

ISL DOCUMENT

INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE DIPLOMA PROGRAMME SUBJECT DESCRIPTIONS 2024-2026

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The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme

The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) is a rigorous two-year course of study that was introduced at ISL in September 2000. The International Baccalaureate Diploma gives students access to college and university study throughout the world, and universities rightly perceive that a student who has completed the requirements of the IB Diploma is well prepared for the demands of higher education. It offers both breadth, in terms of the range of courses offered, and depth, in that students must take each course for two years. It is a deliberate compromise between the specialisation required by some national systems and the breadth preferred in others.

The ISL International Baccalaureate experience

The International School of Lausanne has provided an exceptional academic and extra-curricular programme for the local and international community since 1962. The school offers all three IB programmes, including the Primary Years Programme (IBPYP) and Middle Years Programme (IBMYP). The IBDP or IB certificates are offered to all students in Years 12 and 13 with each year group consisting of around 100 students.

The dedicated, experienced and well-qualified teachers provide a secure and happy environment where students are stimulated to learn and have the satisfaction of realising their full potential. The relatively small classes and a good student – teacher ratio ensure that each child receives the close supervision and individual attention that he or she deserves.

The IB Diploma Results of students at the International School of Lausanne are excellent, with a mean points score each year of between 34.1 and 36.5 points, well above the world mean and amongst the best non-selective IB Diploma schools globally.

The ISL High School Diploma

ISL offers a fully recognised US High School Diploma in addition to the International Baccalaureate Diploma, as ISL is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC).

The IB Diploma and the ISL High School Diploma are two separate qualifications. The IB Diploma is a more demanding programme, and students who successfully complete it are also awarded the ISL High School Diploma. However, several students each year choose to focus their efforts on achieving the ISL High School Diploma only, rather than both qualifications simultaneously. Achieving greater success with a reduced range of courses that meets the requirements of the ISL High School Diploma is the correct choice for a number of our students. It involves taking individual courses that lead to the same final IB examinations, and results in a portfolio of official IB course results that are recognized by universities in combination with the ISL High School Diploma.

To receive the ISL High School Diploma, students must meet the following requirements:

- 4 years of a first language
- 4 years of mathematics
- 4 years of science
- 4 years of social science
- 2 years of a second language

Students must achieve an average ISL semester achievement grade of 3.0 each year, in each of the above subjects.

More information can be found in the document "[The ISL HS Diploma](#)". Please consult our [website](#) or [contact Mr Humphrey](#) for more information.

The IB Diploma Curriculum

Students take six subjects for the full IB Diploma; three at higher level (HL) and three at standard level (SL). Each student must take one course from each of six groups.



Generally, subjects studied at higher level will reflect the student's area of interest and specialisation, and will be covered in greater depth and breadth than subjects studied at standard level. Higher level courses involve about 50% more work and are also more demanding.

Students can submit their option choices directly to Mr Humphrey following the presentation on Wednesday 7 February using [this form](#).

When choosing courses, it is essential to choose one subject from each of the six option blocks, A to F. The option blocks are designed to allow the maximum different subject combinations, given some necessary scheduling constraints. To ensure that choices abide by IB requirements, please refer to "[IB Diploma courses offered at ISL 2022-2024](#)"

Information videos

We are pleased to share a useful section of our website, "[Diploma programme options](#)". Please do visit this page to benefit from subject introductions for all of our diploma subjects, recorded by the teachers who actually deliver the courses.

Group 1 – Studies in language and literature

Head of Department - [Ms Percy](#) (English) / [Mr Fazan](#) (Modern Languages)

English A literature

This is a literature course for native speakers of English as well as students with advanced proficiency in the language. It is offered at both HL and SL. Thirteen (HL) or nine (SL) works of literature are studied, some of which are world literature in translation. The course covers works of prose, poetry, drama and creative non-fiction from a variety of time periods.

English A language & literature

This course is for native speakers of English as well as students with advanced proficiency in the language. It is offered at both HL and SL. The course focuses on the analysis of both literary and non-literary texts. The non-literary text types might include speeches, advertising, essays, news, opinion columns, documentary, and photography. For further guidance on the differences between the two English A courses, please refer to the separate document "Literature vs language and literature – advice sheet".

