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**TIPS, TRICKS, AND SECRETS FOR THE
SUCCESSFUL IB STUDENT**

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ZOUEV PUBLISHING

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Published 2017
ZOUEV PUBLISHING

ISBN 978-0-9934187-6-1, hardcover.

Dedicated to you, the student.

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Introduction

Before we dive into the substantive part of this guidebook, I wish to spend a few pages explaining who I am, and my motivation for compiling and writing this book. This is not my first IB guidebook, but it will (hopefully) be my last, in the sense that I wish to exhaust every piece of crucial advice that I have. I hope that this endeavour will be more structured and reflective than my previous IB guidebooks, and I certainly hope it reaches and helps as many students.

Before diving into the world I like to call “stress-free IB” you may want to ask yourself the question “who am I to listen to some stranger’s advice on how to do well on my IB?” At least I hope you are asking yourself this question. After all, I have never officially worked at an IB school, nor am I in any way affiliated with the organisation. Moreover, in recent years, the market for IB ‘help’ material has become greatly saturated with both recommendable and also some avoidable books being published. Thus before going into the details of how to maximize your IB points total, let me put your mind at ease by providing a little background on myself and my own academic experiences.

I graduated with the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program totalling 43 points in 2007, setting a school record at the time and finishing top in most of my classes. The next few years were spent at Oxford University where I completed my BA in Economics and Management, while simultaneously starting to tutor students over Skype from my dorm room. It was during the summer breaks of these years that I completed my first IB guidebook, *Three*, which dealt with the 3 ‘bonus point’ (Extended Essay and Theory of Knowledge) component of the diploma.

Upon graduating from Oxford, I pursued an MSc in Financial Mathematics from the Cass Business School in London. During this year, I completed my second IB guidebook, *I*

Think Therefore IB, which incidentally serves as the inspiration for this book. It was around this time that I was also one of the first tutors to work for EliteIB (www.eliteib.co.uk) which has now grown to be one of the largest IB tutoring agencies in the world.

I left EliteIB to set up my own freelancer IB tutoring practice – IBTutorOnline (www.ibtutoronline.com). It was here that I honed my skills as an Economics and Mathematics tutor, specializing in helping students with their Internal Assessments. I was busy with IBTutorOnline for over five years and in that time oversaw hundreds of Extend Essays, TOK assignments, and helped over 200 students in their IB studies. My students improved their grades, on average, by 2.3 points and I even had the pleasure of tutoring several 45/45 students.

In 2015, I set up a small publishing house (www.zouevpublishing.com) that specializes in publishing IB guidebooks, written by former students and aimed at current students. We have published books that cover subjects such as History and Physics, as well as general IB guidebooks. I also developed a smartphone app aimed directly at IBDP candidates – smartib (www.smartibapp.com).

This app is a social media platform and community forum app designed specifically for students undergoing the IBD program. The app allows students to create a profile and connect with other IB students all over the world via a well-organised forum where they can ask and answer questions. In the first three months, we have over 8,000 registered users who are using the app on a daily basis to meet other students and help each other out. I'm very hopeful that this app is going to make a lot of differences to students who aren't lucky enough to have the best teachers and resources at their disposal.

So, basically, over the last 10 years I have become somewhat of a Mr. IB (as my friends jokingly call me). I have been an

active contributor on IB forums, and I have probably personally and directly helped nearly 1000 IB students over all the years. I truly believe that as far as being a consultant on the broader IB goals of achieving success, I am probably the best at what I do – which leads us to the creation of this book.

Reading this book is probably the most efficient method of earning a 40+ grade in your International Baccalaureate Diploma. Whether you are a student in need of guidance, a teacher looking to find new teaching techniques, or simply an interested reader – hopefully you will find that this extensive treasure-chest of advice meets all of your expectations. If you follow the advice put forth in this book correctly and put in some effort and determination, I firmly believe that you can obtain a points total of 40 or above – irrespective of any ‘natural’ intelligence.

Those of you still curious to know, the two points I missed out on to get a 45 were due to a 6 in Physics (Standard Level) and a 6 in English (Standard Level). Looking back I do blame myself for not following my own advice enough to get that 7 in Physics, however the English I have no regrets about; I tried my best and did what I could, but did not get a 7. Unfortunately, and despite the title, this book will not teach you how to get a perfect score of 45/45 and place you into the top 0.01% of candidates. I know plenty of people who have obtained this amazing feat; however, almost all admit to having had a slice of good fortune somewhere along their path to perfection. With most university offers capped at around 40 points, there is also no need to get a perfect score - unless you are the ultimate perfectionist.

There is no effortless way to achieve the grades that you want. There are however ways that will save you time, effort, and money, yet still let you reach your maximum potential and get the grades you dream of. For those of you reading to find any tips on plagiarism, cheating or any other non-ethical method to get a higher grades, you will have to look elsewhere. My tips and techniques are 100% in line with the rules and regulations

of the IB guidelines. Understandably, there will be critics amongst parents and teachers who suggest that a lot of what I endorse is in some ways non-ethical and not in accordance with what the IB preaches. These arguments lack merit. Countless students are getting the top grades and succeeding without actually succumbing to becoming lifeless bookworms. One needs to understand and appreciate that there is “cheating” and then there are “tactical and efficient study techniques”, and there is a thick line separating the two concepts. This book will ultimately teach you to become masters of manipulating the resources at your disposal efficiently and tactically, without having to resort to anything that can be regarded as ‘cheating’.

