

Criterion E: Engagement (6 marks)

This criterion has two key strands associated with it:

Process

Research focus

What is being assessed under this criterion is your engagement with both the research process and focus of your investigations (or topic).

How is this assessed?

The way the IB assesses this criterion is by means of the Reflections on Planning and Progress Form (RPPF) which has been newly introduced alongside the current criteria. In this form you will be expected to write three reflections after having met with your supervisor at each of three key junctures in the Extended Essay Process. The supervisor's report that is added to the RPPF will also shed light on how well you've engaged with the two strands for this criterion.

There will inevitably be more than three sessions with your allocated supervisor where you cover a wide variety of things in support of your Extended Essay. These sessions will range from quick 10–20 minute meetings to longer sessions to go over your research plan or provide feedback on your draft.

The three mandatory reflection-specific sessions, however, will ideally be as follows:

1. First reflection session

- This will be one of the early sessions with your supervisor (not necessarily the first) where you will outline your ideas regarding the topic in general, the research question you have in mind, initial background reading or research you may have conducted, possible approaches and your initial thoughts about the answer to your research question.

2. Interim reflection session

- This session will usually fall somewhere in the middle to latter half of your EE calendar, usually before the first full draft is completed. The general expectation is that you are able to present to your supervisor a more refined RQ, discuss your essay on the basis of some sustained writing and comment on any challenges encountered and what solutions you've attempted.

3. Final reflection session (viva voce)

- This session is indeed the last time you will meet your supervisor as it is intended to be the closing interview. This session takes place after the EE is uploaded for assessment so your supervisor will have read your work. It is an opportunity to offer your final reflections on the process, discuss any achievements and challenges overcome, while also sharing any aspects that contributed to the completion of the essay but are not immediately apparent within it.

How many words can I write in the RPPF?

The form is a fillable PDF and is restricted to **500 words** in total, so an economy of relevant and sharply focused summative words is in order. An example RPPF can be found on page 138.

What do I need to bring to the Reflection Sessions?

The IB advises all students to maintain a Researcher's Reflection Space (RRS) for the purposes of supporting them with both their research and as evidence to show how well they've engaged with both the research focus and process overall. The RRS can be kept in any form (for example, journal, scrapbook or online blog). It is intended to be a place where the process is chronicled as a whole and can therefore be a showcase to your supervisor of your level of engagement with the Extended Essay as a whole.

Towards meaningful reflection

Reflecting before, upon and after action has proven time and time again to be a key ingredient to successfully creating any "product", be it a piece of homework, a creativity, activity, service (CAS) activity or an Extended Essay.

But why do we reflect?

The reason we reflect could be broadly separated into five categories:



Discerning pros and cons

EE link: What are the advantages or disadvantages of my chosen approach?



Adjusting action

EE link: What should I do to counteract problems or limitations with my research approach?



Gap filling

EE link: What is missing from my research or analysis? What else should I be doing?



Re-evaluating goals

EE link: What is my research pointing to that differs from my initial hypothesis or position? Has my research focus changed?



Celebrating failure

EE link: What have I learned from my mistakes or choices made as part of my research? How successful was I in overcoming them?

So what is good reflection?

Although this will vary from situation to situation, broadly speaking it is safe to say that good and poor reflecting will be characterized by the following features:

Good reflection

- meaningful
- individual
- ongoing and episodic
- formative
- corrective
- uncomfortable
- productive
- social
- challenging

Poor reflection

- descriptive only
- complaining
- criticizing only
- boring
- linear or static
- politically correct
- tick box
- hour counting
- a single task

