

# HISTORY IA GUIDE



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For those of you studying the beast that is IB History, you'll know that the IA is the worst monster of them all. Whether you're studying HL or SL, all History students must complete it. The History IA is worth 20% of your final grade if you're a HL student, or 25% if you're studying at SL. So it makes up a hefty chunk of your overall grade.

When we at Lanterna were IB students, we took the approach of working hard on our IAs to try and get as many marks 'in the bag' before my exams. We want to encourage you to do the same! Not only is having 20-25% of your grade secured a great feeling, but as the class of 2020 demonstrated, you never know what could happen in the world, making your IA score the only thing your History grade is based on! If there is one thing COVID-19 should have taught the IB world is that every assignment is crucial to smash, as it could be the only one you end up turning in!

Before breaking down our top tips on how to make sure you get the best possible grade on your History IA we want to take a look at the requirements. Knowing the requirements and being familiar with the criteria is crucial to pushing your grade up.



Section	Suggested Word Allocation	Associated Assessment Criteria	Marks
1. Identification and evaluation of sources	500	Identification and evaluation of sources	6
2. Investigation	1,300	Investigation	15
3. Reflection	400	Reflection	4
4. Bibliography	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Total (maximum word limit)</b>	<b>2,200 words</b>		<b>25</b>

## 1. Choosing a Topic

As there is a **free choice of topic with the History IA**, it's a great opportunity for you to explore your personal historical interests. Whilst having this freedom can be exciting, we know how it can also be quite daunting having to come up with an idea with no guidance! Here are a few ideas to get you on your way:

- Perhaps you're a football fanatic? Why not fit your History IA around this, and investigate the **WW1 Christmas football match of 1914**.
- Maybe you're interested in finding out more about the history of your local area? Pick a local landmark/building or an historic event to analyse. To use myself as an example, I studied the IB in a town called Sherborne, UK. **The old castle there played a part in the English Civil War**, so plenty of possibilities for an historical investigation.
- If you're a food fanatic, you could **explore how food was impacted under Mao's regime in China**.
- For any music lovers out there, how about investigating an aspect of music history you're interested in. **Music during the Vietnam War** is a vast topic.

These are just a few potential topics. The IB clearly specifies in the IB History Guide that the topic can be one of a vast number of options. They break it



down into 7 main different types of topics.

- a historical topic or theme using written sources or a variety of sources
- a historical topic based on fieldwork, for example, a museum, archeological site, battlefields, places of worship such as mosques or churches, historic buildings
- a historical problem using documents (this could include newspapers)
- a local history study
- a historical study based on oral interviews
- a historical investigation based on interpreting a novel, film or work of art
- a historical investigation of cultural issues.



Once you've decided on your topic, you must create a question to investigate. If we take one of my suggestions above, an example History IA question could be the following: *To what extent did music drive the anti-war movement in America during the Vietnam War?* **(Check out this article [HERE](#) if you're looking for more information on this topic).**

The only restriction is that your History IA cannot be on an event that has occurred in the last 10 years. Moreover, as this IA places great emphasis on analysis of sources, you must make sure that there are sufficient sources to support your investigation. More info on sources up later in this guide.

The IB actually publishes some tips about how to go about your History IA as well. They say the best way to make sure that you find a topic that will check off all the criteria while finding a topic that you find to be personally interesting is to go through this 12-point checklist!



1. Start by identifying a general area of interest.
2. Narrow it down to a specific question or area of investigation.
3. Choose a working title that may be changed or refined at a later stage.
4. Make sure sufficient resources can be obtained for the planned investigation. (See: The Research Process)
5. Read widely around the area of study and note down resources used.
6. Review the research question and refine it if necessary.
7. Take notes from resources, gathering evidence and diverse opinions.
8. Ensure accurate use of referencing.
9. Sort evidence thematically or chronologically.
10. Choose two suitable sources to evaluate in section 1.
11. Review your analysis. Check for differing viewpoints where appropriate.
12. Write the investigation, according to IB guidelines.

Here's a list of potential topics that you may want to check out. Note, just because a topic is on this list does not mean that it will guarantee you a high score. These are simply provided to give you some inspiration.