What is essential before we begin is that you throw away all preconceived notions about the IB as being something scary, elitist, incredibly demanding and impossible to crack. I was once amongst you, but after finding out that the IB is just as easy to decipher as the A-levels, the AP programs, or the SATs – I became fearless. This is an essential stepping-stone in your long road to IB success. Yes, your non-IB friends will call you an overachieving geek. Yes, you may find you have more assignments and tests than the other “normal” kids. And yes, there will be times when you wonder why your parents/teachers would ever want to put you through so much traumatising pain. However, one should not fear. The techniques in this book will ensure that your two-year ride in the IBDP will be amongst the most memorable and fun two years of your life.

It certainly was for me.

1. Is the IB For Me?

Before you even embark on your IB adventure, you need to decide if the IB is for you. By that I mean, is the IB diploma the bridge you need to get to the next point in your life – whatever that may be?

Depending on where you are located geographically, what your future career ambitions are, and what school choices are on offer, you may be faced with the task of deciding whether the IB is worth it in your individual situation. Let's start by briefly looking exactly what the IB Diploma Program entails:

Founded nearly 50 years ago, the IB organization is a non-profit institution that offers an international education to students at over 3,500 IB World schools in 145 countries. The Diploma Program includes an advanced academic curriculum and several core requirements, including the Extended Essay (a kind of senior thesis), Theory of Knowledge (an epistemology course that emphasizes the IB philosophy), and CAS (extracurricular activities highlighting “creativity, action, and service” that counterbalance academic studies). Your IB final examination scores and fulfilment of above requirements determine whether you earn the IB diploma.

If that sounds like a lot of work – it's because it is. There is a good reason that the IB program has such a notoriously difficult and rigorous reputation around the world. The upside is that you are encouraged to think independently and learn how to think. You also become more culturally aware as you develop a second language, and you will be able to engage with people in an increasingly globalized and rapidly changing world.

US Scenario

It's widely considered that American students rarely take on the IB diploma to attend university outside of the States, but

rather to earn as many college-transferable credits as possible (to “get ahead” in completing General Education requirements in college) or increase their college application marketability by boasting the IB diploma as an achievement on their resume.

Advanced Placement courses have long been considered the go-to option for U.S. high schoolers who desire more challenging work than what's offered in the standard curriculum. But IB students may have more options for getting an academic challenge. An increasing number of American high schools offer the IB program which, like the AP program, offers a rigorous set of courses. Moreover, the SATs and your GPA seem to still be the dominant factors which US universities look at when deciding on applicants. Thus, it would make sense for US-based students to find out if their ‘dream’ university will be more likely possible if they take the IB. This could even mean you need to call up the universities and talk to their admissions offices.

More importantly, students can earn college credits by taking certain IB subjects. This is very important to consider because rather than taking the full diploma, you may be inclined to take IB certificates instead. If a student chooses to pursue the IB certificate route and not the full IB Diploma he/she does not have to complete the Theory of Knowledge course, the Extended Essay, or the 150 hours over two years of CAS. Taking IB Certificates is similar to taking AP courses. Those students enrolled as just certificate students could also choose to take the AP tests and, therefore, double dip with IB and AP credit on their transcript.

There is also the cost to consider: IB exams are more expensive than AP. There is a \$160 registration fee each year plus \$110 fee per exam. AP exams are 92\$ without an additional fee. Many schools however have financial aid and fee-waiver programs. If financing is an issue for you, you should contact your school and see if help is available. Talk

with a counsellor at your school to find out about testing costs.

I know it seems crazy to be thinking about all of this when you are 15 years old and don't even know much about university and what you wish to study, but the IB is a huge decision and one you should not take lightly. The main advice here is to do your research. I can only give general help, each case will vary on the specifics, so pick up that phone and start calling potential universities to find out their recognition of the IB Diploma.

UK Scenario

In the UK (and some parts of Europe), the choice is altogether different. Here you are required to choose between the traditional A-levels and the IB. Although the IB has only been around since 1968, it has grown substantially in the UK and is finding itself offered at more schools, often alongside the A-levels.

If your school offers both, then it's relatively agreed upon which students do more work. Over the two years, IB students will get up to half as much teaching as their A-level counterparts. On top of that, they have to adopt a more inquiring approach than A-level students. There is also this myth that because IB students can only do two sciences (and A-level students could potentially do three), they have less chance of getting into medical school. This has been proven false as IB students are as successful (if not more) and the IB lets students do biology and chemistry (which is essential for medicine) alongside maths.

Prospective IB students should take comfort in the fact that the IB has become more and more appreciated by UK universities. As a rule of thumb, an IB score of 7 earns 130 UCAS points, while an A* is worth 140 points, and an A-grade 120.

Arguments for students opting for A-levels instead of IB usually focus around the principle objection that the IB lumps students with subjects which they may have no interest or aptitude for. The A-level system allows students who aren't very good at maths, or hate languages, to abandon these weaknesses once their GCSEs are over – but the IB requires you take on these challenges for two more years.