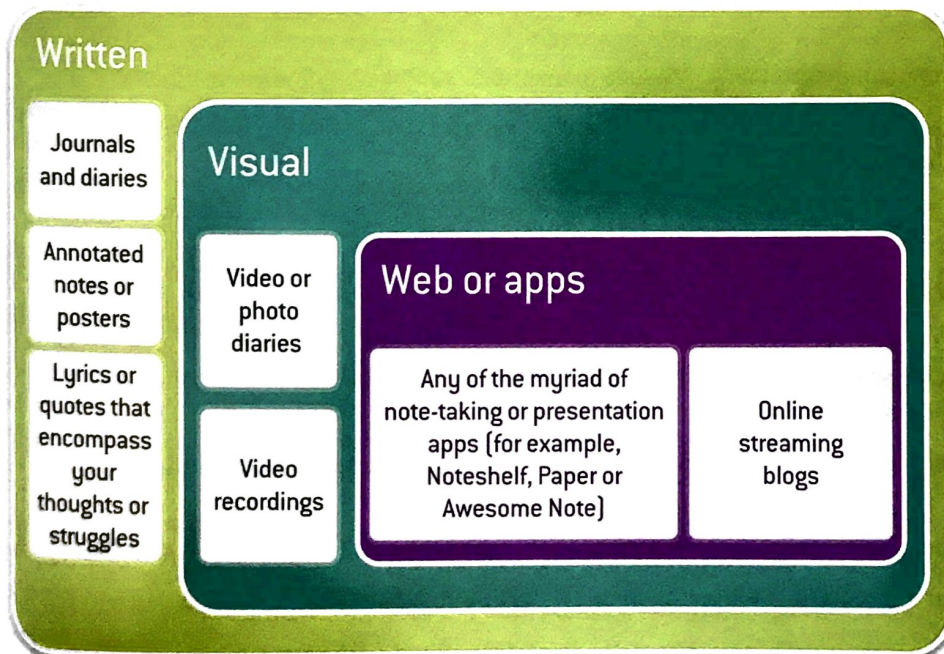
Good reflecting should challenge you, your assumptions and your approach. It should be social in nature as you seek to find solutions to problems through dialogue and discourse with experts. Good reflecting should always correct bad practice or erroneous steps in your research. It should be an ongoing process and generally episodic in nature rather than a one-off task you complete at the end. Most importantly, it should be meaningful, by which is meant it should help you realize what worked and what didn't and thus point you towards finding appropriate solutions or support.

How can I reflect?

All students should create a "space" where they can keep notes, clippings from useful articles, video files, annotations, scribbled ideas and anything that helps build the Extended Essay.

What form this "space" takes is completely up to you.

A traditional approach is to keep a running journal with clippings and annotations (much like a scrapbook only that the focus is your Extended Essay's research question). However, you should not be limited to this, especially when you have access to a myriad of digital platforms and spaces that can help contain and exhibit your work.



What should I include in my Researcher's Reflection Space (RRS)?

The key to making this space work is to include:

- **Reading:** A log of your reading as you complete it. (This could be in the form of a bibliography and/or some short notes on what you thought you gained from each source, even if minimal to non-existent! Remember, good reflection acknowledges mistakes made or incorrect paths followed.)
- **Notes:** Brief notes on your developing (often changing) thoughts on your RQ as a result of your reading and research
- **Challenges:** Register any challenges (even frustrations) and what you did about them, especially if they revolve around the research itself. Avoid simply complaining about things such as missed opportunities or time wasted. Reflect on how you can avoid these issues in future.
- **Visuals:** Include annotated diagrams, charts, illustrations or images that help build your argument.
- **Skills:** Document any newly developed skills or refining of pre-existing skills that you gain as a result of the research process.

Getting the most out of reflection

Below is a list of key questions that you should consider when writing your core reflections in your Researcher's Reflection Space which could then inform what you end up including in the assessed Reflections on Planning and Progress Form (RPPF). Each key question below is subdivided into additional stimuli questions to help guide your reflections along a more research focus. Bear in mind that you do not need to answer all of the additional stimuli questions as they may not all apply to you. What you must do, however, is respond to the key questions as a minimum. Your supervisor should encourage questioning along these lines so you can make the most out of those meetings.

Key question

1. How effective were your choices?

- a. In what way(s) did your chosen methodology produce a definite or satisfactory answer to your RQ?
- b. In what way(s) did your personal reading shed any new light on the text or challenge, or confirm pre-existing schools of thought?
- c. In what way(s) did your choice of source material lead to a comprehensive assessment of (most) all factors?
- d. Was your choice of sources consistently relevant to your RQ? What implication did that have on your conclusion (for example, "it produced a more sharply focused conclusion")?
- e. To what extent did your primary research consider (most) all key variables or factors in external agents (such as socio-cultural influences, gender or researcher bias)?
- f. To what extent did your research material (or approach) utilize the latest research in the field, making it up to date?
- g. In what way(s) did your research highlight any undocumented or new thoughts on the topic in question?
- h. To what extent could your approach be seen as yielding reliable (and/or valid) results?



