

# Introduction to the IB Economics exam papers

## Learning outcomes, command terms and assessment objectives

The IB Economics guide (for first examinations in May 2013) contains detailed learning outcomes for each syllabus topic and sub-topic. All these learning outcomes appear in the textbook and are displayed in **green** boxes under the corresponding heading where they are explained and discussed.

The first word of each learning outcome consists of a 'command term'. The command terms specify what students should be able to do with each learning outcome in exams.

All command terms are classified in four categories called 'assessment objectives' (AOs). There is a progression of AOs regarding the demands made on the student, beginning from AO1, which is the lowest level of demand, up to AO3, which is the highest level. The fourth level, AO4, consists of command terms that are specific to particular skills and techniques, and do not correspond to any particular level of demand in relation to the other three AO levels.

The four AO levels and the corresponding command terms are outlined in the table below. All command terms are defined in the table on page 5 of this section.

| Assessment objective (AO)        | Explanation of assessment objectives  | Command terms  | The command terms require students to:   |
|----------------------------------|---|--|--|
| AO1: knowledge and understanding | Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the syllabus contents, including current economic issues and data, as well as provide definitions of syllabus economic terms.<br><b>HL</b> Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of higher level topics. | define<br>describe<br>list<br>outline<br>state   | Learn and comprehend the meaning of information.   |
| AO2: application and analysis    | Apply economic theories and concepts to real-world situations, identify and interpret economic data, and demonstrate the extent to which information is used effectively.<br><b>HL</b> Demonstrate application and analysis of higher level topics.   | analyse<br>apply<br>comment<br>distinguish<br>explain<br>suggest   | Use their knowledge to explain actual situations, and to break down ideas into simpler parts and see how the parts relate. |
| AO3: synthesis and evaluation    | Examine economic concepts and theories, use these together with examples to construct and present arguments, discuss and evaluate theories and information.<br><b>HL</b> Demonstrate economic synthesis and evaluation of higher level topics.        | compare<br>compare and contrast<br>contrast<br>discuss<br>evaluate<br>examine<br>justify<br>to what extent | Rearrange component ideas into a new whole and make judgements based on evidence or a set of criteria.                     |

| Assessment objective (AO)   | Explanation of assessment objectives   | Command terms   | The command terms require students to:           |
|---|--|---|--|
| AO4: selection, use and application of a variety of skills and techniques | Produce well-structured written material using appropriate terminology; use correctly labelled diagrams to explain concepts and theories; select, interpret and analyse extracts from news media; interpret appropriate data sets.<br><b>HL</b> Use quantitative techniques to identify, explain and analyse economic relationships. | calculate<br>construct<br>derive<br>determine<br>draw<br>identify<br>label<br>measure<br>plot<br>show<br>show that<br>sketch<br>solve | Demonstrate selection and application of skills. |

### Command terms and assessment objectives in exams

The command term that appears at the beginning of each learning outcome in the textbook (and in the IB Economics guide) corresponds to a particular AO level. An exam question on a learning outcome uses a command term that is *either from the same AO level, or from a lower AO level; it cannot be from a higher AO level.*

For example, in the learning outcome, 'Explain the concept of consumer surplus', 'explain' is an AO2 command term. An exam question could use the same command term as in the learning outcome, or it could say, 'Analyse the concept of consumer surplus', since 'analyse' is also an AO2 command term. Alternatively, an exam question could say, 'Define consumer surplus', since 'define' is an AO1 command term. An exam question could *not* say 'Discuss the concept

of consumer surplus', because 'discuss' is an AO3 command term.

Learning outcomes that use AO4 command terms, on the other hand, can only be examined by questions using AO4 command terms. For example, the learning outcome, 'Draw a supply curve' could be examined by a question such as 'Construct a supply curve', since 'construct' is an AO4 command term.

### Main features of examinations (external assessment)

Exams (external assessment) consist of two exam papers for standard level (SL): paper 1 and paper 2. They consist of three exam papers for higher level (HL): paper 1, paper 2 and paper 3. The tables below summarise the main features of each exam paper at standard and higher levels.