Rest of the World

Non-US/UK students face different scenarios altogether. I can't possibly go into the details for each individual country, but basically it boils down to what choices you have on offer in your national education system, and where you wish to go once you finish high school. I have met plenty of students who wanted to go straight into a trade job once completing high school, or someone who wanted to enter the family business as soon as possible. In these situations, I can understand why the two years of the IB Diploma would seem like a time waste.

Ultimately (and I may be slightly biased in this assessment) the IB Diploma does in fact develop well-rounded, inquisitive and global learners. I would strongly argue that it's the best high school education a student can get, and it opens the door to so many diverse opportunities. The skillset you acquire upon completion of the program is going to set you up for a very successful future career.

The IB Diploma is not for everyone. Although it is a wonderfully challenging program that has gained incredible worldwide recognition, you need to look at your individual scenario and decide if the program is right for you and for where you want to be in a few years.

2. IB vs AP

(contributed article)

Due to the rising popularity of the IB program in the America, we decided to include a specific chapter to deal with how US-based students should approach their IB (as most of the information available caters to European audiences).

It's true, the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program is daunting. Certainly, a formidable opponent, monstrous with its intent on obstructing your journey to a happier destination. Coming from a less-than-adequately-funded school in urban America, I've seen quite a few of my friends shrink away at the thought of tackling the academic juggernaut. However, like most of life, the greater the challenge, the greater the reward. I can't speak with authority on universities outside of the United States, though I'm sure they're quite similar, but I can assure you that the most prestigious American universities look upon an International Baccalaureate Diploma with immense respect and appreciation.

Some context for you: my high school was and is the poorest public educational facility in the immediate district and most of the surrounding area. It also happens to be the most diverse school in the entire state of Washington with over 65 languages spoken, about as international as it gets here in America. More than 60% of the student body receives financial aid in the form of "free or reduced lunch". The school offers only 15 International Baccalaureate classes, 8 of which are Standard Level only and many of which were only added within the past year. This contrasts with the 40+ subjects provided by the Programme, the clear majority of which are available in both Standard and Higher Level.

With all that in mind please trust me when I say, within reason, everybody willing to put in the effort can graduate the Programme with flying colors.

A very good friend of mine, illegal immigrant and from a poor background, was accepted into a Top 20 American university with a full ride scholarship, all thanks to the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme. Your two years in this esteemed Programme will be hellish. You will stress, you will question your decision and yes, you will consider dropping out. But your two years in this Programme will be worth it. It will prepare you for university, it will prepare you for your career and yes, it will prepare you for your future. So why Choose IB over AP?

1) Preparation for College

Though it may be true that AP Students get much more college credit than their fellow IB counterparts, the IB does infinitely more in preparing you for the workload you will receive in college. What makes the IB such a daunting program is the fact that it throws so much information at you. Students that do well in the IB can effectively manage this information, learn it efficiently, and at the same time maintain healthy, balanced lives. In college, similarly, you're going to be bombarded with all kinds of information, both academic and non-academic. You're going to have to make choices on prioritizing your work over going to a frat party, about whether you can afford to join another extracurricular activity, or whether staying up all night to finish that paper is worth it. In this sense, the IB offers you invaluable experience and you should treat everything it throws at you as a learning curve for college. Last time I checked, AP students didn't have to write a 4000-word research paper, question their own existence, and manage CAS activities whilst having to juggle six subjects. Truth be told, the IB will make the college transition very smooth and you'll go in feeling like a rockstar.

2) Broader Perspective

Let's be honest: The APs have always been primarily geared to provide an American Education, possessing very few courses such as AP World History that critically examine

society from a global perspective. Before I get bullets fired at me for challenging the greatest nation in the world, let me add that this is completely fine: The APs prepare you very well for college and ensure you learn loads of material. However, I personally feel the IB offers you something much more rich and substantial. Indeed, the IB turns you into a scholar of the world: you're forced to examine things from multiple different perspectives, challenge assumptions, and this leads you to become a well-rounded, critical thinker. Sure, you can argue that this global mumbo-jumbo isn't necessary, and that the point of a high-school program should be to simply gain knowledge in subjects you're interested (hence why you don't have as many subjects if you do the APs). But the way I see it, the IB is in a way that 'study abroad' experience that so many people claim is invaluable. Think of yourself as Dora the Explorer, always questioning everything around you, and wanting to delve further into your intellectual pursuits.

3) Alumni Love

This doesn't seem like a real reason, but hear me out. Nothing quite compares to being in college, meeting someone new, and then realizing that both of you are IB Alumni! You suddenly feel as if you have known each other for many, many years and can relate to each other. The pain, the misery, the grade boundaries—oh, what bliss! It's like you're family. No, you ARE family.

4) Creativity, Action, Swag

Though the IB is a lot of work, it ensures that you pursue worthwhile and enjoyable activities outside the classroom. You're going to graduate highschool having done activities that you previously would never have thought of doing, and the most exciting part is that one of these activities might end up being something you love to do! Take it from me: I unwillingly decided to learn chess to fulfil my Creativity Section, after my mother went out and spent money on buying a chess board. Hundreds of hours later, chess has become one

of my favourite hobbies, one that I pursue even in college! See, the AP Program aims to simply focus on the courses that you take. The IB, as hard as it may sound to believe, wants you to go outside and discover the amazing opportunities that are available.

