NEW MYP AND IB STUDENT GUIDE

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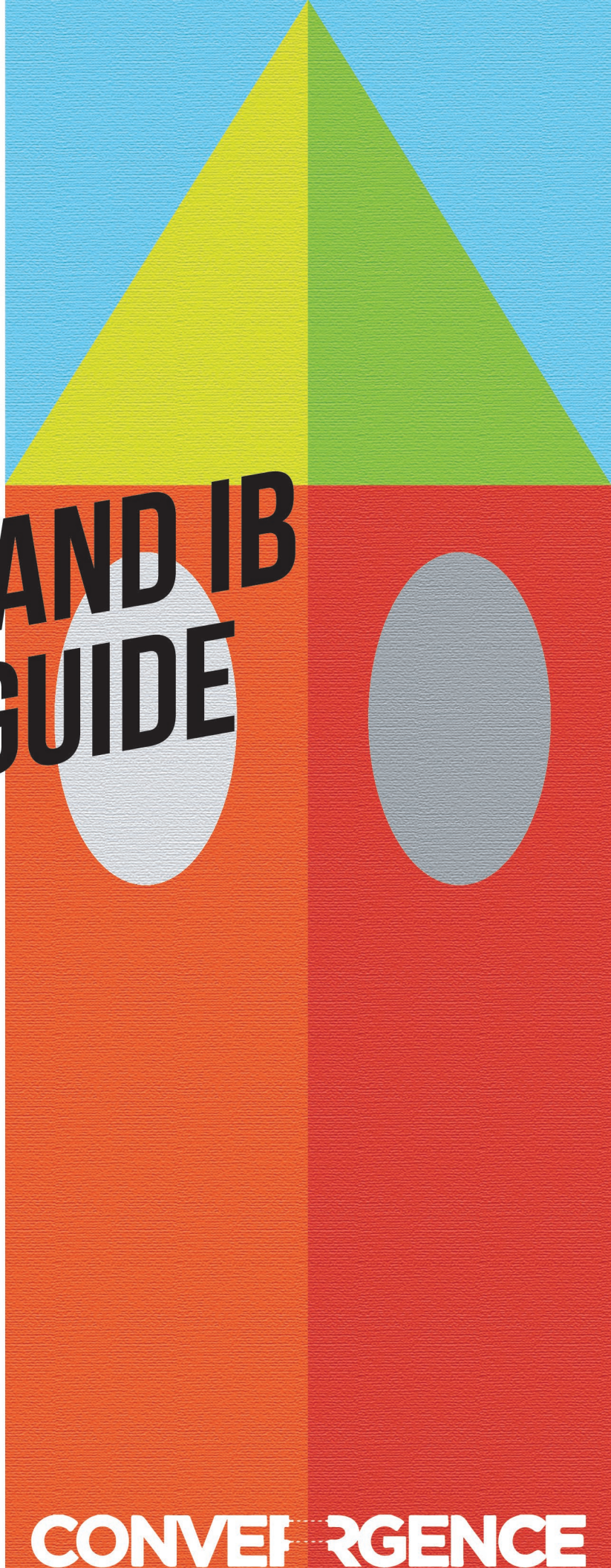


CONVERGENCE

TIPS FOR IB COURSE WORK AND ASSESSMENTS

KEVIN LIU
EDITOR IN CHIEF

Courses in the IB are not only rigorous, but also possibly quite disparate from what you are used to. Even coming from the IB's Middle Years' Programme (MYP), I had to adapt to some different course structures and assessment styles. In this article, I will go over some of my subject-specific experiences and tips from my past year in the IB. Hopefully, this effort can help new IB students get prepared and adjusted quickly.

Science Courses

I currently take IB HL Physics and SL Chemistry. Coming from the MYP, I noticed that these science courses in the IB really had a different feel, especially when it came to assessments.

In the MYP, assessments took place in four criteria (Knowledge and Understanding, Inquiring and Designing, Processing and Evaluating, and Reflecting on the Impacts of Science), and typically, only the mark of the first criterion is based on performance in tests. The remaining three criteria are evaluated in lab reports and research projects.

