

A LEVEL EXTENDED ESSAY WRITING GUIDE

General paper (GP)

INTRODUCTION

What is an Extended Essay?

The extended essay is a core component of the A-Level General Paper curriculum, designed to develop your critical thinking, research, and analytical writing skills. This guide will walk you through the entire process of crafting an exceptional extended essay.

An extended essay is an in-depth research paper of 3,000-4,000 words that allows you to investigate a topic of personal interest within the framework of General Paper themes. It requires independent research, critical analysis, and structured argumentation.

Purpose and Objectives

The extended essay aims to:

- Develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills
- Enhance research and analytical capabilities
- Foster creativity and independent learning
- Prepare you for university-level academic work
- Demonstrate your ability to communicate ideas coherently

These objectives align with the generic skills emphasized in the General Paper syllabus, including planning and carrying out investigations, sorting and analysing information, identifying problems and proposing solutions, and working independently with persistence.

CORE TOPICS FOR INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS

Based on the General Paper syllabus, you should select your extended essay topic from one of the following core areas:

1. Social and Cultural Issues

This area explores the dynamics of human society and cultural practices. Topics may include:

- Family structures and changing gender roles
- Gender equality and women's empowerment
- Cultural diversity and multiculturalism
- Youth challenges and opportunities
- Urbanization and its social impacts
- Migration and demographic changes
- Social change and modernization in Uganda
- Cultural heritage and preservation

Example Research Questions:

- "How has urbanization affected family structures in Kampala?"
- "To what extent has social media empowered young women in Uganda?"

2. Science, Technology and Innovation

This area examines the role of scientific advancement and technological development in society. Topics may include:

- Digital transformation and its societal impact

- Artificial intelligence and automation
- Biotechnology and genetic engineering
- Environmental technology and green innovation
- Mobile technology and financial inclusion
- Educational technology and learning outcomes
- Health technology and medical advancement
- Innovation ecosystems in developing countries

Example Research Questions:

- "How has mobile money technology affected financial inclusion in rural Uganda?"
- "What are the ethical implications of AI adoption in Uganda's healthcare system?"

3. Economic and Political Systems

This area investigates governance structures, economic policies, and political processes.

Topics may include:

- Democratic governance and accountability
- Economic development strategies
- Globalization and trade policies
- Poverty reduction and inequality
- Political participation and civic engagement
- Regional integration (East African Community)
- Corruption and institutional reform
- Economic diversification and industrialization

Example Research Questions:

- "To what extent has decentralization improved service delivery in Uganda?"
- "How does youth unemployment affect political stability in East Africa?"

4. Environmental and Health Issues

This area focuses on sustainability, conservation, and public health challenges. Topics may include:

- Climate change and adaptation strategies
- Environmental conservation and biodiversity
- Public health systems and disease prevention
- Water and sanitation access
- Food security and sustainable agriculture
- Renewable energy and environmental sustainability
- Air and water pollution
- Wildlife conservation and ecotourism

Example Research Questions:

- "How effective are Uganda's climate adaptation strategies in protecting smallholder farmers?"
- "What role can renewable energy play in addressing Uganda's energy poverty?"

CHOOSING YOUR TOPIC

Selection Criteria

Your topic should be carefully selected based on the following criteria:

1. Personal Interest

Choose something you are genuinely curious about

Your enthusiasm will sustain you through months of research

Personal connection often leads to deeper insights

2. Researchable

Ensure adequate resources and information are available

Check library catalogs, online databases, and academic journals

Verify that you can access primary and secondary sources

Consider whether expert interviews or fieldwork are possible

3. Appropriate Scope

Not too broad: "Climate change in Africa" is too vast

Not too narrow: "Rainfall patterns in Kampala in January 2024" is too specific

Just right: "How does climate change affect coffee production in central Uganda?"

Aim for a topic you can thoroughly explore in 3,000-4,000 words

4. Relevance

Connected to current issues in Uganda or globally

Has practical implications or policy relevance

Addresses real-world problems or debates

Contributes to ongoing discussions in the field

5. Originality

Offers room for your unique perspective and analysis

Allows you to make an original contribution, even if small

Enables critical evaluation rather than mere description

Provides opportunities for independent thinking

Formulating a Research Question

A strong research question is the foundation of your extended essay. Transform your general topic into a focused, answerable question.

Characteristics of a Good Research Question:

- Clear and Focused: Easy to understand with well-defined boundaries
- Arguable: Open to analysis and interpretation, not just factual
- Researchable: Can be investigated with available resources
- Complex: Requires analysis, not just a yes/no answer
- Relevant: Addresses significant issues or debate

Examples of Weak vs. Strong Research Questions:

Weak: "Social media in Uganda"

- Too broad, not a question, no clear direction

Strong: "How does social media usage affect youth political participation in urban Uganda?"