5) Work Ethic

Granted, the average IB student will have more work to do than the average AP student. You take more subjects, have a lot to do outside the classroom, and oh god, there's just so much writing to do! But whilst doing all of this, you start to develop a strong work ethic. Even if you procrastinate, you realize that you just must get your work done. Unless you want very little sleep, you start to become much more efficient with your work and know how to prioritize your day. You know whether you can afford to go out with your friends, or should rather stay in to do some revision. Conversely, you realize that having a social life is also important to maintaining a balanced lifestyle, and thus you make time to hang out with your friends. These are invaluable skills not only to hone for college, but also for the rest of your life. With each day, you start to work smarter, you start to feel like a champion.

6) Research and Investigation Skills

If you've ever been interested in doing research (or even if you haven't) the IB is an excellent program to cultivate investigative qualities. The IAs that you must write for your sciences ensure that you develop skills in data analysis, know how to work with uncertainties, and are comfortable combining both quantitative and qualitative elements to form a cogent paper. The Internal Assessments that you must write for your Humanities, especially Economics, allow you to combine real-life information and theory to craft a compelling argument. The Math Internal Assessment is an amazing way to understand the practicalities of Math in the real world, and allow you to consolidate your fundamentals in specific areas. The Extended Essay that you must write gives you real-hand

experience on drafting a paper of such large volume. And of course, who can forget scouring the Internet for all those precious past papers and their markschemes.

7) A Powerful Resume

Think about it for a second. In a world where colleges expect you to do a billion activities, ask you to go above and beyond both within and outside the classroom, and even want you to do research, isn't the IB marvellous? Your CAS lead to all those Extra-Curricular Activities, you get to put down your EE as 'research' (I for sure did), and your TOK endeavours demonstrate intellectual curiosity. Aren't you, by simply doing the IB, building up an awesome portfolio for applying to college? All the stuff that you learn, that you do, and that you're able to get deeply involved in will look fantastic on your application, for both college and prospective internships.

8) Way of Thinking vs Curriculum Readiness

The APs will ensure that once you get to college, you know the curriculum that is going to be covered and that you've had some sort of experience dealing with it beforehand. That's in part why the AP Program warrants so many college credits. However, what the IB program will do is that it will force you to develop a dynamic way of thinking that is tailored to new situations. That is, you may not have seen the material presented to you, but you will be fantastically equipped to deal with it. You will recognize patterns, structure your revision effectively, look at details from different perspectives; essentially, you'll have a mental toolkit ready to tackle all sorts of new problems. To me, that's something that is much more important than simply gaining enough college credits or having familiarity with the curriculum. Life is all about adapting to new situations, solving new problems, and the IB is what is going to prepare you for the best.

18. IB Exam Revision [Part 1]

Preparing for the final exams can be a daunting task. Once the examination timetable is published your first exam date will remain cemented in your mind. Although there are hundreds of ways to revise for the examinations, many are largely ineffective and far too time consuming. In this chapter I will give you some general guidelines for how to best revise for your final exams.

Time Management

Having me preach to you about the importance of time management is perhaps hypocrisy at its best. For me it was not until I got into university that I really started to understand how effective time management can be. If you are one of the few who has mastered the skill at an early age then consider yourself lucky. This is an invaluable ability that you will use regularly throughout your life.

One of the great rewards of undertaking the IB challenge is that you will have the opportunity to learn amazing time-management skills. The key to good time management is not just writing up a good schedule, but also imposing consequences when you fail to adhere to that schedule. For example if you promised to revise biology for 45 minutes a day every weekday and then you only manage to do 15 minutes on one of days, you must make sure you catch up on the remaining half an hour the day after.

When Do I Start?

I had a teacher who once told the class (with 4 months remaining until final exams), “I hope your revision is going well... and if there are still some of you that haven’t started revising, well you are already behind.” Hearing those words I got uncomfortably nervous and stressed. Not only had I not begun revising, I didn’t even know where to start. Several

weeks passed as I procrastinated even more and eventually “mock exams” came around. I didn’t study much, except for glancing over a few past papers from the previous year. Luckily, it turned out that some of the “mock exams” were in fact last year’s actual examinations. Nonetheless, I didn’t have a good feeling about the whole thing and my grades reflected this – got a 36 overall with a 4 in HL Mathematics. This was a real wake up call as my university offer was given on the condition that I get a minimum of 40 points overall and a 7 in HL Mathematics and Economics. I feared the worst.

With less than a month to revise and no quick solution in sight, I was probably justified in my distress. Some of my friends had been “revising” since the beginning of winter break. I was too busy partying and procrastinating. With less than a month to go until exams I knew that this month would make or break me. I quickly made a demanding exam schedule and started it the following day. For a whole month I practically lived in a cave, having deactivated Facebook and deleted Skype. I read, breathed and lived revision. The only thing that kept me going was a voice in the back of my head telling me “you did nothing for two years, the least you can do is work mercilessly for one month, and then it will be all over.”

The whole point of that little story is not to suggest that you should only leave a month for revision. It was simply to demonstrate to you what you will have to go through if you do leave revision so late. I was never one to miss a party – there was no way I could give up weekends, and sports, and all my hobbies just so that I could start revision many months in advance. I left revision too late, but, I paid the price. Whatever choice you make, you need to realise that you will have to bear the consequences when your actual exam preparation comes around.

