

Peace and conflict studies

These subject guidelines should be read in conjunction with the “Introduction”, “Outline” and “Details—all essays” sections of this guide.

Overview

An extended essay in peace and conflict studies provides students with an opportunity to undertake an in-depth study of a limited topic in this field. Essays should allow students to develop and show research, interpretative and presentational skills.

Students who are considering registering an extended essay in this subject (which is a school-based syllabus) are strongly advised to study carefully a copy of the syllabus, obtainable from IBCA, before making a final decision. The syllabus gives a clear idea of the scope and content of the subject, and will help students to decide whether their choice of topic is appropriate.

Choice of topic

The choice of topic must ensure that the various assessment criteria can be satisfied. Students are advised to avoid topics that are too broad in scope to permit an in-depth study within the prescribed word limit. A limited topic, thoroughly researched and with a clear focus, is preferable to a broad topic that can only be examined superficially.

There are many areas of human interaction in which conflict and/or peace can be observed, but purely descriptive essays should be avoided. Topics drawn from more dynamic situations allow the process of change to be studied and the student to assess the viability of peace being achieved or maintained.

When choosing a topic, students should ensure that a variety of sources are available. Students may use journalistic or visual/pictorial material, or data collected from interviews, but their essays should not be based solely on such sources. In particular, students should realize that extended essays in this subject are expected to show knowledge and understanding of the different theories about the causes of peace and conflict (see assessment criterion D).

The following examples of peace and conflict studies extended essays are intended as guidance only. The pairings illustrate that focused topics (indicated by the first title) should be encouraged rather than broad topics (indicated by the second title).

- “The debate about the effects of television violence on pre-teenagers: social and legislative safeguards and their effectiveness” **is better than** “Violence on television”.
- “Maori non-violent struggles for their land” **is better than** “The political position of the Maori people”.
- “Racism in [X] and proposals for its reduction” **is better than** “A study of racism”.
- “Conscientious objection in Switzerland: a study of its history, the human rights issues, the effects acceptance would entail, and of its political support” **is better than** “The case for conscientious objection”.

Treatment of the topic

Peace and conflict studies involves differing interpretations of situations, events, causes and solutions. The better essays will examine a wide variety of opinions, assess their strong and weak points, and include an element of personal evaluation.

Many essays will involve topics of which students have direct experience, to which they have easy access via family or friends, or with which they have some political, philosophical or cultural affinity. This is not discouraged but, in such cases, care must be exercised to maintain the academic standards of essay writing, particularly with reference to sources, contentious issues and conclusions. Several successful essays of this type have been written within the framework of a school or local community. In these cases, students have had no difficulty in finding ample source material, much of it being primary source material.

Peace and conflict studies is an interdisciplinary subject, and essays should reflect this. For example, data may be drawn from statistics, geography, sociology, psychology, history, economics, politics and journalism. Such data must be integrated, and shown to be relevant to the scope of the peace and conflict studies syllabus.

Essays in this subject must obviously show an awareness and understanding of the differing roles, views and activities of all parties to the conflict being researched, and must also suggest and critically examine possible solutions to the conflict (criterion F). In responding to this criterion, as well as to criteria D and G, students should use every opportunity to show their awareness of theories about the causes of peace and conflict.

The assessment criteria should be used as a guide to the organization and structure of the essay. In the early part of the essay, the chosen topic and research question should be shown to have a firm place in some aspect of the broad peace and conflict studies syllabus. Placing the topic and research question in context should be done briefly but clearly (criterion B).

One of the weakest elements of extended essays in this subject is the failure of many students to show that they have any knowledge and understanding of theories about the causes of peace and conflict, which should underpin any study of the subject. At least one of the books that deal with these theories ought to appear in the bibliography and students should show their awareness of such theories at appropriate points in their essays (criterion D).

Some examples of titles, research questions and approaches used in the past include the following.

