

Curriculum design and scheduling

Introduction

The IB Diploma Programme is flexible enough to accommodate the needs and interests of individual students while maintaining the principle of concurrent learning of a broad and balanced curriculum. The programme is designed to be a two-year course of study with all subjects and core requirements studied concurrently. Students are expected to build a degree of interdisciplinary as well as subject-specific understanding. The programme should equip students with a powerful set of holistic skills that can prepare them not just for higher education but for the real-life challenges they will face in the future.

The school's choice of Diploma Programme subjects

The inherent flexibility in the Diploma Programme model (see the *Handbook of procedures for the Diploma Programme*) can present challenges for a school in terms of the subject choices available to students. Schools will need to take into consideration factors such as staffing, facilities, the incoming cohort's academic background, and regional university entrance requirements. Common questions to be considered when drawing up a school schedule (or timetable) include the following.

- How does the school build and update the master schedule to reflect the interests and abilities of its students?
- How will the proposed programme allow the study of languages A1 other than the language of instruction in the school?
- Which group 2 subjects and levels will be most appropriate based on the students' previous language study?
- Which sciences will be offered, in which combinations and levels?
- Does the size and composition of the initial cohort justify the inclusion of all four IB mathematics courses?
- Are certain IB subjects required in order to fulfill state, provincial or national curricular requirements?
- Do local or national university entrance requirements require the school to offer certain subjects at certain levels? Many countries and universities have highly specific requirements for subject combinations and results before they allow tertiary study. Some courses, for example, school-based syllabuses, might not be recognized by universities of national/federal education authorities.

It is important to note that initial subject offerings will have considerable implications for students' ability to access the Diploma Programme. Subject choices open to students can dictate whether the programme encourages maximum participation or allows only a small group of students, who possess specific skill sets, to complete the programme. The scheduling of classes in the Diploma Programme can also have great impact. If courses are scheduled at times that conflict with students' extra-curricular commitments (for example, band practice, theatre rehearsals, sports teams) this will diminish the attractiveness of the programme.

Students should be expected to take subjects and levels that provide an appropriate degree of challenge rather than making choices to maximize grade results. It does not always follow that a higher diploma score represents a better level of achievement. One example of this is when a student is entered for a language course that, due to prior experience with the language, he or she finds easy. The student may attain a grade 7 in this course but would have been better served educationally by experiencing a more demanding language level and attaining, for example, a grade 4.

Schools must follow the guidelines presented in the group 2 language subject guides:

It is essential that Diploma Programme coordinators and teachers ensure that students are following the course that is most suited to their present and future needs and that will provide them with an appropriate academic challenge. The degree to which students are already competent in the language, and the degree of proficiency they wish to attain by the end of the period of study, are the most important factors in identifying the appropriate placement point on the spectrum of modern language courses available. Appropriate placement is the responsibility of teachers and coordinators, not the IBO.

The Diploma Programme and the school schedule

Every attempt should be made to ensure that the IB's mission statement and Diploma Programme principles can be fully supported by the schedule. The structure of schedules will vary enormously across IB World Schools and any schedule is bound to be a compromise between benefits and constraints. The perfect schedule does not exist. With this fact in mind, the following minimum expectations need to be respected.

- The schedule must deliver blocks of time for each of the six academic groups that are consistent with the published guidelines (see the *Handbook of procedures for the Diploma Programme*) for the recommended teaching hours of 240 hours for HL courses, 150 hours for SL courses and at least 100 hours for TOK. In addition, appropriate provision must be made for the extended essay and the CAS programme.
- All HL courses and at least one SL course must be taught over the two years of the programme. It is permissible to teach up to two SL subjects over one year. It should be noted that this exception is designed to offer flexibility to schools where genuine need for this arrangement exists due to unavoidable scheduling constraints. This is not intended to be a routine aspect of Diploma Programme design; all courses are designed as two-year learning experiences.
- In creating a schedule, it should be understood that different time allocations may suit different subject groups. For example, subjects in groups 4 and 6 are generally suited to longer blocks of time.
- The core must be taught/experienced over two years. TOK is a course that encourages reflection on the nature of human knowledge and should be taught with reference to student experience in the classroom, which requires concurrency of learning. Some schools choose to finish the TOK course slightly before the final examinations so that students can start to prepare for final assessments. Similarly, CAS needs to involve students over the two years, but it is reasonable to allow students to finish the programme a couple of months before final assessments to allow them to concentrate on examination preparation.
- Beginning to teach Diploma Programme courses early, with a view to early completion, is inconsistent with the principle of concurrency and holistic learning. However, learning is always progressive; students in the year leading to the Diploma Programme need to have a programme of study that equips them with the skills, knowledge and attitudes required to be successful in the programme. There should not be a sudden jump in expectations or standards as students start the Diploma Programme.
- CAS is organized around learning outcomes. Like the IB learner profile, these are relevant outside the two years students spend in the Diploma Programme. Students are, however, required to complete the CAS requirements concurrently with their academic learning, so that their diploma experience is broadened. For this reason, students cannot transfer learning experiences gained prior to the start of the Diploma Programme and count them as part of the CAS programme, even though these are valuable experiences in themselves.

