

Researcher's reflection space

Student reflection in the extended essay is critical. Effective reflection highlights the engagement of the student in an intellectual and personal process and how this has changed the student as a learner and affected the completion of that individual's essay. For those students who have completed the Middle Years Programme, the researcher's reflection space (RRS) can be compared to the process journal. The IB considers this to be a central component of a successful research process as it:

- supports student learning, thinking and critical analysis throughout the research process
- helps to stimulate discussions between the student and supervisor
- aids the reflection process.

The nature of the RRS

Use of the RRS is strongly recommended as it will allow the student to more clearly articulate and understand their decision-making process. It supports learning, thinking, critical analysis and evaluation, and contributes not only to the development of a successful extended essay but also to skills and competencies for pathways beyond the Diploma Programme.

The RRS is a personal learning environment that can be either a physical or virtual support tool. It is a space in which students are able to record reflections on what they are reading, writing and thinking. The use of the RRS will help students to prepare for their reflection sessions with their supervisors and inform the discussions that take place. In preparing for their reflection sessions students could use their RRS to:

- record their reflections
- respond to artefacts, such as photos, newspaper clippings, twitter feeds, blogs, and so on
- respond to prompts and questions that may arise in the students' subject areas, TOK classes or other aspects of the Diploma Programme
- create MindMaps[®] ;
- record emerging questions.

The idea of the RRS is not new and many students already keep research journals in the planning, researching and writing phases of their work on the extended essay. Encouraging students to develop a RRS will provide benefits in terms of the management of their workload and focus on their extended essay.

The role of the RRS

Created by students to support their engagement in the planning and decision-making process, the RRS helps to develop critical and evaluative thinking skills. It is also a planning tool that helps to scaffold the development of approaches to learning skills and conceptual understandings that occur throughout the research process. Additionally, the RRS tracks the evolution of thought as it relates to the development of an argument. It helps the student to personally connect to the topic and may motivate them in meaningful ways to successfully complete the extended essay. Finally, supervisors will be able to more effectively authenticate the student voice in that the RRS links directly to elements that will eventually be found in the essay itself. The RRS is intended to make the entire supervision process more meaningful.

Insights and information recorded in the RRS are expected to form the basis for and find direct expression in the essay, reflection sessions and *Reflections on planning and progress form*. Students are expected to share excerpts from the RRS in discussions with their supervisor. Using these reflections as a point of reference in their supervision sessions, students will be able to:

- demonstrate their planning
- discuss what they are learning
- evaluate their progress.

The student–supervisor relationship

Students can use the RRS to prepare for their reflection sessions with their supervisors.

Reflection session	Description
The first reflection session	Students are encouraged to include in their RRS examples of initial topic exploration, possible sources and methods, preliminary research questions and their personal reactions to the issues. In attending their first reflection session with their supervisor, students can use notes made in the RRS as the basis for discussion as well as to demonstrate the progress students have made in the research process.
The interim reflection session	As their RRS develops, students can demonstrate the progress of their thinking, the development of their argument and raise any questions they may have with their supervisor. At this stage the RRS may include reactions to readings, progress in the timeline for completion of the extended essay, a possible outline of arguments, setbacks encountered and the strategies used to overcome them.
The final reflection session— <i>viva voce</i>	During the <i>viva voce</i> , which takes place at the completion of the extended essay process, the RRS can form the basis for discussion about the process of completing the essay. Students can show what they have learned about the topic, the research process followed, their own learning, as well as outlining new questions they have uncovered. Most importantly, during the <i>viva voce</i> the RRS may help to highlight the personal significance of the work to the student and ultimately contribute to the supervisor's report.

Tip

While use of the RRS is not mandated, the IB considers the development of the RRS an essential element of good reflective practice as it will help the student to not only scaffold the extended essay process but also to build skills which transcend the task itself and prepare the student for university study and beyond.

A well-used RRS will aid the reflection sessions students have with their supervisor, as elements of it can be used to stimulate and inform discussion. This will help students to move towards a more evaluative understanding of the research process and the choices they make as part of this.

Finally, the RRS will contribute to a richer and more personally rewarding experience with the extended essay overall.