the key concepts of the course (for example, power, sovereignty, development, human rights, etc.). This is assessed in the markscheme as the student effectively 'synthesizing' their material. Students should keep notes on how the experience relates to the key concepts and learning outcomes of the course.

### Stage 3 – Writing the report

Before considering in detail how to write the report, it is worth drawing attention to the two most common mistakes that students make when presenting the first draft of their reports.

Report is dominated by the activity, with no analysis

- The student writes only about the activity and does so in narrative, rather than analysis.
- The report reads like an account of who they met, what they did, what they saw, what they were told, how they felt about what they saw and heard.
- There is little analysis of what their experiences tell us about the political issue or how it links to and helps us understand the key concepts or learning outcomes of the course.

Report forgets about the activity, with or without analysis

- The student writes only about the political issue, perhaps analysing it, but more in the style of an Extended Essay.
- There is no link between the activity and the issue, it feels as if the student has focused more on secondary research.
- There is a sense that the activity was of little importance or relevance to the political issue, which is why the student rarely mentions the activity.

The simplest advice is that reports should be a balance between these two extremes, aiming to clearly ***demonstrate how the activity has helped build an analytical understanding of a political issue.***

The engagement activity is assessed against a markscheme, as is the case with every piece of coursework that students submit for assessment in IB courses. For the engagement activity, the markscheme is divided into four sections. The report is marked out of 20, as follows.

#### Assessment criteria for the written report

Criterion	Student will...	Mark and descriptor
<b>A</b> – Identification of issue and justification (4 marks)	... clearly identify and explain what the political issue is.	0 The work does not reach a standard described by the descriptors below.
	... explain how the issue links to the key concepts and prescribed content and of the IB Global Politics course.	1–2 The political issue raised by the engagement is implied but not explicitly identified. There is some limited explanation of why the student chose this engagement. There is some link between the engagement and course content.  3–4 The political issue explored through the engagement is clearly and explicitly identified. There is a clear explanation of why this engagement and political issue are of interest to the student. There is a clear link between the engagement and political issue on one hand and course content on the other hand.
<b>B</b> – Explanation of the engagement (4 marks)	... clearly identify and explain what the activity was.	0 The work does not reach a standard described by the descriptors below.
	... explain the reasons why the activity was chosen, including why it was suitable for exploring and analysing the political issue that was chosen.  ... explain the ways in which the activity has helped the student understand key concepts and learning outcomes that relate to the political issue chosen.	1–2 There is a description of the engagement and of what the student actually did. There is some limited explanation of what the student learned about global politics from undertaking the engagement.  3–4 The description of the engagement and of what the student actually did is clear and relevant for their chosen political issue. There is a clear explanation of the ways in which the student's experiences informed his or her understanding of the political issue.



Criterion	Student will...	Mark and descriptor
<b>C – Analysis of issue (6 marks)</b>	<p>... analyse the political issues raised in a wider context, particularly in light of the key concepts, learning outcomes and theoretical perspectives from each of the units in the Global Politics course.</p> <p>... demonstrate evidence of research skills, organization and referencing.</p>	<p>0 The work does not reach a standard described by the descriptors below.</p> <p>1–2 There is some attempt at analysis of the political issue but the response is largely descriptive. Few of the main points are justified.</p> <p>3–4 There is some critical analysis of the political issue but this analysis lacks depth. The response is more descriptive than analytical. Some of the main points are justified.</p> <p>5–6 The political issue is explored in depth, using the key concepts of the course where relevant, and the response contains clear critical analysis. All, or nearly all, of the main points are justified.</p>
<b>D – Synthesis and evaluation (6 marks)</b>	<p>... link together their activity and the political issue throughout the report.</p> <p>... give equal attention to the activity and the report (which will read neither like an IB Extended Essay, nor like a narrative description of an activity in isolation).</p> <p>... make connections with theoretical viewpoints, related ways of knowing and areas of knowledge, and multiple perspectives, giving a comprehensive treatment of the political issue that was studied.</p>	<p>0 The work does not reach a standard described by the descriptors below.</p> <p>1–2 There are limited links between ideas. There are no conclusions, or the conclusions are not relevant.</p> <p>3–4 There are some links between the student's experiences and more theoretical perspectives on the political issue. Conclusions are stated but are not entirely consistent with the evidence presented. Multiple perspectives are acknowledged, where relevant.</p> <p>5–6 The student's experiences and more theoretical perspectives are synthesised so that an integrated and rich treatment of the political issue ensues. Conclusions are clearly stated, balanced and consistent with the evidence presented. There is evidence of evaluation of the political issue from multiple perspectives.</p>

## Structuring your report

### Linking the issue with the key concepts (Criterion A)

One way of ensuring that students include the necessary level of analysis in their written work is to review the key concepts for each unit. For example, the 16 key concepts for the course are power, sovereignty, legitimacy, interdependence, human rights, justice, liberty, equality, development, globalization, inequality, sustainability, peace, conflict, violence, and non-violence (see pages vi and vii). Written work should explore those concepts that are relevant to the activity and political issue.

