

International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme

Standard level and higher level courses

The Diploma Programme model

The IB Diploma Programme (DP) is a rigorous, academically challenging and balanced programme of education designed to prepare students aged 16 to 19 for success at university and in life. The DP aims to encourage students to be knowledgeable, inquiring, caring, open-minded and to develop intercultural understanding and the attitudes necessary to appreciate a range of viewpoints.

The DP provides the opportunity to develop both disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge that meets the rigorous standards set by institutions of higher learning around the world.

To ensure both breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding, students choose courses from the following subject groups: studies in language and literature; language acquisition; individuals and societies; sciences; mathematics; and the arts. Most subjects may be taken at either standard level (SL) or higher level (HL).

To earn the full diploma a student must take at least three subjects at HL. In addition, three core elements—the extended essay, theory of knowledge and creativity, activity, service—are compulsory and central to the philosophy of the programme.



The nature of HL and SL courses

It is essential for any pre university education to equip students with the depth of discipline-specific knowledge and skills that they will need for their chosen academic and career paths. However, this must be balanced with the breadth needed to develop well-rounded students who can draw connections between the different disciplines.

As such, the philosophy of the IB DP is that students should engage with a range of subjects while being able to explore specific areas of personal interest in greater depth. SL courses ensure students are exposed to a range of disciplines that they might otherwise opt out of, and HL courses allow students to spend more time with subjects they are more interested in by exploring options in addition to the SL core curriculum. In this sense, all DP courses, regardless of whether they are SL or HL, are integral to the programme.

Curriculum and assessment

Both SL and HL courses are meant to span the two years of the DP. SL courses are recommended to have at least 150 hours of instructional time, and HL courses are recommended to have at least 240 instructional hours.

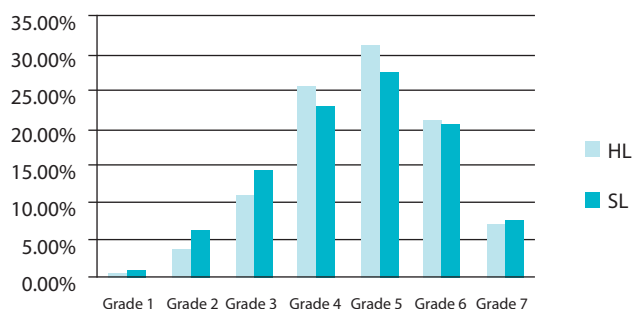
In most cases both SL and HL courses consist of the same educational aims, core syllabus and curriculum and assessment models. HL courses typically also include a range of additional elements designed to allow students to explore areas of interest within the subject in more depth. In this sense, SL courses are not watered down versions of their HL counterparts. The assessment criteria are equally demanding for both levels, and SL exams are marked and standardized with the same rigour as all IB coursework.

Comparisons with other programme of study

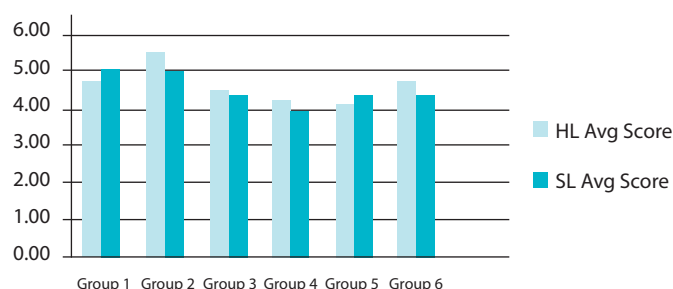
Typically when doing course comparisons, external bodies have compared IB SL courses with the alternative curriculum. Comparisons have been made between SL courses and AP, A level, Australia National Curriculum, Indian boards, Knowledge and Skills for University Success (KSUS) and so on, and in most instances SL courses were found to be as demanding if not more so than the comparative courses.

The below figures on DP student exam performance provide some evidence of the equitability of SL and HL assessments.

HL/SL course grade distributions, May 2014



Average HL/SL grades for each subject group, May 2014



The below example of the DP physics course highlights the nature of the difference in curriculum and assessment between HL and SL courses.

DP physics curriculum components		
Syllabus component	Recommended teaching hours	
	SL	HL
Core	95	
1. Measurements and uncertainties	5	
2. Mechanics	22	
3. Thermal physics	11	
4. Waves	15	
5. Electricity and magnetism	15	
6. Circular motion and gravitation	5	
7. Atomic, nuclear and particle physics	14	
8. Energy production	8	
Additional higher level		60
9. Wave phenomena		17
10. Fields		11
11. Electromagnetic induction		16
12. Quantum and nuclear physics		16
Option (1 of 4)	15	25
A. Relativity	15	25
B. Engineering physics	15	25
C. Imaging	15	25
D. Astrophysics	15	25
Practical scheme of work	40	60
• Practical activities	20	40
• Individual investigation (internal assessment)	10	10
• Group 4 project	10	10
Total teaching hours	150	240

DP physics assessment components				
Component	Overall weighting (%)		Duration (hours)	
	SL	HL	SL	HL
Paper 1	20	20	0.75	1
Paper 2	40	36	1.25	2.25
Paper 3	20	24	1	1.25
Internal assessment	20	20	10	10

Byrd, S, Ellington, L, Gross, P, Jago, C, Stern, S. 2007. Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate: Do they deserve gold star status? Washington, DC, USA. Thomas B Fordham Institute

Conley, D., Ward, T. 2009. International Baccalaureate Standards Development and Alignment Project. Educational Policy Improvement Center, Eugene, Oregon.

Dixon, M, Charles, C, Moss, J, Hubber, P and Pitt, P. 2014. The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme: Alignment with the Australian Curriculum and Australian Qualifications Framework. Bethesda, MD, USA. International Baccalaureate Organization.

Geetha, T. 2009. Comparative Curriculum Analysis of the IB Diploma course and the CBSE and the CISCE for their senior school examination courses. Central Institute of Education, University of Delhi.

Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (OFQUAL), 2012. International comparisons in senior secondary assessment. <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/14715/>

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), 2003. Comparability between GCE and International Baccalaureate examinations: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+www.ofqual.gov.uk/308.aspx>

For further examples of curriculum and assessment requirements for specific DP HL and SL courses, subject briefs for all courses are available at: <http://www.ibo.org/en/university-admission/recognition-of-the-ib-diploma-by-countries-and-universities/ib-recognition-resources-and-document-library/>