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Assessments with an International Reach

The international and intercultural nature of IB teaching in Canada and the United States is reflected in assessment. In the Diploma Programme, for example, assessments are conducted in English, French, and Spanish. Many senior examiners are also bilingual or trilingual. Beyond language, a significant cross-cultural dimension is included in PYP, MYP and Diploma subjects and their assessment.

At the Diploma level, for instance, students must study world history and develop an international perspective on historical explanation. A recent Thomas B. Fordham Institute report (November 2007) said that IB “seeks to ensure consistency of course quality around the globe via a system of standard formative and summative assessments that are administered both internally (by classroom teachers) and externally (by IB examiners).” The report further stated that IB “maintains consistency in instructional quality through its oversight of instructors.”

Each IB programme includes a rigorous student assessment that is appropriate to the age range, including:

Primary Years Programme:

Teachers assess students by selecting or designing methods of assessment appropriate to the learning outcomes they intend to capture. Teachers also take into account the diverse, complicated and sophisticated ways that individual students use to develop and demonstrate their understanding.

Middle Years Programme:

Teachers organize continuous assessment over the course of the programme according to specified assessment criteria that correspond to the objectives of each subject group.

Teachers are responsible for structuring varied and valid assessment tasks (including tests and examinations) that allow students to demonstrate achievement according to the objectives for each subject group. These include:

- Open-ended, problem-solving activities
- Investigations
- Organized debates
- Hands-on experimentation
- Analysis and reflection

Schools also make use of quantitative and qualitative assessment strategies and tools available from the IB that provide opportunities for peer- and self-assessment. The IB offers monitoring or moderation of internal assessment for IB World Schools.

Diploma Programme:

Diploma Programme assessment employs both external and internal assessments. Examinations form the basis of the external assessment for the vast majority of courses.

External assessment: Examinations form the basis of the assessment for most courses because of their high levels of objectivity and reliability. They include:

- Essays
- Structured problems
- Short-response questions
- Data-response questions
- Text-response questions
- Case-study questions
- Multiple-choice questions (limited use of these)

There are also a small number of other externally assessed pieces of work, including theory of knowledge essays, extended essays and world literature assignments. These are completed by students over an extended period under teacher supervision instead of examination conditions, and are then marked by external examiners.

Internal assessment: Teacher assessment is also used for most courses. This includes:

- oral work in languages
- fieldwork in geography
- laboratory work in the sciences
- investigations in mathematics
- artistic performances

The assessments measure the extent to which students have mastered advanced academic skills, including:

- Analyzing and presenting information
- Evaluating and constructing arguments
- Solving problems creatively

Basic skills such as retaining knowledge, understanding key concepts and applying standard methods are also assessed. In addition to academic skills, the IB assessments encourage an international outlook and intercultural skills where appropriate.

Sample assessment questions from the Diploma Programme include:

From History HL and SL:

To what extent do you agree with the view that war accelerates social change?
Evaluate the contribution made towards the war effort by civilians on both the home front and the battle front in two wars, each chosen from a different region.

From English HL

“Some works of literature are universal and timeless; others seem specific to one place and / or time.”
In what ways do two or three works in your study explore this range of possibilities?

From Chemistry HL

An anesthetic mixture at a pressure of 105 kPa was made from the gases nitrous oxide, halothane and oxygen, using the following amounts:

- 0.13 mol nitrous oxide
- 0.01 mol halothane
- 0.07 mol oxygen

Use Dalton’s Law to determine the partial pressures of each gas in the mixture.
Outline one advantage and one disadvantage of halothane as an anesthetic.