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DP language courses: overview and placement guidance



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Peterson House, Malthouse Avenue, Cardiff Gate
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United Kingdom
Website: ibo.org

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IB mission statement

The International Baccalaureate aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.

To this end the organization works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging programmes of international education and rigorous assessment.

These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right.

DP language courses: overview and placement guidance

Purpose of this document

This document is primarily intended to assist administrators and teachers in schools to understand the language courses on offer in the studies in language and literature and language acquisition groups of the IB Diploma Programme and the requirements in relation to these. It is also anticipated that this document will be of use to other interested parties—including universities, governments, parents and students—who want an overview of IB language courses for students aged 16–19.

These parties can also consult the subject briefs on ibo.org for condensed course information. These briefs provide course descriptions and outlines of syllabus and assessment components.

For a list of the languages offered for each course, please consult *Diploma Programme Assessment Procedures*.

This document provides an overview of

- studies in language and literature and language acquisition group courses,
- criteria for the award of a bilingual diploma,
- guidance for the placement of students in language courses.

Overview of studies in language and literature and language acquisition courses

Requirements

Students are required to select at least one language from studies in language and literature. They are also required to select a different additional language from either studies in language and literature or language acquisition. Students also have the option of studying a third language as an elective instead of an arts subject.

Studies in language and literature courses

Studies in language and literature courses are designed to support future academic study by developing high levels of language competence and communication skills as well as social, aesthetic and cultural literacy. Literature plays a central role in the courses, which aim to support lifelong learning through engaging students as actively as possible with the texts they study.

Each course highlights a different perspective in the study of texts.

- In language A: literature the focus is directed towards developing an understanding of the techniques involved in literary criticism and promoting the ability to form independent literary judgments.

- Language A: language and literature looks more openly at the method of inquiry embodied in critical literacy and is directed towards understanding the constructed nature of meanings generated by language and the web of relationships they share with the social world. In addition to the study of literary texts, language A: language and literature allows the exploration of a wide variety of non-literary texts.
- Literature and performance enables students to combine literary analysis with practical experience of the investigation of the role of performance in understanding literature.

Studies in language and literature courses are suitable for students who have experience of using the language in an academic context. It is recognized that students have language backgrounds that vary significantly. There are some students for whom the target language is their only proficient language, whereas other students have complex language profiles and are competent in more than one language. One of the ways in which the studies in language and literature group promotes multilingualism is through the support and development of the student's first or best language(s). To this purpose, the group offers more than 50 languages automatically. Additionally, special-request language A and school supported self-taught options are available for language A: literature.

Language acquisition courses

Language acquisition consists of two modern language courses and one classical language course. The overarching aim of these courses is to provide students with the opportunity to acquire or develop an additional language (or languages) and to promote an understanding of other cultures through the study of language.

Language ab initio and language B are language acquisition courses designed to provide students with the necessary skills and intercultural understanding to enable them to communicate successfully in an environment where the language studied is spoken. Language B is a language acquisition course designed for students with some previous experience of the target language. In the language B course, students further develop their ability to communicate in the target language through the study of language, themes and texts. In doing so, they also develop conceptual understandings of how language works, as appropriate to the level of the course.

Language ab initio is a language acquisition course designed for students with no prior experience of the target language, or for those students with very limited previous exposure. It should be noted that language ab initio is offered at SL only. At the language ab initio level, a student develops receptive, productive and interactive communicative skills. Students learn to communicate in the target language in familiar and unfamiliar contexts.

Language acquisition students can also opt to study a classical language, Latin or Classical Greek. The Diploma Programme courses in classical languages provide an opportunity for students to explore the literatures and cultures of ancient Greece and Rome as they hone their language skills. Such study yields important insights into the cultures that produced them, but also can be a lens for the investigation of other languages, literature and cultures, including contemporary ones. Students develop an appreciation for the power and uses of language through critical analysis, close reading, and inquiry into a variety of classical texts and sources.

Award of a bilingual diploma

Those students who have extensive experience with, or proficiency in, a language in addition to their first or best language(s) are encouraged to pursue the bilingual diploma. A bilingual diploma will be awarded to a successful candidate who fulfils one or more of the following criteria:

- completion of two languages selected from studies in language and literature group with the award of a grade 3 or higher in both
- completion of one of the subjects from individuals and societies or sciences groups in a language that is not the same as the candidate's nominated studies in language and literature language. The candidate must attain a grade 3 or higher in both the studies in language and literature language and the subject from individuals and societies or sciences groups.

Further details of how the diploma is awarded are contained in the document *General regulations: Diploma Programme*.