#### Paper 1 has the same structure for both standard and higher levels:

|  | Paper 1: SL and HL   |
|--|--|
| Duration of paper 1                                | 1 hour and 30 minutes  |
| Focus and structure of paper 1                     | Section A focuses on section 1 of the syllabus (microeconomics). Students must answer one question from a choice of two.<br><br>Section B focuses on section 2 of the syllabus (macroeconomics). Students must answer one question from a choice of two. |
| Structure of questions and marks earned in paper 1 | Each question consists of two parts, (a) and (b). Students must answer both parts.<br><br>Part (a) earns a maximum of 10 marks, and part (b) a maximum of 15 marks, making a total of 25 marks for the question.   |

(continued over)

|   | Paper 1: SL and HL  |
|---|---|
| Assessment objectives in paper 1  | Part (a) of the questions examines assessment objectives 1, 2 and 4.<br>Part (b) of the questions examines assessment objectives 1, 2, 3 and 4.   |
| Maximum marks earned in paper 1, and percentage in total IB Economics grade | Since the student must answer two questions, paper 1 earns a maximum of 50 marks.<br>Paper 1 accounts for 40% of the student's overall grade at standard level, and 30% of the student's overall grade at higher level. |

**Paper 2 has the same structure for both standard and higher levels:**

|   | Paper 2: SL and HL  |
|---|---|
| Duration of paper 2   | 1 hour and 30 minutes   |
| Focus and structure of paper 2  | Section A focuses on section 3 of the syllabus (international economics), though students may be required to draw on other parts of the syllabus. Students must answer one question from a choice of two.<br><br>Section B focuses on section 4 of the syllabus (development economics), though students may be required to draw on other parts of the syllabus. Students must answer one question from a choice of two.  |
| Structure of questions and marks earned in paper 2                          | Paper 2 consists of data response questions. Each question consists of four parts, (a), (b), (c) and (d), which are based on a text/data provided. Students must answer all parts.<br><br>Part (a) is sub-divided into 2 parts, (i) and (ii), each of which is worth 2 marks; therefore part (a) is worth a maximum of 4 marks.<br><br>Part (b) is worth a maximum of 4 marks.<br><br>Part (c) is worth a maximum of 4 marks.<br><br>Part (d) is worth a maximum of 8 marks.<br><br>Therefore, each question earns a maximum of 20 marks. |
| Assessment objectives in paper 2  | Part (a) of the questions examines assessment objective 1.<br>Part (b) of the questions examines assessment objectives 1, 2, and 4.<br>Part (c) of the questions examines assessment objectives 1, 2 and 4.<br>Part (d) of the questions examines assessment objectives 1, 2 and 3.   |
| Maximum marks earned in paper 2, and percentage in total IB Economics grade | Since the student must answer two questions, paper 2 earns a maximum of 40 marks.<br>Paper 2 accounts for 40% of the student's overall grade at standard level, and 30% of the student's overall grade at higher level.   |

**Paper 3 is for HL only:**

|   | Paper 3: HL   |
|---|---|
| Duration of paper 3   | 1 hour  |
| Focus and structure of paper 3  | Paper 3 focuses on the entire syllabus, including SL/HL core and HL topics. Students must answer two questions from a choice of three.  |
| Structure of questions and marks earned in paper 3                          | Each question consists of several parts, (a), (b), (c) and so on. The number of parts varies from question to question. Students must answer all parts.<br><br>Each question earns a maximum of 25 marks. |
| Assessment objectives in paper 3  | Paper 3 examines assessment objectives 1, 2 and 4.  |
| Maximum marks earned in paper 3, and percentage in total IB Economics grade | Since the student must answer two questions, paper 3 earns a maximum of 50 marks.<br><br>Paper 3 accounts for 20% of the student's overall grade at higher level.   |

## Definitions of command terms

All command terms are listed below alphabetically, together with their corresponding AO levels and definitions.