1. Assess the impact of either Marxism or nationalism in Europe, in the second half of the nineteenth century. (Include an element of debate or a point to make. Also, need to phrase it as a question)
2. Assess the role of Piedmont-Sardinia in Italian unification between 1850 and 1861. (Include an element of debate or a point to make. Also, need to phrase it as a question)
3. Assess the successes and failures of the domestic policies of Napoleon III. (Include an element of debate or a point to make. Also, need to phrase it as a question)
4. Cinema as History: Sir Richard Attenborough's Gandhi (topic only)
5. Compare and contrast the part played by Lenin and Trotsky in the development of the USSR between 1918 and 1924.
6. Examine the impact of the EU (European Union) between 1955 and 1995. (Time frame is too big, and narrow down impact on a certain aspect of a country / economy / section of society)
7. For what reasons, and with what results, did communist regimes in



Eastern Europe (excluding USSR) collapse (1989-90)? (This is an essay statement; turn it into an IA research question that invites debate and analysis)

8. How useful is the art of George Grosz to the historian of Weimar Germany?
9. How, when and why was the church/mosque/temple of [name] built and what can be learnt from the town of [name] in a defined period?
10. In what ways did the Chinese communists use the traditional art form of opera to promote their ideology during the Cultural Revolution?
11. In what ways did the guild system affect the development of Norwich?
12. In what ways did the New Deal's Farm Security Administration use photography as propaganda to support its programmes? (Is there enough scope for critical analysis in a question like this? Consider rephrasing)
13. In what ways did the work of Henry the Navigator inspire Portuguese exploration?
14. In what ways, and for what reasons, was the period 1815 to 1866 one of change for Austria?
15. To what extent can Nixon's Vietnamization policy be considered a success?
16. To what extent did collective security become a victim of economic problems in the inter-war years?
17. To what extent did David Low's cartoons accurately reflect public opinion in Britain in the years before World War II? (Hard to find evidence on a topic like this, have you checked what sources are available to you?)
18. To what extent do the film *The Charge of the Light Brigade* and the book *The Charge: The Real Reason Why the Light Brigade was Lost* agree on the apportioning of blame for the failure of the charge of the Light Brigade?
19. To what extent does the film *Amadeus* accurately portray the final illness and death of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart? (Not enough scope for evaluation/analysis?)
20. Was Hitler's "euthanasia" policy distinctively Nazi? (develop further)



21. Was the Berlin Wall built simply to deny freedom to East Germans under Soviet rule or did it serve a greater purpose? (what does “greater purpose mean, be more specific)
22. Was the crossing of the Luding Bridge in May 1935 a great communist victory against tremendous odds, or a minor skirmish exaggerated by the Chinese Communist Party for propaganda purposes?
23. What was the cause of the Rwandan Genocide? (rephrase, too narrative, make more analytical)
24. What were the causes of the Boston Massacre 1776? (too narrative)
25. Why, and with what consequences for its citizens, was Dresden (any affected town could be substituted) bombed in 1945? (Could possibly lead to a narrative answer)

## 2. Consideration of Sources

With the History IA, **you need to select and analyse a range of source material and consider diverse perspectives.** The rubric specifies that in order to get into the highest marks for criteria A:

*‘An appropriate question for investigation has been clearly stated. The student has identified and selected appropriate and relevant sources, and there is a clear explanation of the relevance of the sources to the investigation.*

*There is a detailed analysis and evaluation of two sources with explicit discussion of the value and limitations of two of the sources for the investigation, with reference to the origins, purpose and content of the two sources.’*





For us, an important point here is analysing a **range** of sources, as this will automatically make it easier for you to discuss diverse perspectives. Whilst it can be tempting to pick the first sources you come across when researching your topic, they might not provide you with thoughtful points to discuss in your IA. So **it's worth spending a fair amount of time to search for the most interesting sources to evaluate.**

Remember to consider both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources provide a first-hand account of an event or time period, whilst secondary sources are interpretations and analyses based on primary sources. It's also a good idea at this stage to think of the value and limitations of sources you come across. This is something you will have to discuss in Section 1 of

your IA (more about the different sections to follow). Examples of sources you could include with your IA include photographs, newspaper articles, interviews, letters, speeches, documents/programmes, or posters.

So, what online sources would we recommend that you can trust? Here's a great short list that the tutors at Lanterna have compiled! These should be your starting points.