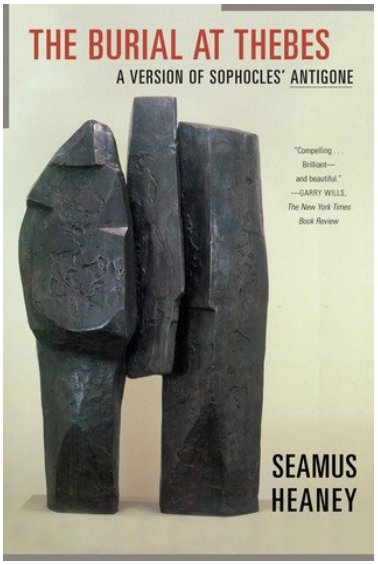
However, in the IB, there are no four distinct criteria. The majority of assessments are tests and exams, and there are very few summative lab writeups. In fact, in an entire year, I only had to write one summative lab writeup, and that was early in the year in HL Physics. In contrast, at the end of nearly every 20-day term, I would have a test for Physics and Chemistry, totalling to around ten tests over the year. Research and lab writing in IB science courses is mostly in the Internal Assessments (IAs) – my friend Tyler's article will cover strategies for IAs in detail.

You will also find that tests and exams are dissimilar to those in the MYP. In the MYP, there would be Level 7/8 questions that are meant to test your knowledge in "unfamiliar situations", so these questions would usually be a little beyond the curriculum level. In the IB, however, all science test and exam questions should be familiar, as long as you have paid attention in class. The test format is more traditional, with each question being worth a set number of marks (compared to the MYP's mark banding system). As such, you should not worry about going beyond the curriculum; as long as you keep up with all course content and homework questions assigned by your teacher, you should be fine.

Depending on the teacher, you will most likely get extensive handouts summarizing the content in each class, so taking your own notes might not be required. Before tests and exams, I have found that the study strategy that works best for me is focusing on doing practice questions. You can find questions from anywhere: past worksheets, the textbook, the review package provided by the teacher, and etc. Of course, make sure you know everything conceptually first, but practice questions are not to be skipped. IB exams often have long, multi-part questions, so before your exam, find some old IB practice papers (usually provided by teacher) and make yourself comfortable doing these long problems.

English

English is a compulsory subject, and you will have chosen to take it as either "Language and Literature" or "Literature", both offered in HL and SL. Language and Literature covers "non-literary" texts, such as advertisements, graphic novels, and even paintings, while Literature focuses on more traditional readings. I personally take SL Language and Literature, and I've found the English class to be quite similar to my experience in the MYP, in the sense that assessments are essays, passage analyses, or presentations that emphasize applying comprehension and analysis skills rather than knowledge of the text itself.



The assessments I did in Year 11 were supposed to mimic the format of the final IB exams. At the end of the first term, we had a passage analysis test, where we were given a passage from the book we covered and had around an hour to type a response to one of a few given prompts (for example, "discuss the effect of imagery on the portrayal of the characters in this passage"). You should be familiar with this assessment format from MYP English, and the Paper 1 of the final exam will also take this form. The key for this test is to describe exactly how your supporting evidence (e.g. an example of imagery) affects the reader (e.g. delivering a specific message to the reader), rather than just pointing it out.

The remaining three assessments were all assignments and presentations. The second assessment was in the form of Paper 2 on the final IB exam: an essay comparing and contrasting two works and how they explore a common idea or theme. We then had another analysis-style essay, and at the end of the year, we did the Individual Oral (IO). The IO takes the place of the English IA and is a 10-minute oral presentation about two works' connection to a common theme (such as social mobility). These sorts of assessments are also pretty similar to those in the MYP.

