

ISL DOCUMENT

LITERATURE VS LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE: ADVICE FOR STUDENTS IN CHOOSING

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What do the courses have in common?

Both courses study great works of literature, including works like Shakespeare's *Othello*, Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Seamus Heaney's poetry, and 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 an significant oral components, 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, and includes works from across a number of different time periods and cultures. 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 units. Two out of the four units are similar to the literature course, with a focus on the art of reading. However, the other two units explore how we use language itself. This includes one unit which looks at how language and meaning are shaped in a variety of different cultures and contexts. In this unit, the students look at topics such as the history and evolution of the English language, and language and power – considering questions like, in what ways has language been used to persuade and oppress? The second unit is on language and mass communication, which will look at topics like advertising, propaganda, and news coverage.

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, and in addition, explore a range of written forms, including essays, editorials, blogs, brochures, and memoirs, and visual texts. So, if you are more interested in uses of language and its various forms, or if you enjoyed the media unit on representations of youth and old age more than the other units this year, then you should opt for language and literature.

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 French, so 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.

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.

Instead, you should ask yourself how much you enjoy reading fiction. If you prefer a literary, analytical course, or if you are planning to study English literature or subjects like history or philosophy at university, then you should choose the literature course. You should also choose literature if you're simply an avid reader and you enjoy discussing how and why texts have been written.

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