

Environmental Systems and Societies (First assessment 2026)

Nature of the subject

Environmental Systems and Societies is an interdisciplinary course, **offered at SL and HL**, which can be selected either as a Group 3 or as a Group 4 subject. This offers students greater flexibility in their choice of subjects to study as part of their diploma. The course satisfies the requirements for both hexagon groups 3 and 4, leaving students the opportunity to study another subject from any group of the hexagon including another subject from groups 3 or 4.

The prime intent of this course is to provide students with a coherent perspective of the interrelationships between environmental systems and societies; one that enables them to adopt an informed personal response to the wide range of pressing environmental issues that they will inevitably apply to their everyday life. Through the course, students should become able to evaluate the scientific, ethical, and socio-political aspects of environmental issues while appreciating alternative viewpoints, including the perceptions of different cultures.

Course Content

Apart from the theory taught in class, the course includes a number of practical experimental work in the form of activities or investigations.

The topics covered in both SL and HL are:

- Foundations of environmental systems and societies
- Ecosystems and ecology
- Biodiversity and Conservation
- Water, food production systems and society
- Land and food production systems
- Atmosphere and Climate Change
- Natural resources
- Human populations and urban systems

Additional HL topics

- Environmental law
- Environmental and ecological economics
- Environmental ethics

Also, some investigations and activities will be carried out during the two-year course. These may include in-class activities, short experiments, computer simulations, analysis and processing of data from databases, data gathering through questionnaires or surveys, and fieldwork.

Prior learning

There are no prerequisites for Environmental Systems and Societies SL and HL.

Assessment

Student's progress will be continuously evaluated in formative (quizzes, presentations) and summative (revision tests, IA-related assignments) assessments. Written work is assessed against criteria specified by the IB.

The final Diploma grade in the subject is determined by two assessment components:

Internal assessment: Individual investigation

This component is internally assessed by the subject teacher and externally moderated by the IBO. The grade awarded comprises 25% of the final IB Diploma grade for the SL and 20% for the HL. It consists of an Individual investigation.

- The **individual investigation** is a scientific investigation performed by the student on an environmental issue covered by the course. It should be up to 3000 words and is assessed on 6 criteria: identifying the context, planning, results- analysis and conclusion, discussion and evaluation, applications, and communication.
- The process starts with the selection of the topic, the formulation of the research question, and the planning of the methodology by each individual student at the end of IB1. These are discussed and approved by the teacher. The students then gather and process their data, and complete the draft version of the IA report in November. Feedback is given and the final version of the report is submitted before winter break.

External assessment: Written examinations

The final written examination takes place in May of the second year and comprises 80% of the final IB Diploma grade for the HL and 75% for the SL. It is externally assessed by the IBO.

It consists of 2 papers:

Paper 1: A previously unseen case study

Paper 2: section A consists of short-answer data-based questions and section B requires students to answer structured essay questions, with a limited amount of choice.

Assessment objectives

1. Demonstrate knowledge and understanding
2. Apply this knowledge and understanding
3. Evaluate, justify and synthesize knowledge
4. Investigate environmental and societal issues at the local and global level

Relevance

ESS is an interdisciplinary course that includes both natural and social sciences that include topics such as biology, ecology, geology, chemistry but also economy, management, and politics. This way ESS provides relevant background for a variety of future university courses ranging from law and politics to business, economics, and natural sciences. Last, the course will help students to make informed decisions and choices in everyday life.

Teaching approaches

The instruction methods include case studies, debates, real-life examples, simulations, lectures, peer assessment, small group work, and practicals.