

IB Assessment principles and practices: A guide to assessment for students and their parents/guardians

Introduction and overview

This publication is intended as a summary guide to IB assessment (exams, internal assessment, coursework and so on) for students studying an IB programme and their parent(s) or guardian(s). More detailed information about IB assessment can be obtained from the IB website.

What are the steps in the life of an exam?

Assessments in general, rather than just exams, have a cycle of creating, completing, marking and grading, with each stage informed by the previous stage and leading into the next stage.

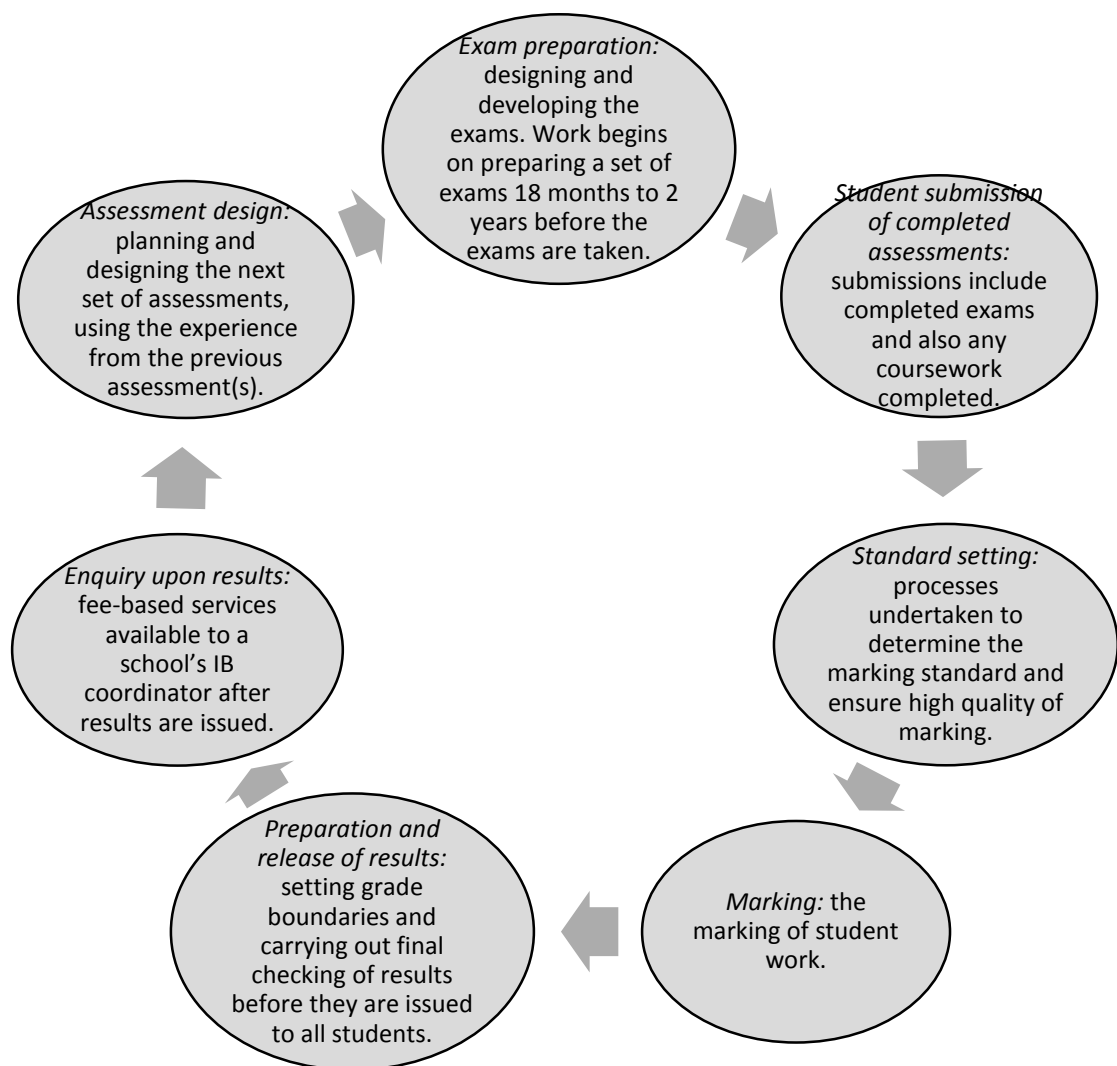


Figure 1. Assessment cycle

How am I tested?

The IB uses several ways to assess your knowledge and understanding of your subjects. Each subject is tested through a number of different elements, or *components*. Exams are taken at the end of your programme of study, and your answers are marked by examiners. As well as exams, you also complete assessment tasks within your school. These tasks are either *internally assessed*, that is, they are marked by your teachers and then moderated by examiners, or *externally assessed*, meaning they are sent directly to examiners to be marked.

<p>Examples of tasks that are sent directly to examiners to be marked are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • examinations (including on-screen) • extended essays • written assignment/written tasks • theory of knowledge essays. 	<p>Tasks that are marked by teachers and moderated by examiners can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • oral work in languages • fieldwork in geography • explorations in the sciences • investigations in mathematics • artistic performances • portfolios/ePortfolios • projects. 	<p>Within each component there is a variety of assessment tasks, which may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • multiple-choice questions • short-response questions • extended-response questions • essays • presentations • performances.
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An individual component can be made up of one or more tasks. Different assessment tasks are used to ensure the IB uses the best tool to test the right skills. For example, an essay can be used to assess writing skills, a multiple-choice question can be used to assess ability to recall information related to the course, and a presentation can be used to assess communication skills. Having a variety of assessment tasks means your achievement against all of a subject's objectives is properly tested.