Title	Violence in the American school system
Research question	An analysis of the causes of school violence and suggested solutions.
Approach	This is a good example of a topic of which the student had personal experience. General reading is undertaken to set the context. This is followed by interviews with fellow students and effective use of regulations of local education authorities and local press reports. A sound knowledge and understanding of theories about peace and conflict is applied in researching and organizing both parts of the essay.

Title	Conflict in Germany between German nationals and Turkish immigrants
Research question	An analysis of the causes of conflict between the two groups, and of possible solutions.
Approach	General reading of secondary sources/articles is undertaken to set the context. The argument about causes of violence is developed from interviews with German nationals and Turkish immigrants, by applying knowledge of theories about the causes of conflict, and by using examples of actual cases of conflict and tension. The essay concludes by suggesting possible ways of alleviating or removing conflict.
Title	Has the Kashmir conflict become a permanent vendetta between India and Pakistan or is a peaceful solution possible?
Research question	The question is built into the title, but is also stated in the early part of the essay and in the abstract.
Approach	General reading of secondary sources is undertaken to write a historical summary of the conflict and its causes since independence, with comments drawn from knowledge of the theories about the causes of conflict. This is followed by a discussion of possible paths to a peaceful compromise with a cautiously optimistic conclusion.

Interpreting the assessment criteria

Criterion A: research question

Although the aim of the essay can best be defined in the form of a question, it may also be presented as a statement or proposition for discussion. It must be appropriate to the subject in which the essay is submitted. In peace and conflict studies, this provides students with a wide range of topics. Even if the research question is built into the title itself in the form of a question, it must also be clearly stated in the early part of the essay and in the abstract.

Criterion B: introduction

Students should explain briefly the importance and the context of the topic, and, perhaps, the reason for choosing it. The introduction should relate the research question to existing subject knowledge: the student's personal experience or particular opinion is rarely relevant here.

Criterion C: investigation

Students should demonstrate that they have selected a range of sources on the basis of their relevance to the topic and the research question. They should also show that the investigation into sources and data has been planned and carefully selected.

Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

Students are expected to illustrate their knowledge of the chosen topic by placing it within a context of peace and conflict in society. This knowledge should include an understanding of academic theories about the causes of peace and conflict.

Criterion E: reasoned argument

This, along with the previous criterion, goes to the heart of the essay. A reasoned argument will be logical, coherent, persuasive, well supported with evidence and always relevant to the research question.

Criterion F: application of analytical and evaluative skills appropriate to the subject

Students are expected to apply peace and conflict analysis accurately and consistently, to demonstrate awareness and understanding of the differing roles, interpretations and actions of all conflicting parties, as well as a realistic examination of possible solutions to conflict situations.

Criterion G: use of language appropriate to the subject

The use of language must be effective and include relevant peace and conflict terminology.

Criterion H: conclusion

This should stem from, and be consistent with, the evidence presented in the research. No new material should be introduced apart from identifying new questions that may have arisen from the research.

Criterion I: formal presentation

This criterion relates to the extent to which the essay conforms to academic standards about the way in which research papers should be presented. The presentation of essays that omit a bibliography or that do not give references for quotations is deemed unacceptable (level 0). Essays that omit one of the required elements—title page, table of contents, page numbers—are deemed no better than satisfactory (maximum level 2), while essays that omit two of them are deemed poor at best (maximum level 1).

Appendices are not essential and examiners are not required to read them. It is important, therefore, for students to include all content of direct relevance to the argument in the body of the essay.

Criterion J: abstract

The abstract is judged on the clarity with which it presents an overview of the research question, the scope of the investigation and the conclusion, not on the quality of the research question itself, nor on the quality of the argument or the conclusions.

Criterion K: holistic judgment

The qualities that distinguish an essay from the average are rewarded under this criterion. These qualities include intellectual initiative, depth of understanding, insight, creativity and flair. When all these qualities are present, they will identify an essay of outstanding quality. Essays that demonstrate only one or two of them should also be rewarded.