There is no ideal time to start revising. That being said, you should never leave less than a month, and you would probably be wasting your time starting revision any sooner than 3 months before exams. Some of you may seem confused as to

why I am suggesting that you don't study too much, but that's not what I am saying. There have been studies done that show how students can reach the "peak" of their revision too early, and have a "meltdown" before actual exams. This usually happens to students that start revising nearly a year in advance. By revising too much in advance you may run the risk of failing to recall the earliest information and start to panic.

Perhaps the golden rule to IB exam revision can be worked out logically. If you still have assignments to finish that will be graded by the IB, it's probably safe to say that you should not even think about starting revising. Your Internal Assessment is far more important than early revision so make sure you get that out of the way first. Once all your work has been sent off you can drop everything else and just focus on revising for your exams. Always remember your priorities: first get all the IA out of the way, and then you can centre all your attention on revision.

The IB is too demanding for you to be starting revision early. With all the tests, assignments, sports meetings, CAS reports and homework that you will have on your hands, you will not be able to begin preparing too much in advance. Don't forget however that all the tests and coursework that you are doing is a form of revision. It's not the best, but at least you are doing something to reinforce your knowledge of the subject. So don't think you are doomed if you haven't been revising out of a textbook with a month to go before exams. You have been revising "indirectly". At least that's what I told myself to be able to sleep at night.

Mock Examinations

Most schools will administer "mock" examinations several weeks or months prior to the actual exams. This is not really a test of your knowledge and how well you will perform on the actual exam. It's more to get you familiar with examination conduct and protocol. You will need to get used to arriving

punctually, having the right materials, and following exam rules and regulations.

Nonetheless, I suggest you make full use of your mock exams and treat them almost as if they were the real deal. You will be able to see what you would achieve if you had sat the real exam and not done any revision. Thus, it is kind of a test of how focused you were in class throughout the year. For most of you this experience will be a wake-up call.

Once your mock exam results come out don't just glance at the grade and move forward. Find out where you went wrong and where you could have done better. Although these exams are graded by your teachers, it doesn't mean the marking will be much different when done by examiners elsewhere. Look for places where you lost marks due to silly mistakes and try to work on these mistakes before your real examination.

One final note on mock examinations. It is no hidden secret that most schools use last year's real paper as the current year's mock paper. Don't think that you are a genius for figuring this out. This has been a tradition in most schools, however some now started to come up with new material. Nonetheless, if your mock exam paper happens to be a past paper that you have already worked on yourself then don't feel guilty or feel like you didn't deserve the grade you got. If you did well that just shows that your work with past papers has been worthwhile. You were able to apply the material again, meaning you probably learnt something along the way. If you still did poorly despite having seen the paper and the markscheme beforehand then you have reason to worry.

19.IB Exam Revision [Part 2]

What do I revise?

You should by now realise that you will not be devoting an equal share of revision time to each subject. Some subjects you may not even bother with until perhaps a few weeks before the final exam. Other subjects you may like to start revising several months in advance. This will all depend on what your strengths are, as well as what your aims are.

For example; my IB results needed to coincide with my university offer from Oxford – I didn't really care about much else. This meant that I needed a 40 overall, 7's in HL Mathematics and HL Economics, as well as 6's in all of my remaining subjects. As soon as I learnt of this offer, I immediately outlined my problem areas. I knew that getting a 7 in HL Mathematics was by far my greatest weakness. I had never gotten a 7 in any test, and was probably averaging out a 5 overall. I felt uncomfortable with a large portion of the material. I also knew that getting a minimum of 6 in HL Geography and SL English should not be too big of a problem. I felt very comfortable with the Geography material, and my IA for English seemed good enough. Having gone over all of this in my head, I began to formulate how I will go about revising. I ended up spending more than 50% of my revision on Mathematics (doing a past paper almost every other night), then 30% on Economics (because I couldn't take any risks as I had to get a 7) and the rest of time I divided equally amongst the remaining subjects.

This may come as a shock to a lot of you. How can one spend more than half of their revision time on just one subject? Instinctively, you would want to divide your time equally amongst the six subjects giving you an equal chance of doing well in all of them. This is not the correct way to think. You need to identify your weaknesses and base your revision around this. If you are borderline failing Chemistry and sailing

through Business Management, then focus all your attention on getting through the Chemistry material. You may not enjoy it as much as BM but it's by far more important to you and your overall grade.

Figure out what your problem areas are by looking at your predicted grades and talking to your teachers to check where you stand in terms of their predictions. More importantly, you should know by now what your aims and objectives are. Do you need a minimum of a 6 in this subject for university or university credits? Do you need a 7 in this in order to fulfil the requirements? Once you work out what you are aiming for then make sure to focus your energy on this specifically. If you don't have any set aims and you are just trying to get the greatest points total then your task may be slightly easier. Find out your where your Achilles heel lies and focus on this and this alone.

How Do I Revise?

Although there are a multitude of methods to revise for the actual exams, you need to be careful and avoid doing redundant tasks. Out of all the possible methods that are out there, I highly recommend you try to focus your revision around past papers. For a full detailed explanation of this method please refer to the specified chapter on Past Papers.

I know that this method may not work for everyone. Perhaps you made great notes throughout the year or you enjoy learning from the syllabus and the textbook. Nonetheless, more often than not the most successful IB candidates will tell you that they revised primarily with the help of past papers and markschemes.

