

Theatre: Subject-specific guidance

See also: *Extended essay guide* and *Extended essay teacher support material*

Overview

An extended essay (EE) in theatre gives students an opportunity to:

- undertake independent research into a topic in theatre of their choice
- apply a range of skills to develop and explore in an imaginative and critical way a focused research question appropriate to theatre
- test and validate their research by considering its effect on the practice of the area of theatre they have investigated.

Choice of topic

Theatre is composite in nature. Students may therefore take an interdisciplinary approach in their research, so long as their topic is firmly rooted in the subject of theatre. The essay topic may relate to an area of the Diploma Programme theatre course, but students can also choose to explore other areas of the subject. Crucially, the topic must reflect their particular interest and enthusiasm within theatre.

Students can opt to compare two or more theatrical practices, but students should be careful to ensure that their comparisons are valid and the product of sensitive and objective analysis.

Research question

Once they have chosen their topic, students must frame a focused research question.

It is the task of the supervisor to ensure that the question:

- can be answered using theatrical sources available to the student
- will encourage and enable the student to apply theatrical concepts, theories or ideas.

The question's scope should not be too broad as such essays are rarely successful. The best research questions encourage analysis in depth rather than breadth.

Treatment of the topic

The EE's emphasis should always be on:

- written analysis, interpretation, evaluation
- the construction and development of a sound argument.

Research plan and methodology

When they have established their topic and research question, students should then make a research plan.

The plan should be flexible enough to allow them to explore their topic in a creative manner. Students should not be afraid to take risks during the research process: originality is encouraged, as is using a variety of research models.

It is vital that students' methodology:

- is tailored to the research question
- allows for an in-depth exploration.

Their personal involvement in the EE is also crucial.

Sources

Students are encouraged to use both primary and secondary sources.

Primary sources

Primary sources of information can include:

- play texts
- productions of plays
- sketches, drawings, pictures, plans, photographs
- reviews of a landmark production
- interviews with playwrights, directors, actors, etc
- drama workshops or exercises
- audio or video recordings.

Audio and video recordings or hyperlinks to videos online cannot be submitted as part of the EE. If students include visual material within the EE, it should further or illustrate their argument rather than be merely decorative. See Use of illustrative material, criterion D

Secondary sources

A good essay will always include a bibliography of high-quality research sources. These give students scope for the in-depth analysis that characterizes the best pieces of work.

Their reading will enable them to:

- establish the wider theatrical context for their research question early in the essay
- support their argument throughout the essay.

Secondary sources of information can include:

- textbooks
- books
- academic journals
- magazines
- the internet.

Students should not rely exclusively on textbooks and websites for their secondary sources—they must read more widely.

Relationship between theory and practice

Students can choose to undertake practical, applied research, but it is not a requirement.

Students can choose to base their EE exclusively on their reading and explore a topic at a purely theoretical level. However, their EE must connect the theory with theatrical practice. The research outcome should always include a practical dimension.

Students should avoid taking a narrow literary approach. For example, an essay exploring the use of fans in Restoration comedy must include a discussion of how a particular production interpreted the convention.

The title of the essay should clearly indicate its main aims and objectives.

Examples of topics, research questions and suggested approaches

Once students have identified their topic and written their research question, they can decide how to research their answer. They may find it helpful to write a statement outlining their broad approach. These examples are for guidance only.

Topic	Costume design
Research question	To what extent do Sara Schwartz's costume designs carry the themes explored in the production of <i>Leonce and Lena</i> at the Volkstheater?
Approach	A performance analysis of <i>Leonce and Lena</i> produced at the Volkstheater in 2010 and the themes explored in it, as declared by the director, such as loss of power, beauty, existentialism and self-sacrifice, through the lens of costume design. Close links are drawn to the text by Büchner and Schwartz's designs, supported by personal interviews. The essay required extensive and repeated visits to the theatre.

Topic	Traditional Japanese theatre: Noh and Kabuki
Research question	What part is played by violence in Noh and Kabuki theatre?
Approach	Contextual and socio-historical research of the two forms underpinned a close performance analysis of chosen plays from each form to examine the theatrical techniques used to portray violence on stage. A comparison between the techniques of each form was made to show how the different forms place different significance on the portrayal of violence in telling the theatrical story.