French A literature

This is a literature course for native speakers of French as well as students with advanced proficiency in the language. It is offered at both HL and SL. Thirteen (HL) or nine (SL) works of literature are studied, some of which are world literature in translation. The course covers works of prose, poetry, drama and creative non-fiction from a variety of time periods.

French A language & literature

This course is for native speakers of French as well as students with advanced proficiency in the language. It is offered at both HL and SL. The course focuses on both literary and non-literary texts. Together, the four parts of the course allow the student to explore French through its cultural development and use, its use in mass communication, and its literature.

More details on the differences between the two language A courses can be found in the document '[Language A - advice sheet](#)'.

Language A literature school supported self-taught SL

The IB offers students the opportunity to study literature in their home language, supported by an external tutor. The SSST literature course is paid for by the family, and it is designed for native or near-native speakers. It is only offered at SL. Ten works of literature are studied, three of which are world literature in translation. Please [contact Mr Humphrey](#) for more information.

Group 2 – Language acquisition

Head of Department - [Mr Fazan](#)

Language B (at ISL, we offer English, French, German and Spanish as B languages)

Language B is a foreign language course for students with previous experience of learning the language. It is primarily a language acquisition programme, although some literature is studied in the HL course as a means of understanding the diverse use of the language. The emphasis of the language B programme is on communicative skills in speech and writing, and on learning about the culture of the countries where the language is spoken.

Aside from the literature component at HL, the main difference between the HL and the SL courses is that HL students are expected to show a much wider range of vocabulary, a firm command of grammar and an effective use of complex sentence structures. As a rule of thumb, we expect 2-5 years of previous learning for the SL course, and 4+ years of previous learning for the HL course. However, what is appropriate will vary individually and the school is happy to advise students about the choice of level.

French and Italian ab initio (beginners)

Offered at SL only, this is a foreign language learning programme for absolute beginners and students with very limited knowledge of the language (maximum of 2 years).

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Group 3 – Individuals and societies

Head of Department - [Ms Smith](#)

Economics

Individuals, firms and governments must constantly make choices which will affect their own economic wellbeing and that of society as a whole. How these choices are made and the analysis of their consequences is central to the field of economics. Both SL and HL students cover the same units and learn basic quantitative tools, but in the HL course the topics are studied in more depth and there is one additional exam.

Environmental systems and societies (ESS)

ESS is an interdisciplinary group 3 and 4 course that is offered only at standard level (SL). As an interdisciplinary course, ESS is designed to combine the methodology, techniques and knowledge associated with group 4 (sciences) with those associated with group 3 (individuals and societies). Because it is an interdisciplinary course, students can study ESS and have it count as either a group 3 or a group 4 course, or as both. If students choose the latter option, this leaves the opportunity to study an additional subject from any other group, including an additional group 3 or 4 subject. ESS is firmly grounded in both a scientific exploration of environmental systems in their structure and function and in the exploration of cultural, economic, ethical, political, and social interactions of societies with the environment. As a result of studying this course, students will become equipped with the ability to recognize and evaluate the impact of our complex system of societies on the natural world.

- *Please note that there is a mandatory field trip for ESS in June of Year 12 which takes place over a weekend and carries an additional cost of CHF150.*

Geography

Geography is a dynamic subject that is firmly grounded in the real world and focuses on the interactions between individuals, societies and physical processes in both time and space. The core themes include changing populations; global climate change; and resource consumption and security. Accompanying the core is a series of two (SL) or three (HL) options from key geographic themes. All students study urban environments as the internal assessment is linked to this unit. The other options are chosen by the class of students. They include; extreme environments; geophysical hazards, food and health or leisure, sport and tourism. In addition, HL students also study an extension which focuses on global interactions. Fieldwork, leading to one written report, is based on Lausanne's urban environment and makes up the internal assessment component of the geography course. This takes place towards the end of Year 12.

Global politics

Global politics allows students to analyze the significant political issues of our time in an in-depth way. All SL and HL students complete a common core entitled "people, power and politics". This consists of four core units: power, sovereignty and international relations; human rights; development; and peace and conflict. All students undertake an engagement activity through which they study a political issue of interest experientially. HL students also examine two contemporary global political challenges through a case studies approach.