If you still insist on studying from textbooks and notes, I recommend you cover some basic study tips. For example, some subjects such as biology may require more 'visual learner' skills – using your eyes and memory to recall the information. I know some students get very creative with this

process and create highly effective ‘mind maps’ and ‘word association’ memory tools. I guess the theme here is sticking to the revision method that you know works for you the best. If you don’t think you have one, I highly suggest you get cracking on past papers.

No matter what method you choose, I highly recommend that your revision remains active. By this I mean you are constantly writing, making notes, and writing again. Although lying in the grass with a book to cover your face from the sun sounds like a good plan, you are wasting your time. Sit at a desk, grab some plain white paper, and make good use of your pen and pencil. You are twice as likely to remember what you are revising if you are constantly writing and not just reading.

Some of you may find that study groups work well for particular subjects. I myself found it extremely useful to work together on a maths paper with another person, or to discuss economics material in a group. Choose your groups wisely though. Avoid students who are far more advanced than you and avoid friends that seem like they attend revision sessions more for the social aspect rather than actual studying. The point is that if you find revising or working through past papers with a group of equally motivated peers useful then by all means proceed with that.

You will probably have a good week or two of no school before your examinations begin so make full use of that period. Make sure each day is productive and that you set yourself mental tasks to complete every day. Don’t be alarmed but you should probably be aiming to get at least 7 hours of pure revision done every day that week. This isn’t really asking that much given that you probably haven’t been doing much revision all year.

Don’t panic if you come across something during your revision that you have never seen before. Chances are it probably isn’t in the syllabus anymore or maybe you just missed it out in class. Ask your friends or your teacher for

advice. You shouldn't spend hours and hours stuck on one section or problem – remember this should be revision and not first-time learning.

Another common mistake made during the revision period is setting yourself goals that are simply beyond your reach. No one expects you to revise for twelve hours a day straight, sleep for eight and leave four hours for washing/pooping /eating. It shouldn't have to come to that. You should be studying hard but also leaving a little time to relax and recover. Remember that there is a huge amount of resources available for you to aid in your revision.

20.IB Exam Revision [Part 3]

Cramming: The Night Before

No words of advice or comfort can really help ease your pre-exam stress and make you relax the night before your first examination. You will remember that date for a long time. For most of you, this is probably the first official externally graded examination that you take (unless you've done GCSEs or SATs). This can be a scary notion but you just need to realise that in a matter of a few weeks all of this will be over and you will embark on the longest holiday of your teenage life.

Now, what should you be doing the night before an exam? Well, as a golden rule, you should restrict your revising only on material for which you will be examined the following day. This means if you have a math exam tomorrow, you should be doing just math today – not biology which you have in a weeks' time or something like that. You need to keep the subject fresh and familiar in your mind – focus all your energy on it the night before and hopefully you will wake up with most of it still in your head.

Now, what about cramming? There is a heated debate as to whether cramming even works. Some say that having late night cram sessions is not only ineffective, but that it can put you in unnecessary stress and increase your chances of “going blank” the following day. Others will tell you that cramming is the best form of revision, and everything you stuff into your brain the night before just spills on your exam paper the next morning. Then there are also those who will tell you that cramming works – but you should not do it because you are not learning long-term, you are merely memorizing stuff in the short-term which you will probably forget in a weeks' time. Those people are missing the point.

From a personal viewpoint, cramming the night before an IB examination was helpful, but only to a certain extent (and only

for certain subjects). For example, I found that cramming popular mathematic proofs was extremely helpful, however cramming an English novel was not. Use your common sense a little when it comes to cramming. More importantly, don't overdo it. Your sleep and nutrition can play a large role in your examinations, so make sure you are getting a minimum of six hours of sleep most of the days. Exceptions can be made when you have an exam the following day, and then after that you have a day or two break from exams for recovery – in that scenario I have seen some students even pull off near all-nighters.

Disappointment: The Morning After

However well your exam went, you are more than likely to come out feeling rather disappointed. This is natural. If you come out of the exam room very cheery and happy that usually means that either you have been very lucky and really aced it, or you really messed up a question or two because you misunderstood what was being asked. Either way, the most important thing to remember after every examination is to move on. Don't hang around outside the exam halls asking all your friends what they answered or what they thought of a certain question. The exam is over. Whatever you say or do after is not going to change what you wrote on that paper or the outcome of the exam. You need to revise for your other papers.

This is one of the biggest mistakes I see students make when it comes to revision. Instead of studying for the next paper, they waste time talking to their friends and trying to figure out how they got this or that answer, or what they wrote about in their essay. You are likely to get even more disappointed and discouraged if you waste time asking your friends what they wrote down only to find out that your answer was totally different. After you have just sat an examination, just go home as fast as you can and focus on the next one.

22. Examination Technique [Part I]

Although you should keep in mind that you need specific revision techniques for each individual subject, there remains much to be said about examination technique in general. Your success in the exams will not only rely on how well prepared you are in terms of the material, but also how well you perform under pressure. To deal with this you will need to master a few exam techniques. Most of them are simple, but nonetheless are often forgotten or severely underestimated.