Topic	Physical theatre
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Research question	To what extent can social discrimination be discussed through the body in physical theatre? An analysis of DV8's <i>The Cost of Living</i> .
Approach	Performance analysis of <i>The Cost of Living</i> , first identifying the physical metaphors of broken body and whole body, and linking this to physical characterization techniques. A comparison is made between spoken and physical language as well as their interplay in this production to convey the intended message about physical disability. Secondary research sources range from the general on physical theatre, the moving body etc to the specific: Lloyd Newson and DV8's own writings.

Topic	Circus and theatre
Research question	To what extent can theatrical elements transform circus into a piece of theatre? An analysis of Cirque du Soleil's production <i>Ka</i> .
Approach	The essay investigates and compares essential elements of theatre and circus and their possible interferences. Elements of theatre such as design, story and characterization in a specific performance were analysed in this production by Cirque du Soleil. Generic elements of circus were also identified in the same performance and a conclusion was drawn as to what extent this performance could be termed "theatre" or to what extent it was "circus". The analysis was dependent on watching a live performance as well as the DVD; extensive secondary sources on theatre and circus as well as reviews, critiques and performance programme notes.

An important note on "double-dipping"

Students must ensure that their EE does not duplicate other work they are submitting for the Diploma Programme. For example, the EE should not be based on the same theatre theorists, play texts, world theatre traditions, starting points or theatre research examined as part of the standard and higher level courses.

Supervisors play an important role in guiding students in this. Students risk their diploma if academic misconduct is detected.

Interpreting the EE assessment criteria

Criterion A: Focus and method

(Strands: Topic, Research question, Methodology)

Students may choose to take an interdisciplinary approach to researching and planning their topic.

Topics need to be appropriate to the subject of theatre. Any topic that is outside the subject of theatre (eg ones that are film or literature based) cannot score above level 0 against criterion A.

Research questions need to be specific, sharply focused and stated clearly in the introduction to the essay. Topics that are too broad, and that cannot be dealt with within the scope of the word limit, should be avoided.

The research question needs to be presented as a question for discussion. It should encourage analysis in depth rather than breadth. Its purpose should be made clear to readers and related to existing knowledge of the topic.

Students should establish the theatrical context related to the research question early in the EE.

Students can choose from a variety of research methods to respond to their chosen research question. Qualitative, quantitative, mixed method and practice-based research are all acceptable.

Students are not required to undertake applied research, but if they choose to explore a purely theoretical topic, their essay must connect the theory with theatrical practice. The research outcome should always include a practical dimension. EEs in which theory and practice are completely divorced from each other or those based on a narrow literary approach will not score highly.

The discussion may also include a critical perspective on secondary source material so that students use the views of critics or practitioners to support their own argument.

The sources used may consist of a stage script or scripts that form the focus of investigation, and secondary sources (eg established theories used appropriately, published criticism on the stage script or scripts used in discussion, reviews of a landmark production or productions). Primary research such as interviews, laboratory exploration through exercises or workshops may be used provided that they are closely related to the chosen research question.

The sources used must provide sufficient material to develop and support an argument and conclusion relevant to the research question.

Criterion B: Knowledge and understanding

(Strands: Context, Subject-specific terminology and concepts)

Students must demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the theoretical background and an awareness of the academic context and its practical applications. They should do this by integrating their own ideas with current philosophical and theoretical thought and their practical application in theatre.

The student must demonstrate a contextual understanding of the chosen area of theatre. The context should be understood as the historical and sociocultural backdrop that informs or shapes a chosen theatre-related topic.

The nature of the chosen topic will determine the emphasis given to the different aspects of context and the direction of the research.

Some essays will have a strong element of applied research, while others may discuss previous or present practices to illustrate their central points.

Students should establish the context succinctly and not pad out an EE with a lengthy descriptive, historical or biographical narrative.

Criterion C: Critical thinking

(Strands: Research, Analysis and Discussion and evaluation)

Students should use a range of sources of information, including both primary sources (stage scripts and theatrical productions) and secondary sources (books, newspapers, magazines and journals, interviews and websites).