Elements of Diploma Programme design and scheduling

Certificate students

All Diploma Programme schools must provide the full Diploma Programme. However, in some school populations the full Diploma Programme may not be appropriate for all students. While many schools require all students to complete the full Diploma Programme, others allow some students to sit individual subject certificates. They view this as one way of expanding the school population involved with the IB's unique philosophy of education and also as a potential means to increase numbers enrolled in the Diploma Programme over time. Schools in the implementation phase will need to give careful consideration to the possible implications of allowing certificate students.

Extra certificates

For various reasons, including personal interests, school regulations or university entrance requirements, schools may allow students to register for a further certificate subject in addition to the six required for the diploma. Beyond the scheduling issues potentially presented in such cases, care should be taken to ensure that the student does not suffer undue stress as a result of the additional academic burden. It is better to study the six required subjects and the core well, rather than take on an extra load that is bound to have an impact in terms of the time that can be spent on the full diploma. Schools are reminded of the option to study four subjects at HL, rather than three (see the *Handbook of procedures for the Diploma Programme*). For some gifted students this may provide an appropriate challenge without entering them for extra certificates.

Non-regular diplomas

In rare cases, schools may seek to offer a student a choice of subjects that is different from the choice of subjects specified in the regulations for the Diploma Programme. This can only arise when a prescribed condition of entry into an institution of higher education makes it necessary for a student to modify the programme. To request such a modification, the school must provide the IB with clear evidence that specific subject substitution is necessary, in the form of actual pages of the prospectus from the institution concerned. Schools must consider the possibility of the student pursuing an extra certificate subject before submitting a request for a non-regular diploma. The *Handbook of procedures for the Diploma Programme* details the requirements for submitting such a request.

Higher level (HL) and standard level (SL) courses scheduled together

Schools are often presented with a situation whereby it is desirable to schedule HL and SL students in the same class for a given subject. This practice is understood and accepted. Wherever possible, subject curriculum review and development takes this into account and many subjects stipulate core HL/SL content and extension HL work to facilitate this practice. Some subjects lend themselves more readily to this arrangement than others. Schools must take great care in programming such classes, particularly with regard to options studied and assessment timelines. It is essential that HL students are given the extra support and time they need and that HL and SL students do not simply complete the same course. This will inevitably result in either too much time for SL students or too little time for HL students. One effective solution is to schedule most classes as HL/SL with additional HL classes or blocks of time dealing with HL extension work. Some schools also use virtual learning environments to support HL extension activities.

Classes combining IB curriculums with other school, state or national curriculums

When a school must combine the teaching of Diploma Programme classes with other curriculums, great care must be taken to ensure that the integrity of the IB Diploma Programme curriculums and assessment are maintained, and that students are not being disadvantaged in any way by the nature of this arrangement.

Supporting the mother-tongue language and the language of instruction

Many IB World Schools have students who are well qualified to enter the Diploma Programme but for whom the language of instruction is their second or even third language. This can present challenges to the process of Diploma Programme design for these students. The IB publications *Learning in a language other than mother tongue in IB programmes* and *Guidelines for developing a school language policy* should be consulted in relation to this issue.

A powerful feature of the Diploma Programme is the facility it affords schools to offer multiple languages A1. Courses may be taught or offered as school supported self-taught, which enables students to develop their mother tongue. A school can request a language that is not automatically available through the special request process (see the *Handbook of procedures for the Diploma Programme*). Wherever possible, schools should offer students the possibility of studying their mother tongue as a language A1 course. Depending upon the student's fluency in the language of instruction of the school, he or she could complete another A1 course or language B in the school's language of instruction. Students will still have to study their other subjects in the language of instruction of the school, so it is essential that all teachers recognize their role as language teachers as well as subject specialists.