History

This is a world history course based on a comparative and multi-perspective approach to history. It emphasises the importance of encouraging students to think historically

and to develop historical skills as well as gaining factual knowledge. The prescribed topic focuses on the move to global war (the Second World War), with case studies including authoritarian states in Germany (Hitler), Cuba (Castro) and China (Mao). HL students also study one regional option in depth, which is the history of Americas region (including Canada and Latin America). All students will also undertake an historical investigation of their choice which can be from any time period or location.

Group 4 – Experimental sciences

Head of Department - [Mr Allen](#) (Science) / [Mr Turland](#) (Design and Computer Science)

Biology

Biology is the study of the science of living things and how they function. It is an experimental science that combines academic study with practical and investigational skills. The core themes are: cell biology, molecular biology, genetics, ecology, evolution and biodiversity, and human physiology. HL students study some topics in greater depth, alongside some additional topics, such as plant biology and animal physiology.

Chemistry

Chemical principles underpin both the physical environment in which we live and all biological systems, and chemistry is a prerequisite for many science higher education courses. It is an experimental science that combines academic study with practical and investigational skills. The core themes are: stoichiometric relationships, atomic structure, periodicity, chemical bonding and structure, energetics, chemical kinetics, equilibrium, acids and bases, redox processes, organic chemistry, and measurement and data processing. The HL course covers the topics in greater depth.

Computer science

Explore the essence of computational thinking in our IBDP Computer Science course, where practicality and innovation converge. Engage in hands-on activities like programming, alongside studying computer systems, organisation, and networks. Experience a unique blend of theoretical knowledge and practical application through a detailed case study and a project encompassing design, development, and documentation. Higher Level (HL) students delve further into abstract data structures, resource management, and control systems. This course is designed to cultivate technical skills, problem-solving abilities, and a deep understanding of the digital landscape, preparing students for diverse technological advancements.

Design technology

Embark on a journey of innovative thinking with our IBDP Design Technology course, focused on leveraging technology for enhanced human-centric solutions. The course encompasses six fundamental topics: human factors and ergonomics, resource management and sustainable production, modelling, final production, and the principles of innovation and classic design. Higher Level (HL) students further explore user-centred design, sustainability, market innovation, and commercial production. Through a blend of teacher-led tasks and insightful case studies, students develop a comprehensive understanding of these areas, equipping them with the skills to create and innovate in a variety of contexts.

Environmental systems and societies (ESS)

ESS is an interdisciplinary group 3 and 4 course that is offered only at standard level (SL). As an interdisciplinary course, ESS is designed to combine the methodology, techniques and knowledge associated with group 4 (sciences) with those associated with group 3 (individuals and societies). Because it is an interdisciplinary course, students can study ESS and have it count as either a group 3 or a group 4 course, or as both. If students choose the latter option, this leaves the opportunity to study an additional subject from any other group, including an additional group 3 or group 4 subject.

ESS is firmly grounded in both a scientific exploration of environmental systems in their structure and function and in the exploration of cultural, economic, ethical, political, and social interactions of societies with the environment. As a result of studying this course, students will become equipped with the ability to recognize and evaluate the impact of our complex system of societies on the natural world.

- *Please note that there is a mandatory field trip for ESS in June of Year 12 which takes place over a weekend and carries an additional cost of CHF150.*

Physics

Physics is the study of the properties and interactions of matter and energy. It is an experimental science that combines academic study with practical and investigational skills. The core themes are: measurement and uncertainties, mechanics, thermal physics, waves, electricity and magnetism, circular motion and gravitation, atomic, nuclear and particle physics, and energy production. The HL course covers the topics in greater depth. No specific level of achievement in mathematics is required for any IB science course, but HL physics students are advised to combine it with mathematics: analysis and approaches HL, and SL physics students are advised to take mathematics: analysis and approaches at SL (or HL).

Group 5 – Mathematics

Head of Department - [Mr Power](#)

Mathematics: Analysis and approaches

Mathematics: Analysis and approaches, offered at both SL and HL, is appropriate for students who enjoy developing their mathematics to become fluent in the construction of mathematical arguments and develop strong skills in mathematical thinking. They will also be fascinated by exploring real and abstract applications of these ideas, with and without the use of technology. Students who take this course will be those who enjoy the thrill of mathematical problem solving and generalization. This subject is aimed at students who will go on to study subjects with substantial mathematics content such as mathematics itself, engineering, physical sciences, or economics for example. The course has an emphasis on calculus and on algebraic, graphical and numerical approaches.