Time Management

You need to be able to allocate your time proportionally across the entire duration of the exam. This includes taking off a few minutes from the beginning for reading and the end for proofreading. Whatever time you devote to actual writing and working out should be spaced out across the whole exam. Luckily, the IB have made your task even simpler as they now indicate how many points each question and sub-question is worth. For most papers this is the same year in year out however pay close attention to this as it will decide how many minutes you will need to spend on the question. If it takes you less time to answer than you had anticipated, then move on to next question as you may need that extra time.

You absolutely must, and under no exceptions, finish your exam from beginning to end. If you have not answered all the questions that were required of you then you can consider your grade 7 a missed opportunity. Once the examiner sees that you have left questions at the end blank, this immediately sends out a signal that you have mismanaged your time. This mistake is made every year by countless bright students and the only reason for it is poor organization and time use – something that is not expected from the best candidates.

There is absolutely no reason why you should not have enough time to finish the exam. I hear this excuse all the time

but the truth is you did have enough time, you just didn't use it wisely. It's one thing to leave a question blank because you just had no idea how to answer it – which is something I also highly discourage. But it's a totally different matter if you didn't answer the last few questions because you messed up your timing.

Command Terms

These 'command terms' are specific words and phrases that the IB like to use in their exam questions. The IB examiners are not just trying to grade you on your knowledge of the subject, but they want to test your ability to answer the question that they have set out for you.

This is not something that is unique to the IB examinations. At university, and also in some job applications, you will be tested on your ability to really understand what is being asked. There is no point in answering how something happened if the question asked why did it happen. Get used to reading questions carefully and answering accordingly because this is a skill that you will reuse often.

Again, your success at identifying and answering these command terms will largely depend on your practice with past papers. That being said, no amount of preparation can spare you from being careless. For this reason make sure to double-check what is being asked. If time is available then I even recommend you highlight or underline the command term so that you don't forget what it is you need to answer. There's nothing worse than writing an answer explaining something when you were simply asked to define it.

A full list and explanation of command terms can be found in the syllabus/subject guide for the subject in question. These can be found online, or by asking your teacher. The terms differ from subject to subject. Please make sure you understand the command terms well before you go into the exams.

Extra Materials

Along with your lucky charms and favourite pen I strongly advise that you bring in a well-functioning clock in order to be able to manage your time properly. This varies amongst personal taste but I know that some like to have wrist watches, while some bring digital clocks, and I have even seen some bring countdown timers that were preset to countdown the exam duration. You need to keep in mind that although there may be already clock in the exam room you could be assigned a seat all the way in the back. Perhaps your eyesight isn't as great as you thought it was and as a result you struggle to see the time. Don't take any of these chances. Bring some sort of time device with you.

I always have a little bit of paranoia when it comes to calculators malfunctioning in exams so I strongly recommend that you bring a spare calculator (not necessarily the graphing one) or at least a spare set of batteries for the calculator-based exams. It goes without saying that you need a spare pen or two just in case the one you have runs out. Also, try to bring a set of highlighters because you can use these to remind yourself of the key terms in a question as discussed before in this chapter.

Answer the Whole Question and Nothing but the Question

This is self-explanatory. When answering any question on the IB exams you must make sure you address the exact phrasing in the question and give the examiner exactly what he/she is looking for. For all my examinations, I brought along a highlighter or two so that I could highlight key words in the question sentence. For example, if a math question stated "give the answer in cm^3 " I would highlight the cm^3 part. I know that this might sounds a little pointless and a waste of time but you would be surprised to see how many candidates "forget" certain parts of the question. One common example

is when a question asks you to “explain why” and you write an excellent essay on “how”. By highlighting the “explain why” part you will significantly reduce the chances of this kind of slip up.

There is usually absolutely no reason to write more than what is required. If the question is worth two marks this means the examiner is probably looking for two key points – no more, no less. You don’t have time to be writing everything you know. You need to pick the most valuable bits of information and keep to your own time limit. There are no “bonus” points and you will not get extra credit for writing what is not required. Remember, the key is to write efficiently and aim for maximum marks with minimum nonsense.

Less is More – Usually

There are a few exceptions to the above paragraphs. If, in the unlikely scenario that you stumble upon a question you don’t how to fully answer, then sometimes (very rarely!) writing something that you do know on the topic might give you a few marks. This technique is very beneficial if used wisely, but it can also be very risky and damaging to your time if you abuse it. I can give you a good example. Suppose you get a “define” question worth two marks. This usually means you need to give two concrete points in order to get full marks. Let’s suppose that you could only remember one. Whereas normally I would suggest that you not waste your time and just move on the next question, there will be times when a little bit more ‘filler’ might get you that other mark. Either expand on your first point or throw in some other information that could, maybe, give you the remaining mark (like adding an example).

Remember that directly you will not get marked down for writing more. Indirectly, you always run the risk of losing valuable time. There is a general belief that examiners will only read the first few points you make and ignore the rest if you haven’t hit the nail on the head yet. Personally, I find that this

notion is too general to apply to every examiner in every subject. Your best bet is to keep writing “educated guesses” until you think you have good odds at getting most of the marks. You won’t lose marks, but you might not gain any either. Remember that you are facing a balancing act – writing more BS versus having more time to answer later questions.