1. University Libraries: Many universities give free access to their libraries online or in person, which will allow you access to all kinds of resources.
2. Scribd: Although this will set you back a few dollars a lot of books and articles are available on here that you won't find anywhere else.
3. Google Books: If you're looking for a particular quote, fact, or anything else, go on Google Books and search for that specific term! You'll find





any books that contain that information within seconds.

4. Google Scholar: Much better than searching using Google when you're doing academic research.
5. BBC History sites: Have a wide range of topics that may prove useful

### 3. History IA Structure

The History IA is split into three sections, as you can clearly see from the rubric at the top of this guide. These sections provide a useful structure for your IA, and **we recommend clearly labelling these three sections in your essay. It will help the examiner follow your IA much more easily, and make it clear to them that you have a strong grasp of what each section deals with!** In short, here's what you need to do in each section:

- *Section 1: Identification and evaluation of sources* – firstly, you must clearly state your chosen question. Then you must analyse two of the sources you will use in your IA, including an explanation of why they are relevant to the investigation. A detailed analysis should include reference to the origins, purpose and content of the sources, as well as their value and limitations. Suggested word count = 500
- *Section 2: Investigation* – this section must contain critical analysis that is focused clearly on your question. It must also include your conclusion that you draw from the analysis. You want to bring your other sources into the discussion here, as you want a range of evidence to support your argument. Suggested word count = 1,300 (this section forms the bulk of your IA)
- *Section 3: Reflection* – here you need to reflect on how your investigation has highlighted the methods used by, and the challenges facing, the historian. *What methods used by historians did you use in your investigation? What did your investigation highlight to you about the limitations of those methods? Who decides which events are historically significant? Is it possible to describe historical events in an unbiased way?* These are examples of questions you could consider in this section. Suggested word count = 400.



In addition, you must have a bibliography, but this is not included in the total word count (overall word count = 2,200). Our top piece of advice is to write your bibliography as you go along. It is so boring (and time consuming!) having to go back and search for where your sources came from. Even worse, by needing to go back to do your bibliography you run the risk of forgetting to cite a particular source and you could end up being done for academic dishonesty!



### 4. Following the Criteria

When completing your History IA, it's a good idea to check that you're meeting the assessment criteria (which you can see at the top of this guide). I know this is something I often talk about, but it is such an important point! **By using the criteria descriptors like a checklist, you can ensure that you're satisfying what the examiner wants in your work.**

Let's take the History IA 'Criterion B: Investigation (15 marks)' as an example. If you're looking to be in the top band for this criteria, 13-15 marks, follow this description:

*'The investigation is clear, coherent and effectively organized. The investigation contains well-developed critical analysis that is focused clearly on the stated question. Evidence from a range of sources is used effectively to support the argument. There is evaluation of different perspectives. The investigation argues to a reasoned conclusion that is consistent with the evidence and arguments provided.'*

Read through your Section 2: Investigation. Scrutinise whether you have included everything to secure the maximum marks. If not, go back to your work and add in what's missing!



## 5. Use Your Teachers and Tutors!

In the **IBO History IA guidelines** students are actively encouraged to engage with their teachers throughout the IA process. It states:

*‘Students should be encouraged to initiate discussions with the teacher to obtain advice and information’.*



We think this is such a crucial point that many IB History students are unaware of/choose to ignore. **Don’t be scared to approach your teacher and ask any questions you may have!** They should be able to point you in the right direction, and might be able to introduce you to new sources for your IA. Which in turn, could lead to you producing a stronger IA and getting more marks in the bag!

In addition, **your teachers are allowed to read and give advice on one draft of your IA.** IBO rules state that the following version handed to your teacher must be the final version for submission. So, make sure your draft you hand in is as detailed as can be. Ideally, you want your teacher to give you as much feedback as possible. So handing in a fully written draft will probably be better than just giving in a plan!

Even better than using your teachers could be using one of Lanterna’s very own experienced tutors! Whilst your teachers are undoubtedly spammed with questions from other people in your class, our tutors can sit down with you 1-on-1 online and help you with anything you might be struggling with! Check out our Online Private Tuition by clicking [HERE!](#)

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Questions? Email us at [info@lanternaeducation.com](mailto:info@lanternaeducation.com)