In my opinion, the most crucial part of completing these three assessments was picking a topic. I almost spent more time thinking of a topic and gathering my supporting evidence than writing an essay itself. When your teacher introduces an assessment, you should immediately start thinking about what topic you can cover, and looking for evidence while you do your reading. Your topic choice should be specific and well thought out rather than arbitrarily picked – this will make or break the assessment. When writing the essay, you should pay attention to details such as the author's specific word choice and always refer back to the text. In your writing, you should avoid informalities such as contractions and passive voice. Most importantly, always take the teacher's feedback seriously and don't be hesitant to make major revisions as necessary.

Second Language

In terms of second languages, there really isn't much more to say than the platitude you've heard already: keep up with your homework and practice and don't try to cram it. Learning a language can be arduous and is a process of gradual accumulation. Things like vocabulary and grammar rules only come with time and repeated efforts, and you cannot simply review everything the night before the test and hope you succeed.

In class, you might go through different "units" that focus on different categories of vocabulary or grammar patterns at once (for example, you might have a unit on different foods and beverages). Assessments (especially official IB assessments), however, will often focus directly on listening, oral, reading, or writing and might not directly relate to the content most recently covered in class. For example, you might have an essay writing test where you can choose from five different prompts, only one of which is related to the recent unit. As a result, your mark will be heavily dependent on how solid your language foundation is. If you neglect your classwork, you might not feel it right away, but after a few months you'll find yourself in a precarious spot.

An important tip for essay writing tests: you will have to choose from different "text types", such as journals, letters, or speech drafts. A meaningful portion of the mark comes from whether you follow the text type format properly (for example, having a greeting/introduction, proper indentation and spacing, including the date if required, etc.). Make sure you review the text types prior to your test so you don't lose out on these nearly free marks.

Mathematics

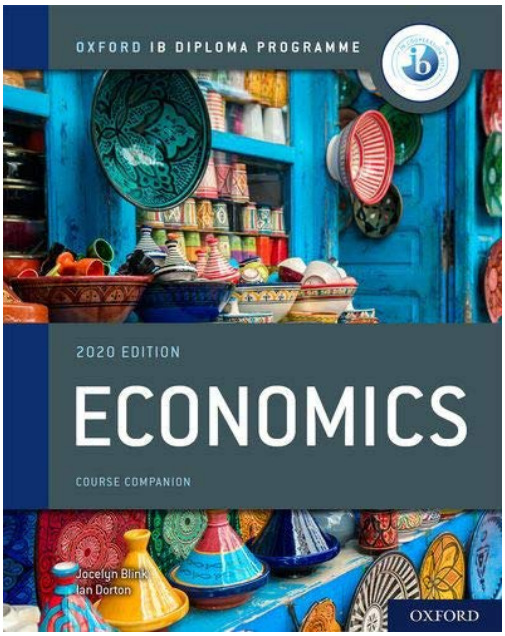
IB Math is often considered unrelentingly difficult by many, especially in HL. If there's any subject you should be extremely careful about, it is math. Classes can be very fast paced, and if you fall behind, it can be quite a grind to catch up. Fortunately, your teacher will support you as long as you are invested into it. Make sure you understand every single practice problem covered during class or in homework (often, test questions will very closely resemble a question you have seen before), and if you think you're confused about anything, speak up or seek help immediately. Also, you should take time to review foundational concepts from previous years, such as factoring quadratics or unit-circle trigonometry, as these will be assumed knowledge in the IB.

In terms of assessments, with the exception of the IA (again, Tyler covers that in detail), you will pretty much only be writing tests. You should be mentally prepared for very challenging test questions, and while all questions are related to the current unit, they might require previously learned skills (for example, a question requiring both calculus and trigonometry might show up on the calculus test). You should treat the test almost like contest – don't expect to solve every single question, but instead, prioritize marks you are sure you can get before tackling more difficult problems. There is significant leniency when the tests are marked (they are "curved"), and in some cases (especially in the HL math courses), obtaining around 50% of the marks on the test might be sufficient for a mark in the high 80s.

Your strategy for studying should be similar to studying for science tests: make sure you conceptually understand everything first, but focusing on doing as many practice problems as you can (past papers, worksheets, review package, textbook problems, online problems, or really whatever).

