

ISL DOCUMENT

LANGUAGE A COURSES: ADVICE FOR STUDENTS IN CHOOSING

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What courses are available?

Both English and French A can be taken as either language A: literature or language A: language and literature.

What do the courses have in common?

Both courses study great works of literature, including a whole range of contemporary and classic novels, plays, poetry and world literature.

Both courses have final examinations that test students' abilities to respond to previously unseen texts, and their ability to answer an essay question in timed conditions on the literary works they have been studying in class.

Both courses hone students' ability to analyse and write about texts, and to construct arguments and essays.

And finally, both courses have a significant oral component, worth 30% (at SL) and 20% (at HL) of the final IB Diploma mark. This means that both courses develop speaking and presenting skills as well as reading and writing skills.

So what is the difference between the courses?

Literature only focuses on literary texts. This means that across the two years, students read nine works at standard level, and thirteen at higher level. This is a course of reading and analysing the author's craft. If you are interested in picking apart texts and reading an exciting range of novels, plays and poems, then you should opt for literature.

Language and literature is made up of a balance of 50% language and 50% literature. Half of the course is therefore very similar to the literature course, with a focus on reading and interpreting literary texts. However, the other half of the course is spent analysing 'real world' texts such as advertising, speeches, news, political campaigns, propaganda, film and so on. This part of the course, focussed on the creation of meaning in non-literary contexts, is referred to as the 'language' element. Rather than studying individual texts, the study of language is organised into three thematic units: language and power, language and gender, and language and relationships. The language and literature course still involves a lot of reading: students will read a minimum of four literary works at standard level and six literary works at higher level. In addition, students need to be prepared to do a good deal of reading and research in understanding the complexities of some of the language texts and topics they study. One way to choose would be to think back over the units that you have covered over the last few years. For instance, in English the units on *Romeo and Juliet*, protest poetry, identity poetry, *Of Mice and Men* and *Things Fall Apart* were all literature based. The work on reporting the news, visual advertising, the language of film, the presentation of Africa in the media was all 'language' focussed. Thinking about what you enjoyed the most in the MYP might help you to come to a decision about which course is better for you in the DP.

As a matter of interest, the final spread of grades, globally, has proved to be very similar between the two subjects, so you mustn't expect that one will be easier than the other, or that your marks will be higher in one than the other: that would not be a good way to choose which one to pursue.

One consideration that you might want to think about is the fact that we offer both the literature course, and the language and literature course, in both English and French. If you choose to do the language and literature course in one of those languages, then you may well want to choose literature for the other language. The French and English language and literature topics are not identical, but there will inevitably be some overlap in terms of course content, and your IB Diploma experience might be more interesting with a broader range of subjects in it.

This is an active decision that each student will need to make. You can speak to your English or French teacher if you want any further advice.