23. Examination Technique [Part II]

Give Yourself Space

One of the first things you should do when you sit at your desk is carefully lay out all your materials. You don't want to be doing a three-hour examination curled up uncomfortably on a tiny working space. Place the examination paper on one side and the fill-in answer booklet next to it. Arrange your pencil case and all of your materials somewhere neatly in the corner. Make sure that your workspace is not one giant mess or else this could reflect negatively on your answers.

Start With What You Know

If the exam is parts-based, then I highly advise you to start with the parts where you are more comfortable and ones that you find more enjoyable. Not only will this ensure that you not waste time attempting trickier question but you will also feel more confident and optimistic knowing that you have already answered many questions correct. There is no strict rule governing where you need to start and finish your section-based exam so don't treat it in a strictly chronological order. Do what you feel happier doing first and leave the trickier bits for later.

Handwriting

Do you have handwriting that needs its own Rosetta Stone? If so, you need to make at least some effort to improve it or else you risk having your paper deciphered angrily and possibly downgraded. I highly suggest that when you are doing past papers in your revision, you start to focus also on the neatness of your handwriting. I personally haven't heard of any cases where a student's paper was simply illegible, but I am sure that they exist. If you find that your writing speed is significantly slower, then you might be better off not bothering with drastically improving your handwriting. If your

teachers need to constantly remind you to write neater than please do pay attention. Nothing is more frustrating to an examiner than to decode your cluttered calligraphy.

Leaving Early

There are very few things in the world that frustrate and anger me more than seeing candidates get up and leave examinations with plenty of time to spare. You are given the time limit for a reason – use it! You must be incredibly careless to give up and just leave the exam with an hour to spare. There is absolutely no reason – none whatsoever – for you to leave before the time is up. Don't think you can just cross your arms on your desk and put your head down for a nap either. That would be equally retarded. I don't care whether you think you have answered all the questions and proofread enough. Unless you are 100% confident that you got 100% don't even consider leaving early. And no, you're not "cool" or "rebellious" for leaving with time to spare.

Proofreading

You absolutely must make sure you leave a few minutes at the end of your examination for proofreading. This is more important in non-essay based exams such as Mathematics and the Group 4 topics. Even in examinations for Economics, going back and making sure your diagrams are properly labelled could score you a few extra points. I'm not suggesting you make sure that you crossed all your T's and dotted all of your I's but at least make sure the majority of the exam is legible and that you avoided any silly mistakes. The few marks that you pick up when proofreading could prove vital if you're on the edge between two distinct marks. You will lose and gain most of your marks in the beginning and at the end of your examination – so make sure you make a positive start and always go back and proofread at the end.

Ignoring Distractions

Although the exams are supposed to happen in complete silence there may be times when distractions are simply inevitable. For example the kid sitting next to you who has never heard of cough medicine and is having non-stop bronchitis-like coughing. Or the student who accidentally drops his pencil only for it to roll all the way across the room. I remember for one of my first Mathematics exams the weather in the morning was terrible. It was hailing, raining and thundering all at once. The fact that our examination centre had a semi-glass ceiling provided very surreal Dolby-Digital surround sound. It was probably the most frustrating thing to encounter when you are trying to focus on a HL Mathematics paper.

You need to teach yourself how to work around distractions. Don't become frustrated and punch the desk. Nor should you start to complain and lash out on your examination coordinator for having so many distractions. Just sit your exam and focus on what's in front of you. Do whatever you need to do to clear your head and relax. Perhaps invest and get used to wearing earplugs to drown out the noise?

Last Minute Exam Checklist

Have you done the following before entering your exam:

- Did you bring two pencils and two pens?
- Are they sharpened / refilled?
- Is your calculator charged?
- Do you have at least 1L of water for every 2 hours the exam goes for?

It may seem obvious, but last year when I did the exams I forgot some of these due to stress, and thus did not score as highly as I could have scored. Trust me, you'll want to have water when you're staring down a 20 mark multi-part physics question. The point is spare yourself the misery and just make sure you've prepared your stationary and water beforehand. However don't drink so much water that you have to take a

bathroom break and waste valuable exam time – this is a mistake that too many students also make.

You will do fine.

Good luck with the exams!

24. Acing the Literature (Group 1) Exam

(contributed article)

The following sections of the book will attempt to cover in greater detail the specifics behind each IB group and subject. We begin with group 1: studies in language and literature.

Paper 1

This will be a short snippet on the best way to practice English and prepare for the exams, but first a short back story on my love hate relationship with the subject at hand. I was never particularly good at English. Despite trying very hard I always found it difficult to perform as well as other students, most of all I found it difficult to break that 6-7 barrier (which I did during the exams, but not with my external assessments). Had I known what I know now I would have been able to achieve a solid 7 without any problems. My class work averaged out to a 6, however to my astonishment I received solid 7s in both the exams (19/20 and 20/25). I was 3% off a 7, so had I put in that little extra effort to get my IA grade from a 13/20 to a 16/20 I would have been able to cross that grade boundary.

Now, the first step towards being good at English is of course listening and participating in class discussions, in addition to reading the books and texts that are assigned and doing your work on time. In addition to these tips a few things I found to be very useful were:

- 1) To read around the subject, this entails learning about the authors, their style, their motivation and other authors that resemble them. By doing so you will be able to explore and reflect on very advanced concepts in your essays. You will be able to justify the author's choices in theme, rhetorical devices and why they even explored the subject matter at hand. Put effort into this and you will be able to hit those top scores in the essays.