- Focused on specific aspect (political participation)
- Defined population (urban youth)
- Geographical scope (Uganda)
- Requires analysis and investigation

Weak: "Climate change"

- Far too broad, not specific to any context

Strong: "To what extent can renewable energy adoption mitigate Uganda's climate vulnerabilities?"

- Evaluative (to what extent)
- Specific focus (renewable energy)
- Clear context (Uganda)
- Addresses cause and effect

Weak: "Is corruption bad for Uganda?"

- Too obvious, lacks analytical depth

Strong: "How do anti-corruption initiatives affect foreign direct investment in Uganda's extractive industries?"

- Examines specific relationship
- Focused sector (extractive industries)
- Requires analytical investigation

Testing Your Research Question

Ask yourself:

- Can I answer this in 3,000-4,000 words?
- Are there sufficient sources available?
- Does it require analysis and critical thinking?
- Is it relevant and interesting?

- Can I formulate a clear argument in response?

If you answer "yes" to all these questions, you have a strong research question!

RESEARCH AND PLANNING

Developing a Research Plan

Effective research requires systematic planning and organization. The General Paper syllabus emphasizes the generic skill of "planning and carrying out investigations," which is central to your extended essay success.

Step 1: Conduct Preliminary Research

Purpose:

- Understand the broader context of your topic
- Identify key debates and perspectives
- Refine your research question
- Determine feasibility of your project

Activities:

- Read general overviews (textbooks, encyclopedia entries)
- Review recent news articles on your topic
- Explore academic databases for scholarly articles
- Identify key terms and concepts
- Note gaps in existing knowledge
- Duration: 1-2 weeks

Step 2: Identify Reliable Sources

Primary Sources:

- Original research studies
- Government reports and statistics
- Historical documents
- Interviews and surveys you conduct
- Legal documents and policies

Secondary Sources:

- Academic journal articles
- Scholarly books
- Literature reviews
- Expert analyses and commentaries
- Reputable news sources

Where to Find Sources:

- University libraries (Makerere, Uganda Christian University, etc.)
- Google Scholar
- JSTOR and other academic databases
- Government websites (UBOS, Ministry publications)
- International organization reports (UN, World Bank, WHO)
- Local NGO reports and publications

Evaluating Source Credibility:

- Authority: Who is the author? What are their credentials?
- Accuracy: Is information supported by evidence? Can it be verified?

- Currency: When was it published? Is it still relevant?
- Purpose: Why was it written? Is there bias?
- Coverage: Does it provide comprehensive treatment?

Step 3: Take Organized Notes

Note-Taking System:

- Create a research journal or digital document with:
- Source Details: Full citation information (author, title, date, publisher, page numbers)
- Key Arguments: Main points and conclusions
- Evidence: Important facts, statistics, quotations
- Your Analysis: Your thoughts, questions, connections
- Tags/Keywords: For easy retrieval later

Tips:

- Use quotation marks for direct quotes
- Record page numbers for all information
- Distinguish between author's ideas and your interpretations
- Use a consistent format from the beginning
- Back up digital notes regularly

Step 4: Analyze and Synthesize

Analysis involves:

- Breaking down complex information into components
- Identifying patterns and relationships
- Examining assumptions and implications
- Evaluating strengths and weaknesses of arguments

Synthesis involves:

- Combining information from multiple sources
- Identifying agreements and disagreements between scholars
- Building connections across different perspectives
- Developing your own informed position

Questions to Guide Analysis:

- What are the main arguments presented?
- What evidence supports these arguments?
- Are there alternative explanations?
- What are the limitations of this research?
- How does this connect to other sources?
- What gaps or contradictions exist?

Research Tips

- Start Early: Research takes longer than expected
- Be Systematic: Keep organized records from the beginning
- Consult Your Supervisor: Meet regularly to discuss progress and challenges
- Stay Focused: Don't get lost in tangential topics
- Be Critical: Question sources and evaluate evidence quality
- Track Time: Monitor how long tasks take to improve planning
- Take Breaks: Prevent research fatigue with scheduled breaks
- Remain Flexible: Be prepared to adjust your question if needed

Creating a Timeline

Months 1-2:

- Choose topic and formulate research question
- Conduct preliminary research
- Create research plan

Months 3-4:

- In-depth research and note-taking
- Conduct interviews or fieldwork if applicable
- Develop essay outline

Month 5:

- Write first draft
- Continue research as gaps emerge

Month 6:

- Revise and refine arguments
- Edit for clarity and coherence
- Proofread and format

Final Week:

- Final proofreading
- Prepare all required components
- Submit

STRUCTURE OF YOUR EXTENDED ESSAY

A well-structured extended essay follows a clear academic format. Each component serves a specific purpose and contributes to the overall coherence of your work.