Students should make sure that they:

- define the concepts that they use
- provide examples of these concepts from world politics
- demonstrate how these concepts can be found in the activity that they engaged in.

#### Example 3: identifying the most relevant concepts

A student chooses to work for a local political party to encourage citizens to vote prior to an election, and they are interested in exploring how candidates for office construct and maintain their legitimacy amongst their constituents. Defining the concept of legitimacy, (perhaps as *the degree to which a political actor is accepted amongst a group of people or other political actors*) would be an important component of the engagement activity. Students could go further by identifying examples of legitimate outcomes of elections as well as those outcomes that have been deemed illegitimate by those who participated in elections or by third-party observers. A more **sophisticated** understanding of the concept of legitimacy would go even further; identifying the degree to which a candidate's legitimacy can depend on different constituencies at different levels of analysis in world politics.

#### Synonyms

**sophisticated** .. advanced, developed

### Linking the issue and activity with prescribed content (Criteria A and B)

The chosen activity and political issue should also link with some part of the prescribed content of the course. For example, the prescribed content for the 'Power, sovereignty, and international relations' unit of the course includes the following (see pages 1–29):

- definitions and theories of power
- types of power
- the evolving nature of state sovereignty
- legitimacy of state power
- the United Nations (UN)
- intergovernmental organizations (IGOs)
- non-governmental organizations (NGOs)
- multinational corporations (MNCs)
- resistance movements
- violent protest movements
- political parties
- informal forums
- legitimacy of non-state actors
- global governance
- forms of cooperation
- forms of conflict



It would be impossible for the student to include all of these concepts in the engagement activity. However, in relation to the example of the engagement activity that focused on work for a local party, the following content could be included in the written report: types of power, political parties, legitimacy of non-state actors. Again, the student should define these terms and provide examples that demonstrate their ability to make connections between abstract terminology, examples from outside the classroom, and the activity engaged in for this study.

## Justification of the issue (Criterion A)

A key assessment criterion is the degree to which the student can explain why they participated in this activity in the first place. The key here is to explain why the activity helped them explore the political issue that they chose. There is no need for students to explain how the activity helped them build other skills such as teamwork or leadership skills – this is not rewarded in the markscheme and is best avoided.

## Explanation of the engagement (Criterion B)

Criterion B assesses students' ability to provide a clear account of their activity and its connection to their studies in Global Politics. This is probably the most descriptive section of the engagement activity in that students are being asked to describe all aspects of their activity as it relates to their studies of the prescribed content of the course.

### Example 3: explaining your activity

Returning to **Example 3** from the previous section, the student could explain the reasons why they chose to work for a local political party and explain their efforts to get voters to the **polls**. The student might focus on why they feel it is important to encourage citizens to vote. Regardless of what reasons they have for pursuing a particular activity, the justification for this choice of activity is entirely up to the student and their interests.

On the one hand, the engagement activity asks students to articulate and justify their reason for political action. This can be a difficult task if students do not have a political activity that they are at least **somewhat** passionate about. On the other hand, this section of the engagement activity gives students the opportunity to express their interest in political issues that matter most to them. This means that they want to identify a political issue that has some value and meaning for them, and to describe their participation in such a way that it connects their understanding of the course material to the activity.

The application of students' knowledge about politics to their activity is the second section of Criterion B. Reflecting on what the student learned through the engagement activity is a critical aspect of their coursework in Global Politics and is one of the key attributes of successful IB students. As with all aspects of experiential learning activities, students should take time to **debrief** throughout, especially after completing their activity. Keeping a journal, or (if participating in class or group activities) taking notes during debriefing exercises, will allow students to capture their thinking about political issues as they relate to the chosen activity. Using these reflections to produce an analytical account of the student's work that demonstrates an application of their knowledge of politics, is a crucial element of the engagement activity.

### Subject vocabulary

**polls** an election or a vote that an electorate takes part in

### Synonyms

**somewhat** ..... a bit

### General vocabulary

**debrief** draw conclusions from and summarize the learning as the project develops

## Analysis of issue (Criterion C)

Criterion C asks students to analyse the political issue that they chose, drawing on everything that they have learned in their Global Politics coursework.