Social Sciences

I personally take HL Economics, so your experience in other social sciences courses such as History might be different. However, you should expect assessments to be very practical (i.e. applying concepts and techniques you have learned to tackle realistic problems). In Economics, you might encounter assessments involving picking and analysing a real-world situation (such as tax hikes, or even pandemic-induced lifestyles) from an economic perspective. Most tests and exams heavily focus on doing case studies given some data or an article.



When taking these assessments, make sure you are using the correct terminology and quoting from the text as much as possible. When it comes to terminology, don't try to cram as many terms as you can; instead make sure each term is used properly according to its textbook definition. For me, going through my Econ textbook was exceptionally helpful in preparing for assessments (some online resources you consult might cover the same concepts using different terminology, but the textbook definitely uses the correct, IB-recognized terminology).

Conclusion

Overall, IB courses often require a unique skillset and emphasize applying the skills that you have learned in practical situations. In many ways, the MYP has prepared us well for the IB program, but you might notice some differences and new challenges as discussed above. As long as one has an open mindset to adapt and meet the challenge, everyone can survive and even thrive in the IB. I wish all newcomers to the IB the best of luck!

INTERNAL ASSESSMENTS & THE EXTENDED ESSAY IN THE IB

TYLER STENNETT
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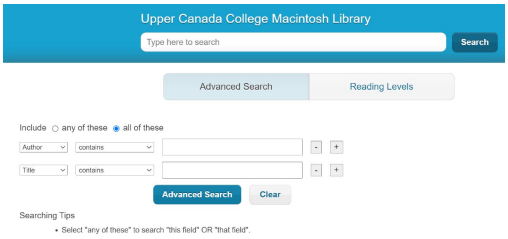
The IB program is notorious for its rigour and sheer workload, and novelty in academic exploration; two such elements that perfectly encapsulate this notion are the Extended Essay (EE) and Internal Assessments (IAs). To summarize, the IAs are numerous individually written assignments with differing criteria per course. Still, the content is generally oriented towards research and exploration or practical applications of the curriculum information. The only exception is the English Individual Oral (IO), which adapted a prepared oral presentation format. The EE is a singular externally-assessed assignment focused on one subject area. It requires more detail and content, with the word count ranging from 3000-4000. Given that I have experience with both assessments, I will attempt to share some knowledge on the best ways I have observed to achieve success. As the EE and IA share various similarities, I will categorize the information into the following sections: topic selection, research, experimentation, writing, and feedback.

Topic Selection

Brainstorming is often considered the most crucial part of the project as it lays the foundation for the entire process. Ideas are best found during readings on relevant news and cross-referencing with past assignment topics; however, treat topic commitment with the utmost caution. An unsuitable topic may result in headaches and overcomplications, and an unenjoyable topic may result in procrastination and dreadfulness. Therefore, it is imperative to consider two criteria when analyzing different ideas: personal suitability and feasibility. A combination of the two criteria is necessary to achieve success in the project - it should be a learning experience as much as an enjoyable one! When talking to my EE advisor, she said one thing which I found particularly interesting: "Pick a topic that you are interested in, and the word count will follow." Ensure you are mindful of the content and the word count but try not to prioritize it too heavily. In fact, teachers adjudicating the IA would prefer a simpler topic that you can explain thoroughly and clearly than a highly complex subject to which you show a rough understanding. In addition, one thing I will repeatedly emphasize is the importance of using your resources, one of which is your teachers. If you are unsure about your topic, do not hesitate to ask your teacher for recommendations and suggestions.

Research



Once you have committed yourself to a topic, you will begin the focused research phase of excruciating searches for quality academic sources. To contextualize, the History IA requires a minimum of six scholarly sources, but it fluctuates from subject to subject. The EE, on the other hand, requires around ten academic sources. Luckily, UCC has access to a plethora of online and physical resources for you to use. For quick access, check the "Macintosh Library Online Resources" on Brightspace and bookmark it. During the research process, look for specific information that aligns with your project's direction. I suggest that you make a separate document to record citations and paraphrasing for each source you find. It is effortless to dismiss proper research in favour of writing spontaneously, but sufficient in-depth analysis and preparation are necessary for writing a well-organized assignment.