What's the difference between a mark/level* and a grade?

In the IB, *marking* and *grading* student work are two different actions.

When work is marked, you are given credit for the work you have produced against a markscheme or similar framework. Marks show how much of the assessment task you got right. The mark itself has no other meaning.

In deciding a grade, the examiner is making a judgment on the quality of your work against a defined standard. This takes into account the difficulty of the task as well as the number of marks given. Grades have a particular meaning and relevance, and they are intended to be comparable with grades in other subjects.

Consider: *Marks* are how far you have walked, but *grades* take into account how steep the path was.

Grade awarding (the process of converting marks into grades) takes place shortly before the issue of results.

Where a subject is made up of a number of components, the overall grade boundaries are worked out based on the grade boundaries set for each component. The total number of marks you were awarded across all of a subject's components is then converted to a subject grade.

Subject grades are converted into points, and the total number of points goes towards determining whether you pass the programme. Certain minimum levels of performance are required across the whole programme.

*Mark, level and score are all words used to describe how much of a task a student got correct.

Please ask your school's IB coordinator if you would like further details regarding the point calculations for individual programmes.

Why does the number of marks required for a grade sometimes change? How are grade boundaries set?

As grades depend on how difficult the task was as well as how many marks were achieved, the IB is able to move the grade boundaries down if an exam is very difficult or move them up if it is very easy. The IB works hard to make all exams comparable between years, so such changes are usually small.

The grade boundaries are agreed at a meeting of the senior examiners and IB staff shortly before the issue of results. The grade boundaries are determined using a combination of judgment, statistical evidence, grade descriptors and feedback from teachers. These comments provide an important background for the senior team to help them agree appropriate grade boundaries in light of teachers' perceptions of the exams.

Who are the examiners?

The IB only appoints examiners who are subject experts and have teaching experience. The majority of examiners are experienced IB teachers. Examiners undergo training before marking and receive detailed information about how to award marks.

There are a number of different examiner roles with varying responsibilities. The principal examiner (PE) leads all the examiners for each component. It is the duty of the PE, supported by a group of senior examiners, to prepare the set of examinations and markschemes for each exam session as well as lead the marking.

The PE decides what the "right answer" is and how to give marks. Every other examiner must follow the views of the PE when marking (see "What is reliability?" below).

All examiners are responsible for marking. Team leaders are senior examiners who provide guidance and feedback to the examiners. PEs provide guidance to the team leaders.

If there are several components in a subject, a chief examiner manages all the PEs in that subject.

What is reliability?

The most important part of marking is that all students are treated fairly and that your work is marked reliably. Marking *reliability* means that you should get the same mark (or a very similar mark) for your work regardless of which examiner marked it and when it was marked. Great care is taken to ensure reliability. All examiners are monitored frequently during the marking period to make sure their marking matches the standard set by the principal examiner.

How is my work marked? How do I know my work has been marked correctly?

To ensure the marks awarded to all students' work are appropriate, the quality of marking of teachers and examiners is monitored. The IB does this in different ways depending on the marking method used.

E-marking

E-marking is the process used when your work is marked on-screen by examiners. It involves your work being scanned into a computer unless your teacher submitted your work electronically or you sat an on-screen examination.

Once an exam is completed and students' answers are submitted, the PE and a few senior examiners mark a number of students' answers, or *responses*, which are then used to monitor the marking quality of all examiners. These scripts are considered definitively marked scripts, known as *seeds*.

Examiners must pass a test to demonstrate they can mark correctly before they are allowed to mark any scripts. Once examiners have passed this test, their marking is monitored regularly using the seeds. An examiner who doesn't mark the seeds accurately enough will automatically be suspended from marking. Examiners do not know which scripts are seeds, so they cannot treat them any differently from the rest of their marking.

Moderation

For an internally assessed component, your teacher will send a sample of their marking to an examiner. The examiner checks whether your teacher's marking of the sample work is appropriate. Your teacher's marks and the examiner's marks are compared, and any necessary adjustment is then applied to your teacher's marks. For example, if the IB finds that your teacher has marked the sample work too generously, all your teacher's marks will be adjusted down. On the other hand, if your teacher has marked the sample work too harshly, all your teacher's marks will be adjusted up. The marks your teacher awards your work will therefore not necessarily be the final marks you receive.

Can I challenge my results?

Yes. The enquiry upon results (EUR) services can be used if you or your school feel that your results are not a fair reflection of your performance. There is a charge for each service, but the charge for a category 1 re-mark is refunded if your grade changes. It is important to realize that your subject grade may be raised or lowered as a result of a category 1 re-mark.

A re-mark/re-moderation will not normally be undertaken by the original examiner of the work. However, there may be some exceptions to this principle in subjects with a small number of students.

How can I find out more?

The IB hopes this document has given you an understanding of IB assessment. If you would like more information, please refer to the IB website www.ibo.org or ask your school's IB coordinator.