Complete Structure Overview

1. Title Page/Cover Page

The title page is the first page of the Extended Essay.

Every essay must have a title page, which should clearly show the:

- Subject: General Paper
- Topic of the study: Your research question or essay title
- Name, school and the registration number of the candidate
- Year of study

2. The Topic

This is decided on after critically thinking about a selected society to identify the problems that are affecting the people. The learner identifies a problem to work with and at the end writes an Extended Essay.

Your topic should:

- Address a real problem in society
- Be based on critical thinking
- Fall within one of the four core areas (Social & Cultural, Science & Technology, Economic & Political, or Environment & Health)
- Be researchable within your time and resource constraints

3. The Contents Page/Table of Contents

This is the roadmap for the learner's extended essay. It includes the topics, sub-topics and the pages where the named information is found.

Format your table of contents to include:

- All major sections with page numbers
- Clear hierarchical structure
- Accurate page references

4. The Introduction and/or Background

The introduction is the opening segment of the Extended Essay, serving as a guide for the readers into the subject that the learner is exploring. It should give a hint about the topic that the learner is working on. This is written as a result of critical thinking about society to identify what problems exist.

Your introduction should include:

- Context and background to your topic
 - The research problem you've identified
 - Why this problem matters
- The scope of your investigation
- A brief overview of how you'll address the problem
 - Recommended length: 600-800 words

5. Research Guiding Questions (or Hypothesis)

These questions are formulated to help the learner to internalize the topic and they are to guide in garnering the right information and data for the essay.

Your research questions should:

- Be clear and focused
- Guide your investigation
- Be answerable within your word limit
- Help you collect relevant data and information
- Emerge from critical thinking about societal problems

6. Body of the Essay

This is the main part of the extended essay. It should include some:

Literature that informed/enlightened the learner about the topic

- Review of existing research and scholarship
- Key theories and concepts
- Previous studies on your topic
- Different perspectives and viewpoints

Methods used to collect the data for the essay

- Description of your research approach
- Sources consulted (books, journals, reports, websites)
- Any primary data collection (if applicable)
- How you identified and selected sources

How the data was analysed

- Your analytical framework
- How you evaluated evidence
- Comparison of different sources
- Critical assessment of information
- Synthesis of findings

- Your own analysis and interpretation
- Recommended length: 2,000-2,500 words

Organization: Divide the body into 3-5 logical sections with clear subheadings

7. Conclusion

This gives some of the conclusions the learner draws from the internalisation of the problem.

Your conclusion should:

- Answer your research guiding questions
- Summarize the main findings from your analysis
- Draw logical conclusions based on your evidence
- Demonstrate what you learned from internalizing the problem
- Explain the implications of your findings
- Acknowledge limitations of your study
- Recommended length: 400-600 words

8. Reflection

This will be the conclusion from the reflection journal that the learner has had, from the time that he/she started the research. It will include some of the challenges and changes that she/he encountered.

In your reflection, discuss:

- Your research journey and learning process
- Challenges you faced and how you overcame them
- What you would do differently
- How your understanding evolved
- Skills you developed

- Personal growth through the process

Recommendations:

These are given as suggestions emanating from the study that could help to alleviate the problem.

Your recommendations should:

- Be specific and actionable
- Flow logically from your findings
- Address the problem you identified
- Be realistic and feasible
- Consider different stakeholders

9. References & Bibliography

These are references and bibliography sources. They should be well-written according to the selected referencing system and version.

Your reference list must:

- Include all sources cited in your essay
- Follow one consistent citation style (APA, MLA, or Harvard)
- Be properly formatted
- Be arranged alphabetically by author surname
- Provide complete publication information

Total Word Count Guidelines

Overall essay: 3,000-4,000 words

This includes:

Title page

Introduction/Background

Body of the Essay

Conclusion

Recommendations

References & bibliography

Formatting Guidelines

General Formatting:

Font: Times New Roman or Arial, 12pt

Line spacing: Double-spaced

Margins: 2.5 cm (1 inch) on all sides

Page numbers: Bottom center or top right

Paragraphs: Indented or with space between

Headings: Use clear, descriptive headings for sections Maintain consistent heading hierarchy

Number sections if helpful (1.0, 1.1, 1.2, etc.)

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