Experimentation

Conducting experiments is a staple of science-based IAs and EEs. Each experiment is unique, but generally, I recommend starting the experimentation process well before your assignment deadline. This will allow you to account for any errors made or any inconsistencies in the data collected that may impact the trajectory of the writing process.

Writing

The writing process will be the most time-consuming as you tediously select the best ways to present your information. In the IAs and EEs, showing your understanding is essential - more so than regurgitating extremely high-level extraneous details. If you choose a complex solution to an easier problem, you may be penalized. One thing that I personally overlooked during the writing process is the importance of justifying your methodology over potential alternatives; this is particularly influential in subjects like mathematics, where there are different viable solutions to a problem. Finally, make sure to insert your citations while writing! This is where your research and your documentation from the aforementioned research phase will come in handy. Quotations can enhance your writing to the next level, and including it seamlessly during the writing process will allow for smooth transitions. In addition, falling behind on your citations and having to insert them into your writing afterwards forcibly is a massive headache - trust me.

Feedback

After submitting your drafts for the IAs and EEs, you must incorporate all the feedback supplied by your teachers - even if you disagree with some of the judgements. Your teachers know the rubric best, and their responses will allow you to maximize your marks; in fact, for your IAs, the same teachers providing you feedback are marking the assignment.

Conclusion

Overall, the IAs and EEs are unique assignments that you should try to enjoy. Nonetheless, we all want to achieve the best possible results, and by keeping some of these recommendations in mind, you can increase your chances. Good luck!

A CONCLUSION TO THE MYP - MY TAKEAWAYS AND TIPS

RAHUL NANDA
EDITOR

After spending five years of my academic career in both the Prep and Upper School, the lengthy MYP Program finally departed from my life this past summer as my classmates and I enter the IB Program. Throughout this time, I have gained a wealth of knowledge regarding the program itself and its value to me as a student. In this article, I will be briefly sharing my thoughts and opinions on the MYP in addition to a few takeaways and tips that I have learned over the past five years.

The Importance of Balance: Although the MYP often became repetitive as I entered Year 10 (given that the rubrics remained unchanged since Year 9), I can conclude that it was quite beneficial for me as a student. One of the MYP's specialities is that it forces students to become balanced in every area of a subject using a grading structure with four equally weighed criteria. For example, in many of the STEM-based subjects, the MYP introduced new areas of assessment—such as Applications of Science and Technology, Real-Life Math Reports, and Investigations—that are weighed equivalent to the conventional Math or Science test and held as much, if not more, value for the student's learning. This helped students become balanced in every area of a subject.

The Grading System: The MYP's grading system—which uses a 1-8 scale on assessments and a 1-7 scale on interim marks—is interesting to say the least, being both intricate and complex. However, its advantages for students are clear.

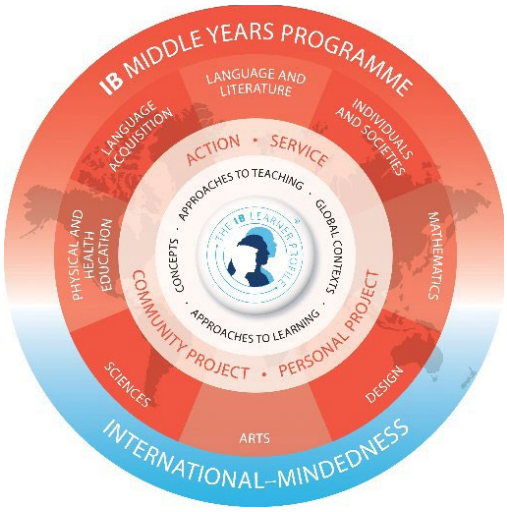
A	Knowing and Understanding	8
B	Investigating Patterns	8
C	Communicating	8
D	Applying Mathematics in Real Life contexts	8
Total Levels for all Criteria		32

First, grading students separately on four criteria allows teachers to provide in-depth information regarding your specific achievement in every component of a subject. Due to this, the MYP is inherently good at identifying a student's strengths and weaknesses, according to your achievement in each of the four criteria. Personally, this made it a lot easier for me to improve in a certain subject in the MYP.

