

11 The Extended Essay

A note to readers. It is suggested that you increase magnification to 125% or 150% to read the guide on screen. Click on the magnifying glass icon at bottom left of the screen and select your magnification.

Key points in Chapter 11

- Divide your study into sections.
- Have your Extended Essay under way quickly by starting your first tasks straight away.
- Avoid a passive approach to the subject by a question-led approach.
- Allow several days for the rewriting of your rough draft.

MOST COURSES INCLUDE OPTIONS which enable more in-depth work over a longer period and a more substantial dissertation or extended essay. This work is usually part of the later phase of your course. Chapter 10 is relevant, also, to this bigger assignment and if you have not looked at that chapter I suggest you do so before you read on.

The greater length of time allotted and the more open-ended nature of your dissertation work can lead to even more deadline-related problems. The key to avoid them is to identify the separate study tasks and break your work into separate steps, which you pace yourself to complete, over the whole length of time available.

Subject choice and information

In some cases you will be given the topic you are to study: in others you will be left to choose your theme and title. Where you have a choice there are a number of issues to consider.

Bigger assignments, in which you have more freedom to explore your subject and which are less closely supervised by your teacher or tutor, will require more commitment from you. It is important, therefore, to choose a subject which will interest you and sustain your motivation. There is no sense, however, in opting for a topic for which you

cannot obtain information and before you settle the subject it is good sense to explore what information you can obtain either immediately or, by ordering from outside libraries, within a short time span. However brilliant or inspiring your projected title is, without accessible information about it you will be unable to write a good assignment. How relevant information can be identified and considered was mentioned in Chapter 2, 'Hunting for information'.

Break-up of the assignment into small steps

With the title settled, your first job is to begin to obtain the information, books, journals, articles and, maybe, videos. Then, unless you are already very familiar with the topic, read a concise account in order to gain an overview. You are now in a position to divide your study into five to nine or so sections (see below). Then loosely divide the time allowed for the assignment into the same number as the sections and focus on one section at a time. Such a division will enable you to pace yourself over the longer than normal time allowed and you have broken the major project into smaller, manageable, parts. As you complete each part you have the satisfaction of your evidential progress to sustain your effort. The greatest reason for under-performance is that students allow time to pass without progress, so the work is crushed into hectic and hasty activity just before the deadline.

Investigation-led study

The surest way to produce a study of substance is to make your work question led. With a fair grasp of the topic after earlier reading, you are in a position to ask analytical questions about the subject: why events happened, why 'x' was important, why the consequences were as they were, and so on. Question-led study will lead you away from a narrative dissertation. Much of your reading will be guided by your search for answers to the questions you generate as you deepen your insights and understanding. Better students will be active, adventurous and resourceful in the search for information. And, because the questions come from you, you will have made it your study and not a 'cut and paste' summary of historians' work.

Tackling each step, one at a time

The questions to which you will seek answers provide the small units, the steps in the bigger study task and the units of paced work as you build up your rough draft.

The answers to your questions will be the backbone of your study. Needless to say, you do not write your dissertation in a question and

answer form but the content of what you write will be generated by answers to questions. For example, you change the questions 'Why did Hitler insist on the death of Rommel?' into 'The reasons for Rommel's death'. As you read for each part of your study, attention to analysis (Chapter 6) and working on information (Chapter 3) will guide your work away from being only derivative of others. When you read to find answers to your questions, only brief notes are needed before you write your conclusions. In this way, the amount of general note-making is reduced and your answers to your questions, one by one, are added together to achieve continuity: they become the first draft of your study.

Changing a rough draft to a final draft

Keeping pace with your informal schedule for completion of sections, add to your rough draft, part by part, until your study is finished in rough. When you write your rough draft, it is a good idea to write on every other line, a practice usually followed by authors. This makes the refinement of your account for the final draft easier. As you work, aim to be prepared to discover new issues that could be considered and to search for new sources. You may find your earlier ideas of the shape of the study change as you progress but this is good, a sign of your full involvement in the subject.

When you allocate time for your study remember to leave seven to 14 working days to revise and refine your first draft and to write your finished study. You will be surprised by how much you are able to improve your account and improve its tone when you write the finished draft. Only when your study is completed should you write the introduction because only when the study is finished will you know exactly what is to be introduced. Guidance on the format the finished work and the requirements for references to sources and authors will be given by your teacher.