Mathematics: Applications and interpretation SL

Mathematics: Applications and interpretation (offered at SL only) is appropriate for students who are interested in developing their mathematics for describing our world and solving practical problems. They will also be interested in harnessing the power of technology alongside exploring mathematical models. Students who take this course will be those who enjoy mathematics best when seen in a practical context. This subject is aimed at students who will go on to study subjects such as social sciences, natural sciences, statistics, business, some economics, psychology, and design, for example. The course emphasises the applied nature of the subject, and also that interpretation of results in context is an important element of the subject.

More details on the differences between the mathematics courses can be found in the document '[Mathematics courses - advice sheet](#)'.

Group 6 – Arts

Head of Department - [Mr Nobs](#)

Music

The music course offers students the opportunity to explore and enjoy the diversity of musical forms throughout the world. They will develop perceptual and conceptual skills through a breadth of musical experiences, learning to recognise, speculate, analyse, identify, discriminate, create and hypothesise. The course aims to develop musicianship and performance skills both individually and collaboratively and focuses on creation skills through the exploration and investigation of composition and musical elements using appropriate musical language. Underpinning the course is an emphasis on increasing knowledge and understanding and developing critical awareness of music in relation to time and place.

Theatre

The theatre course offers a broad range of study requiring students to learn about the roles of performers, directors, designers and theatre-makers. Students learn to research, contextualize, explore, analyse and evaluate their own work and that of other theatre-makers. They have the opportunity to work as part of collaborative ensembles as well as individually, distinguishing their own strengths and weaknesses and discovering the benefit of close collaboration with others. In learning about world theatre practices, influential practitioners, creative and original theatre companies and established playwrights, students gain a richer understanding of themselves, their community and the world they live in. A requirement of the course is viewing live theatre and evaluating decisions taken by professional directors: we aim to see a variety of productions during the course. Students are able to design the course to follow their own passions and interests as their knowledge of theatre deepens, allowing independence and creativity of thought and process.*

Visual arts

Students of visual arts study three interrelated areas: visual arts in context, visual arts methods and communicating visual arts. Visual arts in context provides a lens through which students are encouraged to explore perspectives, theories and cultures that inform and influence visual arts practice. Visual arts methods address ways of making artwork through the exploration and acquisition of skills, techniques and processes, and through engagement with a variety of media and methods. Communicating visual arts involves students investigating, understanding and applying the processes involved in selecting work for exhibition and public display. The HL students go into greater depth and breadth with their exploration of these three areas.

In place of an arts subject, the sixth subject chosen may alternatively be another subject from Groups 1, 2, 3 or 4.

Students can also study two languages in group 1 (rather than studying a B language in group 2) – doing so will result in a 'bilingual IB Diploma'.

IB Diploma Core

At the centre of the IB Diploma model are three elements that ensure the IB Diploma is a unique educational programme, and completion of these is mandatory for achieving the IB Diploma. Theory of knowledge and the extended essay are not compulsory requirements of the ISL High School Diploma.

Theory of knowledge (TOK)

The extended essay

CAS (creativity, activity, service)

IB Diploma Assessment

The IB Diploma (along with certificates for individual subjects, for those who are undertaking only the ISL High School Diploma) is not granted after an accumulation of credits. Instead, student assessment is based primarily on external examinations taken in all subjects in May of Year 13. However, all courses include at least 20% internal assessment.

Each subject is graded on a scale of 1 (minimum) to 7 (maximum). In order to earn the IB Diploma a student must meet defined standards and conditions including a minimum of 24 points in total, including a minimum of 12 points from three HL subjects, and the satisfactory completion of the three IB Diploma requirements outlined above: theory of knowledge (TOK), the extended essay, and CAS (creativity, activity and service).

The minimum score of 24 is based on the notion that a grade 4 represents a passing level in each of the six subjects. Excellent performance in the six subject areas results in a grade 7 for each, or a total of 42 points.

Theory of knowledge and the extended essay combine to contribute a possible 3 additional points to the overall score, giving a maximum IB Diploma score of 45 points.

If you have any questions about the High School Diploma or the IB Diploma Programme at ISL, please contact Michael Humphrey, Assistant Principal - IB Diploma Programme Coordinator (phone: +41 21 560 02 39; email: mhumphrey@isl.ch).