Furthermore, the benefits of the MYP's grading system became especially apparent in knowledge-based tests, such as in Math or Science. Not only are students marked holistically (not an average), but they are usually marked based on their approximate highest level of achievement. For example, although you may get a few easier (1/2 or 3/4) questions incorrect on a Math test, as long as you demonstrate your proficiency in the harder questions in the 5/6 and 7/8 band, you can secure a substantial mark on an assessment.

The last benefit that I encountered in the MYP grading system is that it optimizes students' marks. Using the model of "most recent and consistent," the MYP ensures that a student's final mark in a subject is not an average, but rather a holistic summary of their achievement throughout the year, prioritizing most recent assessments. In combination with the OSSD conversion, MYP grading is rather generous to students.

Design: Fourteen multi-month design projects later, I can finally say that I have completed my last design project. Nevertheless, completing the design requirement has offered my peers and I a unique opportunity to experience a project-based course free of tests or in-class assessments. For me, I have particularly enjoyed design projects. They have taught me the value of commitment, continuity, and consistency in accomplishing a larger goal in addition to the steps needed to succeed in any long assessment. Rather than stressing technical skills, Design focuses on teaching students the process of Researching, Planning, Creating, and Evaluating. Although the term "Design Cycle" has probably been overused, it is one of the only learning models used in the Upper School curriculum that replicate processes used in the professional world. If you pursue engineering or entrepreneurship in the future, I can promise you that the Design Cycle will reappear in your career.



Personal Project: This year, the Personal Project for Y10s was especially interesting, given that we never got a chance to meet our advisors or participate in in-person workshops. Although it intended for students to explore their interests, by the end of the project, you will have known whether you were actually interested in a topic you have spent years obsessing about. As a nearly year-long assignment, the Personal Project essentially helped students conduct an independent "Design" project not limited to Digital Media, Coding, or Product Design. While the report's "reflection-based" questions did seem repetitive and its ability to prepare us for the IB Extended Essay may have been questionable, it was still remarkable to see what some of my peers were able to accomplish in a relatively short timespan. For those completing it in future years, I recommend picking a topic you are passionate about and not procrastinating the creation of your product.

English: In the MYP, English transformed into a predominantly essay-based subject. To be more specific, throughout the Upper School, I will have had only three English tests in the MYP, with two of them involving a Shakespearian passage analysis. While the MYP's reduction in English tests may seem beneficial or convenient, its ability to prepare us for the IB may be

limited, given our lack of experience with essay tests or comparative analyses.

My Tips for the MYP

Ask Questions: Personally, the unique structure of the MYP forced me to learn to comfortably ask questions to my teachers when needed. Asking questions allowed me to benefit from further explanation about a concept or a command term in the rubric while ensuring I knew the teacher's expectation in a particular assignment. Although I may have asked excessive amounts of questions, this skill was essential, helping me to fully engage in the material while furthering my knowledge of MYP rubrics.