In offering school supported self-taught language A1 courses, the Diploma Programme coordinator will need to ensure that all course requirements are met. A teacher needs to be available at the school to assist the student in the target language in terms of selecting appropriate works, signing off on the world literature paper(s) and helping supervise the oral exercises. While this teacher does not have to be able to speak the target language, they do have to understand all the requirements and expectations.

School-based syllabuses

A school-based syllabus (SBS) is an opportunity for schools to offer a course of specific interest or to develop a new SL course as part of a Diploma Programme. The requirements for submitting a proposal for an SBS to the IB are outlined in the *Handbook of procedures for the Diploma Programme*. The requirements for such a proposal are extensive. A proposal will not be approved by the IB unless the syllabus is seen as meeting the requirements of one of the Diploma Programme subject groups and is capable of being assessed appropriately. In addition, the SBS must reflect the IB's mission in terms of delivering an international perspective. Schools will also be advised, if their proposal is similar to an existing SBS, to contact and collaborate with the host school of that syllabus. While the IB recognizes the equivalency of all SL courses, schools should be aware that the IB cannot guarantee that all universities will agree with this judgment (see the article on "University recognition" in the *Rules for IB World Schools: Diploma Programme*).

School assessment timelines

Appropriate internal assessment timelines are a very useful instrument in helping students and teachers realistically plan their work in manageable loads, recognizing that final assessment requirements cannot all be completed at the same time. IB World Schools need to develop timelines that are sensitive to their own specific environment. This can only be accomplished by including input from teachers, and feedback from students, in their construction.

Well-designed timelines reduce stress on students and allow time for teachers to provide feedback on drafts, check for authenticity, mark final pieces of work and prepare moderation samples in good order before any due date. Effective timelines reflect a culture of collaboration among the Diploma Programme teachers, whereby teachers understand both the “big picture” of Diploma Programme design and the basic knowledge of each other’s subject assessment requirements. The coordinator frequently has the responsibility for ensuring that the school faculty meets in a timely manner to coordinate such timelines and develop these understandings. Schools that schedule the Diploma Programme concurrently across both years of the programme are likely to have greater flexibility in developing assessment timelines.

Figure 2 illustrates **some** of the key events that must be scheduled and represents a **possible** example of a timeline. In reality, a school timeline will need to be much more specific, detailing precise dates, and relate directly to the circumstances of the school.

Year before the start of the IB Diploma Programme	
Semester 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introducing the Diploma Programme requirements to prospective students and parents Mentoring students regarding subject and level choices Initial student subject selection Scheduling for the Diploma Programme
IB Diploma Programme year 1	
Year start	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final student subject selection Faculty meet to confirm Diploma Programme two-year assessment timelines Student and parent information events to outline expectations and timelines Introducing expectations for CAS Introducing expectations for the extended essay
Semester 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CAS programme starts (early in semester) Internal coursework assignments start (for example, economics portfolio) Detailed explanation of the extended essay process with timeline Geography field trip
Semester 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language A1 oral presentations Language A1 world literature paper commences TOK presentations Extended essay student research question identified and supervisor established Formal CAS interviews with students Group 4 project completed Year 1 examinations Year 1 reporting

IB Diploma Programme year 2	
Semester 1	<p>CAS programme and interviews continue</p> <p>Draft internal assessments due this semester (specific subjects and assignment detailed)</p> <p>Draft extended essay due early this semester</p> <p>Final extended essay handed in at the end of this semester</p> <p>Draft TOK essay due at the end of this semester</p> <p>Visual arts examination scheduled with visiting examiner</p>
Semester 2	<p>Trial examinations</p> <p>Trial examinations reporting</p> <p>Final internal assessments and externally assessed (non-examination) components due (specific subjects and assignment detailed)</p> <p>Language A1 world literature assignment completed, copied and sent to examiner</p> <p>Extended essay completed early this semester, copied and sent to examiner</p> <p>TOK essay copied and sent to examiner and course completed</p> <p>Language A2 written tasks completed, copied and sent to examiner</p> <p>Language A1 oral commentaries take place</p> <p>Final language B oral recordings copied and sent to examiner</p> <p>Internal assessment completed and marks entered</p> <p>Predicted grades submitted</p> <p>Internal assessment moderation samples selected, copied and sent to moderator</p> <p>CAS completion and CAS completion form submitted</p> <p>Theatre practical play analysis completed</p> <p>Musical investigations completed</p> <p>Final Diploma Programme written examinations</p>

Figure 2

Example of an assessment timeline for schools to adapt to their own circumstances