### Key concepts

This criterion assesses the ability to examine political issues from a variety of perspectives. One way to think about this aspect of the engagement activity is from the frame of the key concepts in the course. The 16 key concepts, but especially those of power, sovereignty, legitimacy, and interdependence are essential to include in the analysis. For example, the student's work for a political party could lead them to be curious about the degree to which parties, candidates, or other political actors seek and reinforce their legitimacy with their constituents. Linking their conceptual understanding of legitimacy, especially with comparative examples in democratic societies and contrasting examples in non-democratic societies, will allow students to show the degree to which they can make connections between the theoretical and practical elements of their Global Politics coursework.

### Extent of analysis

A second aspect of this portion of the engagement activity that students should think about is the extent to which they are analysing the political issue they chose to explore. The command term *to what extent* is an important one to understand as it is an essential part of the way that learning is assessed in the Global Politics course. Essentially, *to what extent* means that students should consider the quality of a concept or a line of reasoning in a clear and well-supported manner.

#### Example 3: extent of analysis

In Example 3, the experience of the engagement activity could lead a student to explore the ways in which candidates running for office use both hard power and soft power to exercise influence in an election. In this, the student might want to examine the different ways in which money is used to buy advertising, campaign resources such as consultants and activities, and other means of influencing political decision-making amongst the **electorate**. The analysis of the candidate's behaviour should lead the student to make a judgement as to how effective these practices were. The same method could then be applied to the ways in which the candidate led by example, attracted others to their cause, or other aspects of soft power as a way of affecting voters' decisions at the polls. In this case, the student would be making explicit connections between their experience, their conceptual understanding of different forms of power, and examining the degree to which each form of power was effective in the engagement activity.

#### Subject vocabulary

**electorate** all the people in a country who have the right to vote

### Supporting claims

A third aspect of Criterion C is how students support the claims that they make in their analysis. Students are being assessed on how they can use evidence to support their claims. This includes:

- demonstrating a logical and organized reasoning for ideas
- using examples from their experience and the cases or material studied in the Global Politics coursework
- using examples investigated as a part of the student's research that are relevant to the topic covered in the engagement activity.

Again, in Example 3, a student would want to show that they have researched different ways in which candidates for office use different forms of power to enhance their legitimacy amongst voters. Case examples from elections or other events in the world outside the classroom can provide considerable weight in

support of the arguments that the student makes about the political issue they are investigating.

## Synthesis and evaluation (Criterion D)

As is the case with the previous section, Criterion D asks students to align their experience in the engagement activity with the topic that they are investigating, drawing on their research and existing knowledge of global politics. Whereas Criterion C focuses on the different ways the student analyses the political issue they studied with reference to evidence, Criterion D requires them to make connections between all of their learning experiences inside and outside of the classroom along with research on the political issue they are studying. This section should also include an explicit evaluation of the student's experiences and the political issue by referring to different theoretical perspectives in order to generate a new and sophisticated understanding of politics.

There are several aspects of students' research that should be included so that they can properly synthesize and evaluate the political issue that they are studying. For example, conducting a literature review of **scholarship** on legitimacy and elections, or the ways in which candidates use power to secure votes, would add a level of sophistication to the argument. Balancing different views amongst a few different theoretical perspectives will allow the student to make grounded arguments about politics that highlight the complexity and **nuances** of the issue that they are studying. In addition, including relevant case examples as reported in leading news sources, periodicals and policy-oriented journals, supports the student's arguments in evaluating both their experience and their research.

In other words, Criterion D should reflect a diverse set of evidence that both supports students' thinking but also provides **counterclaims** to the arguments that they are making. Finally, the student's own interpretation of events in their experience in the engagement activity should inform the arguments and claims that they make in report. The conclusions that they arrive at, as a result of their research and experience should be clear, balanced, and most of all, align with the evidence that they have included in the report.

## Summary

The engagement activity is one of the more **innovative** and distinct forms of assessments in the International Baccalaureate Diploma. This work will allow students to engage in an activity that connects to a political issue that interests them. In addition, students have the opportunity to integrate their classroom knowledge with what they have learned through experiences outside of a traditional lecture or classroom setting. Building on this knowledge, students have the opportunity to further investigate a political issue of interest through research and analysis at various levels. The engagement activity offers students a way of linking their understanding of the complexities of world politics with a real-life activity. Finally, the engagement activity provides a way to develop and **hone** students' skills in sourcing and referencing as well as excellent practice in undertaking analytical writing that is consistent within the genre of social sciences.

### General vocabulary

**scholarship** the work of academic experts

**nuances** small differences in expression

**counterclaims** opposing arguments put forward to show that there is another point of view or analysis

**innovative** using new ideas or methods

**hone** refine or improve