MYP Level	Descriptor	Task Specific
0	The student **does not** reach a standard identified by any of the descriptors below.	
1-2	The student is able to i. **state** a problem or question to be tested by a scientific investigation ii. **outline** a testable hypothesis iii. **outline** the variables iv. **design** a method, **with limited success.**	• Writes a method that **does not include multiple trials/controlled variables** and with limited or **incomplete instructions about how to use LoggerPro** and Geogebra to analyze the data
3-4	The student is able to i. **outline** a problem or question to be tested by a scientific investigation ii. **formulate** a testable hypothesis **using scientific reasoning** iii. **outline** how to manipulate the variables, and **outline** how **relevant data** will be collected iv. design a **safe method** in which he or she **selects materials and equipment**.	• Writes a method that **outlines how to conduct multiple trials/controlled variables** and with **some instructions** about how to use **LoggerPro** and **Geogebra** to analyze the data
5-6	The student is able to i. **describe** a problem or question to be tested by a scientific investigation ii. **formulate and explain** a testable hypothesis **using scientific reasoning** iii. **describe** how to manipulate the variables, and **describe** how **sufficient, relevant data** will be collected iv. design a **complete and safe method** in which he or she selects **appropriate materials and equipment**.	• Writes a method that **describes how to conduct multiple trials/controlled variables** and with **some detailed instruction** about how to use **LoggerPro** and **Geogebra** to analyze the data
7-8	The student is able to i. **explain** a problem or question to be tested by a scientific investigation ii. **formulate and explain** a testable hypothesis **using correct scientific reasoning** iii. **explain** how to manipulate the variables, and **explain** how **sufficient, relevant data** will be collected iv. **design a logical, complete and safe method** in which he or she **selects appropriate materials and equipment**.	• Writes a method that **fully describes how to conduct multiple trials/controlled variables** and with **logical, detailed instruction** about how to use **LoggerPro** and **Geogebra** to analyze the data

Refer to the Rubric: The most basic strategy to succeed in the MYP is to read the rubric. The quality of your work won't matter if you did not listen to the task descriptors. Sufficiently adhering to the command terms will make your life a lot easier.

Don't Take a Disliked Subject For Granted: Given that course selection is relatively restricted in the MYP in comparison to the IB, taking a disliked course is likely inevitable. While it is valid to not favor a specific subject, it is important to not take it for granted. My recommendation is to use it as an opportunity to challenge yourself. Put in the work to force yourself to master the content and develop the strategies needed to excel in it. At the end of the day, it counts just as much as your favorite subject.

Push Yourself: If you have the opportunity to take an extended course, such as in Math or a Language, do it. It will benefit your learning and further your understanding of the subject, while better preparing you for the IB and challenging your intellectual abilities.

Languages Selection: One of my most significant recommendations is to take advantage of having the freedom of choosing your language in Year 9. For me, I saw it as an opportunity to experience a new subject. For future students, I recommend choosing a language that you are particularly interested in, as doing so will ensure you maintain the motivation to succeed in the course. Although many students may be intimidated by the fact of learning a completely new language, resorting to a new language is likely the answer if you dislike French. For me, electing to take Spanish in Year 9 not only prepared me for its IB counterpart, but also expanded my general understanding of languages. Specifically, taking French at UCC made it significantly easier to learn Spanish as I was able to better understand the linguistic patterns often consistent in most languages offered at the Upper School.

HOW TO TEST PREP AND "CRAM"

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CO-MANAGER

Tests can be one of the most challenging aspects of learning for everyone. A lot of people struggle under pressure and given the pandemic, we have very little chance to even practice for test-like situations. When we do return to school, here are some ideas on how to prepare for your next test.

First, you have to study for a test, and this does not mean only going through ideas which you are confused about, but working on every topic. The best idea is to prepare or reference a topic list. Try to remember the keys of the topic and mark down any which you cannot immediately recall. After, you can go through those topics and their notes by using teachers' slides or your own homework. If you cannot recall much at all, you can try to find some YouTube videos online. The MYP's level of knowledge can be found on channels like Crash Course. Then, you can try to do the review package, and for the questions that you get wrong, review again. After you understand all the topics, do a practice test or find some extension/challenge problems that may simulate a Level 7-8 question.

Second, remember that it is not important to get everything right on an MYP test; in fact, you can miss several low-banded problems and still get a 7 or 8. However, try to be as accurate as possible and give each question the same shot. If you cannot do basic level questions or are making blunders on them, it may be a sign that your knowledge base is not strong enough.

Lastly, as a note, the reason why you have to thoroughly understand each question is that the Level 7-8 questions are all supposed to be extensions or something you have not learned before. You must apply your knowledge in an unfamiliar situation, and having good foundations is how you can more easily find solving strategies.