

2: Getting started

All Extended Essays require you to formulate your own research question that will invite an investigation and can be meaningfully answered within the prescribed limit of 4,000 words.

Subject and topic

As a starting point **always** opt for topics that are of meaningful interest to you. Consider the following questions:

1. Which subjects have you really enjoyed?		
Subject A:	Subject B:	Subject C:
For example: English literature	History	Biology
2. Which <i>topic areas</i> or <i>themes</i> or <i>periods</i> have you been intrigued by within these subject areas?		
Topic(s), Theme(s) or Period(s)		
For example: ● 19th-century novels ● Love ● Relationships	● Ancient Greece ● Spartans ● Greco-Persian wars	● Micro-organisms ● Bacteria

Designing a research question

Once you've considered the above table you will have a starting point for the development of your research question.

For example, your first column may indicate that you are interested in writing an Extended Essay on the following:

The theme of love and relationships in 19th-century novels

This, however, is quite a broad topic and so will need to be narrowed down in order to produce a **workable research question**.

A useful technique is to start applying "limiting factors" to the broad topic you've initially selected. Taking the example above, a limiting factor would emerge from asking, "Which novelist from the 19th century am I interested in?"

The answer to this will limit the scope of the investigation to a specific author(s) thus limiting the range from an initial and very broad topic (that is, 19th-century novels) to specific novelists from the 19th century.

The original title above could now be refined to this:

The theme of love and relationships in the novels of Jane Austen

However, this is still too broad a basis for a research question as there are simply too many Austen novels to be able to successfully answer this

Terminology



Workable research question:
A question with a clear focus that can be successfully answered within the given word limit.

within the word limit. Further questions would therefore need to be asked to help limit the scope of the investigation further.

As you will see in the table below, we can narrow down the scope of the investigation by taking each aspect of the question in turn and asking what the possible limiting factors could be (highlighted in yellow).

Terminology



Limiting factors: Relevant sub-areas for investigation that help limit the scope of one's research question.

Subject:	ENGLISH (Language A)
ORIGINAL TITLE: The theme of love and relationships in 19th-century novels	
Limiting factor:	19th-century novels
Question:	Which novels or novelists from the 19 th century am I interested in?
Answer:	Jane Austen



REFINED TITLE: The theme of love and relationships in the novels of Jane Austen	
Limiting factor:	Jane Austen
Question:	Which specific work(s) by Austen?
Answer:	<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>



REFINED TITLE: The theme of love and relationships in <i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	
Limiting factor:	Relationships
Question:	What type of relationships?
Answer:	Married/Unmarried



REFINED TITLE: Austen's attitudes to love and marriage in <i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	
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FINAL QUESTION

In what ways does Jane Austen express her attitudes to the themes of love and marriage inherent in her work *Pride and Prejudice*?

The above refined title is a very good starting point to begin your Extended Essay research as it has a clear focus and is narrow enough to be covered within the word limit.



Below are further examples of how one can apply limiting factors to a variety of subject-specific titles:

Subject:	History
ORIGINAL TITLE:	
Authoritarian states of the 20 th century	
Limiting factor:	Authoritarian states
Question:	Which authoritarian states am I interested in?
Answer:	Communism under Stalin, Fascism under Mussolini



REFINED TITLE:	
A comparison of the communist state in Russia under Stalin with the fascist state of Italy under Benito Mussolini.	
Limiting Factor:	Comparison, communist state, fascist state
Question:	Which specific area of these two states am I interested in comparing?
Answer:	Who was more effective in controlling their citizens



REFINED TITLE:	
To what extent was Stalin's communist state more effective than Mussolini's fascist state in controlling its citizens?	

Subject:	Visual arts
ORIGINAL TITLE:	
The architecture of Le Corbusier	
Limiting factor:	Architecture
Question:	What specific architecture from Le Corbusier's work am I interested in?
Answer:	Villa Stein (Garches, France), Unité d'Habitation (Marseilles, France)



REFINED TITLE:	
An exploration into the works Villa Stein and Unité d'Habitation by architect Le Corbusier.	
Limiting Factor:	Villa Stein (Garches, France), Unité d'Habitation (Marseilles, France)
Question:	Which specific aspect of these buildings do I want to explore?
Answer:	The use of proportional systems such as Le Corbusier's "Modulor"



REFINED TITLE:	
In what ways does Le Corbusier utilize the Modulor proportional system in the works Villa Stein and Unité d'Habitation?	

Subject:	Psychology
ORIGINAL TITLE:	
The usefulness of music therapy	
Limiting factor:	Usefulness
Question:	Useful in what manner or in what field?
Answer:	As a palliative for dementia sufferers



REFINED TITLE:	
An evaluation of the success of music therapy as a palliative for sufferers of dementia.	
Limiting factor:	Dementia
Question:	Which specific type of dementia do you wish to explore?
Answer:	Dementia of the Alzheimer's Type (DAT)



REFINED TITLE:	
To what extent can music therapy be deemed a successful palliative for the symptoms of Dementia of the Alzheimer's Type (DAT)?	

Limiting factors

Below is a list of general terms that allow for the narrowing down (or "limiting") of potential research questions. They are all accompanied by examples showing how a question can be more sharply focused when the general terms (in red) are narrowed down by asking "limiting" questions (highlighted in green).

Accuracy

Accurate in determining what exactly?	
Original question	How accurate are baseline tests such as Advanced Level Information System (Alis) or Middle Years Information System (MidYIS) in education?
Revised question	To what extent can baseline tests such as Alis be seen as an accurate means of determining student performance at IB?

Aspect

Is there a specific aspect that could be investigated (for example, a particular military confrontation, a specific programme, a type of therapy or a specific law)?	
Original question	How effective was Nazi propaganda in controlling its people?
Revised question	How effective was Nazi Youth propaganda in terms of indoctrinating German citizens aged 14-18?