2. What changes were necessary during the research process?

- Did your research bring to light any material or data that forced you to rethink your approach or adjust your RQ accordingly?
- Did your methodological approach or choice of sources consistently yield the required results or were changes/additions required?
- In what way(s) did your Extended Essay compel you to seek out new modes of note taking or overall organization (for example, time management)?
- To what extent did you include a wide variety of source material (that is, not just internet sources)?
- Did your argument require a greater balance of opinion that forced you to do wider reading or additional primary research?
- Why did you switch from a primary to secondary research approach (or vice versa)?

3. What were the greatest achievements and challenges during your research process?

- Did your research require you to acquire more technical skills or adapt your technical proficiencies so as to conduct your research properly (for example, learning how to use specific lab or technological equipment or how to devise subject-appropriate surveys)?
- Was there a lack of sufficient source material to begin with when it came to your topic? How did you overcome this?
- In what way(s) has your research findings added to the existing body of knowledge around your chosen topic?
- Did you make any significant breakthroughs with regards to the topic in question?
- Were you able to devise any original approaches to respond to your RQ?
- In what way(s) was your conclusion a comprehensive response?
- In what way(s) could your chosen topic or approach be deemed a challenge to research or pursue (for example, deals with complex mathematics, concerns itself with an obscure aspect of history or attempts a new reading of a well-known text)?
- Did you acquire any new skills that you have found use for in other areas of your studies?

Note



The RPPF is not intended to be a place where you mention any medical or personal problems you may have encountered. Any adverse circumstances will be communicated to the IB via your IB Diploma Coordinator through a different channel, so seek their guidance if that applies to you.

Exemplar Reflections on Planning and Progress Form

Below is an example of the kinds of things you could write in the three reflection spaces on the Reflections on Planning and Progress Form (RPPF). The key at all times is to maintain a focus on the process of researching and writing the essay itself.

The example is intended for a history Extended Essay but similar types of reflection could be raised with any subject.

RQ: To what extent could Anna Comnena's "Alexiad" be read as a criticism of the reign of Emperor Manuel I?

First reflection

- I was attracted to Anna Comnena's the *Alexiad* as a result of some extra readings that formed part of my IB history course [the Crusades]. As the first female historian Comnena stands in a unique place in terms of historiography, something which appealed to me as both a woman and budding historian. I was initially considering writing about her accounts of the First Crusade but quickly found the topic to be far too wide in scope. A reading of Paul Magdalino's article "The Pen of the Aunt" helped refocus me on the issue of historical purpose, that is, why she wrote the history she did. I have now allocated time to reading historical accounts of Manuel I's reign to decide how closely the events Comnena mentions in her history of her father's reign (Alexius) so as to validate my current hypothesis that she intended the work to be a celebratory account of her father so as to cast a negative light on the rule of her nephew Manuel I. My current list includes, Runciman, France, Macrides, Christomides and Hill.

Interim reflection

- I was finding it hard to come up with a satisfactory counter to the questions of accuracy and authenticity that feature prominently in modern readings of her work. Historians ranging from Edward Gibbon and John France to the more direct Howard-Johnson paper that completely challenges her authorship effectively negated my hypothesis entirely. Using Magdalino and Hill as a focus point, I reread key sections of the *Alexiad* and mapped out her account against the political events of Manuel I's reign and quickly discovered some interesting overlaps [building works, military campaigns, relations with the West and so forth]. Although occasionally obscure and subtle, the criticisms emerge by means of an unspoken comparison which Byzantine readers of her account would have well understood. This approach is providing me with a suitable counter to the aforementioned criticisms. I have also begun structuring my work accordingly with sections devoted to historical context followed by a section on the *Alexiad* that compares and contrasts events from Alexius' time with those of Manuel's. I am considering a chapter on the historiographical tradition of Byzantium but may integrate it into the main body in the end.

Final reflection

- I am very pleased with how the essay has turned out. Skills-wise, I had no problems with referencing, which I picked up quickly. However, integrating source analysis did prove a challenge at times due to my narrative tendencies. I believe I've been able to challenge the orthodox interpretations of Comnena's work as a piece of fantasy fiction at the hands of a disgruntled woman by showing that she was effectively using one of the few weapons she still possessed in her diminished political state—the power of words—to criticize the existing leadership. Hill's works proved of particular use to me as they examined female power in a broader context and thus gave me a framework for interpreting what Comnena was able to do within the context of her time.