Placement of students in language courses

It is extremely important that students be appropriately placed into Diploma Programme (DP) language courses. Appropriate placement into language courses allows for suitable degrees of challenge for development in those languages. Misplacement of a student into a language course which does not provide an appropriate degree of challenge for the student may provide the student with an unfair advantage over those who are appropriately placed into the course. Intentional misplacement may be considered school maladministration according to [Academic integrity](#).

When making placement decisions, the following guidance must be taken into consideration.

Students who are already able to read, analyse and respond to complex literary and non-literary texts in a given language must be placed in a studies in language and literature course for that language. If a student can already communicate successfully in the language on a range of topics in a variety of familiar and unfamiliar contexts, then a DP studies in language and literature course must be considered the appropriate placement.

The language ab initio and language B courses are language acquisition courses—designed to provide students the opportunity to develop in a language in addition to their home/personal/best language(s). They are not designed for students entering the course who already have the ability to communicate confidently and proficiently in that specific language.

Language ab initio is designed for students with no prior experience of the target language, or for those students with very limited previous exposure. Students will be introduced to the conceptual understandings that underlie language acquisition and begin to develop receptive, productive and interactive skills.

Language B is designed for students with some experience in the target language; providing students with an appropriate degree of challenge is important for their development. Schools are encouraged to factor student target language proficiency and Diploma Programme SL/HL balance into the placement decision for each individual student.

Language B SL is designed for students with some previous experience in the target language who already have the ability to communicate in the language in familiar contexts. While in the course, they will further develop this ability. Students will explore the conceptual understandings that underlie language acquisition and begin to use higher-level thinking in the development of receptive, productive and interactive skills.

Language B HL is designed for students with previous experience in the target language who have the ability to communicate in that language in a variety of contexts and for a variety of purposes. As the study of two literary works originally written in the target language is compulsory in language B HL, entering the course with these communication skills would allow the student to begin the study of works of literature originally written in the target language. During the course, students are expected to use higher-order thinking skills in the development of their receptive, productive and interactive skills.

The following tables provide guidance in placing students in an appropriate language course. The “If a student can...” statements have been developed from course [Grade descriptors](#). A student who exhibits a majority of the statements shown under the receptive, productive and interactive skills headings would likely be able to handle the course whilst being appropriately challenged.

If a student can...	the recommended course is...
Receptive Skills	<p>Language A: literature</p> <p>or</p> <p>Language A: language and literature</p> <p>or</p> <p>Literature and performance</p>
<p>...demonstrate a good understanding of the meaning and purpose of written texts, including literary texts;</p> <p>...demonstrate a good understanding of the meaning and purpose of oral texts;</p> <p>...recognize some subtleties of specific language use and their effects.</p>	
Productive skills	
<p>...speak mostly clearly and fluently and use a varied range of language mostly accurately;</p> <p>...write fairly detailed texts demonstrating a good command of vocabulary with a good level of grammatical accuracy;</p> <p>...show a reasonable ability to adapt their writing to suit the intended audience and purpose;</p> <p>...express ideas and organize work coherently.</p>	
Interactive skills	
<p>...handle ideas mostly effectively with generally full interaction;</p> <p>...exhibit some difficulties with more difficult questions.</p>	

If a student can...	the recommended course is...
Receptive Skills	<p>Language B HL</p>
<p>...demonstrate a good understanding of the meaning and purpose of written texts;</p> <p>...demonstrate a good understanding of the meaning and purpose of oral texts.</p>	
Productive skills	
<p>...speak generally clearly;</p> <p>...respond appropriately to most questions but struggle with responding to difficult questions;</p> <p>...demonstrate an adequate command of vocabulary and grammatical accuracy;</p> <p>...use basic and some complex language correctly;</p> <p>...show a reasonable ability to adapt writing to suit the intended audience and purpose;</p> <p>...express ideas and organize work appropriately.</p>	
Interactive skills	
<p>...respond appropriately and demonstrate comprehension;</p> <p>...use pronunciation and intonation which facilitate the understanding of the message;</p> <p>...make independent contributions;</p>	

...produce clear messages.	
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If a student can...	the recommended course is...
Receptive Skills	Language B SL
...demonstrate adequate understanding of the meaning and purpose of written texts; ...demonstrate adequate understanding of the meaning and purpose of oral texts.	
Productive skills	
...develop some ideas using a logical structure; ...use a range of basic cohesive devices; ...use basic grammatical structures accurately; ...use a range of basic vocabulary and appropriate register.	
Interactive skills	
...respond appropriately and generally demonstrate comprehension; ...use pronunciation and intonation which often facilitate the understanding of the message; ...make some independent contributions; ...produce mostly clear messages.	

If a student...	the recommended course is...
...has no prior experience in or has had very limited previous exposure to the target language.	Language ab initio