The use of other materials such as sketches, drawings, pictures, plans and photographs is encouraged but should not overwhelm the EE's text. Where they are used, they need to be crucial to the development and support of a coherent central argument.

The personal involvement of the student in their essay is of paramount importance, and this can become evident through the research path that is followed.

The research outcome should always include a link, direct or discreet, with a practical dimension.

A successful EE develops an argument, backed up with evidence, to convince readers of the validity of the student's findings. The argument may be personal but at the same time must remain logical and balanced. Reasoned argument must be the EE's fundamental structural basis.

The accumulation of research data may form part of the preparation for the writing of the EE but students must show that they can select relevant elements from this data and analyse and evaluate them in a manner relevant and appropriate to the topic.

Students should be able to analyse and evaluate theatrical work, whether this is a scene from a play, a costume design, a lighting plot or any other aspect that might be part of their topic. The ability to analyse and evaluate is part of the process through which the student articulates a relationship to the work and speaks in an individual voice.

It may be that the results of the analysis are unexpected or contrary to the student's initial hypotheses. Students should not be discouraged by this.

Where relevant, the argument should present evidence that leads towards acceptance or rejection of the original hypotheses.

In the context of the investigation of an issue, conflict or problem, bias or shoehorning of results should be avoided. The need to reconsider and re-evaluate initial ideas and modify the central argument, and an awareness of the need to make constant corrections and to recognize shortcomings are essential elements of theatre research.

Criterion D: Presentation

(Strands: Structure, Layout)

This criterion relates to the extent to which the EE in theatre conforms to current academic standards concerning the presentation of research papers. It also relates to how well these elements support the reading, understanding and evaluation of the essay.

EEs in theatre can be presented as a continuous body of text with clearly defined paragraphs or with a section and sub-section structure; the approach taken will be dependent on the nature of the research. The use of charts, images and tables may also be appropriate. They should only be used if they are directly relevant to the research question, contribute towards the understanding of the argument and are of a good graphic quality. Only selected materials that are central to the argument of the essay should be included in the body of the essay, as close as possible to their first reference.

Students must take care in their use of appendices as examiners are not required to read them. All information with direct relevance to the analysis, discussion and evaluation of the essay must be contained in the main body of the essay.

Any material that is not original must be carefully acknowledged, with specific attention paid to the acknowledgment and referencing of quotes and ideas. This acknowledgment and referencing is applicable to audio-visual material, text, graphs and data published in print and electronic sources. The inclusion of visual images may also be a crucial part of providing evidence in support of the student's central argument, and these images should be annotated in an appropriate format, as they need to have an illustrative rather than decorative function. If the referencing does not meet the minimum standard as indicated in the guide (name of author, date of publication, title of source and page numbers as applicable), and is not consistently applied, work will be considered as a case of possible academic misconduct.

A bibliography is essential and has to be presented in a standard format. Title page, table of contents, page numbers, etc must contribute to the quality of presentation.

The essay must not exceed 4,000 words of narrative. Students should be aware that examiners will not read beyond the 4,000-word limit, nor assess any material presented thereafter.

Criterion E: Engagement

(Strands: Reflections on planning and progress)

This criterion assesses the student's engagement with their research focus and the research process. It will be applied by the examiner at the end of the assessment of the essay, after considering the student's *Reflections on planning and progress Form* (RPPF).

Students are expected to provide reflections on the decision-making and planning process undertaken in completing the essay. Students must demonstrate how they arrived at a topic as well as the methods and approach used. This criterion assesses the extent to which a student has evidenced the rationale for decisions made throughout the planning process and the skills and understandings developed.

For example, students may reflect on:

- the approach and strategies they chose, and their relative success
- the *Approaches to learning* skills they have developed and their effect on the student as a learner
- how their conceptual understandings have developed or changed as a result of their research
- setbacks they faced in their research and how they overcame these
- questions that emerged as a result of their research
- what they would do differently if they were to undertake the research again.

Effective reflection highlights the journey the student has engaged in through the EE process. Students must show evidence of critical and reflective thinking that goes beyond simply describing the procedures that have been followed.

The reflections must provide the examiner with an insight into **student** thinking, creativity and originality within the research process. The **student** voice must be clearly present and demonstrate the learning that has taken place.