| Command term         |     | Definition asks students to:   |
|----------------------|-----|--|
| Analyse              | AO2 | Break down in order to bring out the essential elements or structure.  |
| Apply                | AO2 | Use an idea, equation, principle, theory or law in relation to a given problem or issue.   |
| Calculate            | AO4 | Obtain a numerical answer showing the relevant stages in the working.  |
| Comment              | AO2 | Give a judgment based on a given statement or result of a calculation.   |
| Compare              | AO3 | Give an account of the similarities between two (or more) items or situations, referring to both (all) of them throughout.   |
| Compare and contrast | AO3 | Give an account of similarities and differences between two (or more) items or situations, referring to both (all) of them throughout.   |
| Construct            | AO4 | Display information in a diagrammatic or logical form.   |
| Contrast             | AO3 | Give an account of the differences between two (or more) items or situations, referring to both (all) of them throughout.  |
| Define               | AO1 | Give the precise meaning of a word, phrase, concept or physical quantity.  |
| Derive               | AO4 | Manipulate a mathematical relationship to give a new equation or relationship.   |
| Describe             | AO1 | Give a detailed account.   |
| Determine            | AO4 | Obtain the only possible answer.   |
| Discuss              | AO3 | Offer a considered and balanced review that includes a range of arguments, factors or hypotheses. Opinions or conclusions should be presented clearly and supported by appropriate evidence.   |
| Distinguish          | AO2 | Make clear the differences between two or more concepts or items.  |
| Draw                 | AO4 | Represent by means of a labelled, accurate diagram or graph, using a pencil. A ruler (straight edge) should be used for straight lines. Diagrams should be drawn to scale. Graphs should have points correctly plotted (if appropriate) and joined in a straight line or smooth curve. |
| Evaluate             | AO3 | Make an appraisal by weighing up the strengths and limitations.  |
| Examine              | AO3 | Consider an argument or concept in a way that uncovers the assumptions and interrelationships of the issue.  |
| Explain              | AO2 | Give a detailed account including reasons or causes.   |
| Identify             | AO4 | Provide an answer from a number of possibilities.  |
| Justify              | AO3 | Give valid reasons or evidence to support an answer or conclusion.   |
| Label                | AO4 | Add labels to a diagram.   |
| List                 | AO1 | Give a sequence of brief answers with no explanation.  |
| Measure              | AO4 | Obtain a value for a quantity.   |
| Outline              | AO1 | Give a brief account or summary.   |
| Plot                 | AO4 | Mark the position of points on a diagram.  |
| Show                 | AO4 | Give the steps in a calculation or derivation.   |
| Show that            | AO4 | Obtain the required result (possibly using information given) without the formality of proof. 'Show that' questions do not generally require the use of a calculator.  |
| Sketch               | AO4 | Represent by means of a diagram or graph (labelled as appropriate). The sketch should give a general idea of the required shape or relationship, and should include relevant features.   |
| Solve                | AO4 | Obtain the answer(s) using algebraic and/or numerical and/or graphical methods.  |
| State                | AO1 | Give a specific name, value or other brief answer without explanation or calculation.  |
| Suggest              | AO2 | Propose a solution, hypothesis or other possible answer.   |
| To what extent       | AO3 | Consider the merits or otherwise of an argument or concept. Opinions and conclusions should be presented clearly and supported with appropriate evidence and sound argument.   |

Source: IB Economics guide (First examinations 2013)

## Useful suggestions to help you with exams

Here are some general points to bear in mind relating to your exams.

- *Define key economics terms* You must be sure to include correct definitions of the main economic terms that relate to the topic you are writing about.
- *Use correct diagrams with correct labelling* Most exam questions require you to provide a diagram (and possibly more than one diagram) explaining the economic theory you are discussing and that illustrates your analysis. You must be sure to provide the correct diagram. In addition, it is very important that you correctly draw and label your diagram. Even if you provide the right diagram to illustrate the theory you are referring to, you will lose marks if it is incorrectly drawn or labelled.
- *Link diagrams to your writing in exams* Whenever you use a diagram, for whatever purpose, you must be sure to explain in your writing what the diagram shows and how it helps you arrive at your answer or conclusion. Answers to questions that do not refer to or explain diagrams are likely to lose marks, even though the analysis and explanations as well as the diagrams may be correct (and the diagrams correctly drawn and labelled).
- *Clearly state and explain the theory or model you are using* All exam papers, at both standard and higher levels, require use of analytical skills, which means identifying an economic theory, model or concept and applying it to analyze and explain something. When referring to economic theories, models or concepts, you must try to clearly state and explain what these are. You may know and understand a theory, but if you don't explain it clearly, you will not be demonstrating your knowledge and so you may lose marks.
- *Use examples* You should try to include examples that illustrate the topic you are writing about. For example, if you are writing about goods that are substitutes or complements, you could refer to some examples of these.
- *What you should do about lists* You will find that your textbook often makes lists of items that relate to particular topics (for example, the determinants of demand or supply, weaknesses of fiscal and monetary policies). In some cases the lists may be long. When you encounter long lists, you should bear in mind that your objective is not to memorise all the items in the list. Your objective, rather, is to familiarise yourself with the issues at hand, and then choose at least three or four items listed that you try to understand well and can write about in depth. You are better off learning about fewer items in depth than many items that you understand only superficially.
- *Do not use bullets in your writing* Whereas markschemes to IB examination questions are in bullet point form, you should not use bullet points in your answers to questions. Your written work should take the form of essays.
- *Practise writing essays* You should try to practise writing essays, beginning early in your IB economics course, taking care to include an introduction and conclusion, particularly in the case of questions that require longer responses. (This includes all SL and HL paper 1 part (b) questions, as well as SL and HL paper 2 part (d) questions.) Try to organise your answer before you begin to write so that your arguments will be clear, logical and consistent.
- *Write neatly and clearly* You must take care that you write neatly and clearly. A neat paper makes a good impression. It would be a pity if you lost marks simply because your handwriting or your diagrams are not readable.
- *Manage your time properly in an exam* It is very important that you divide the total time you have in an exam between the various questions and their parts. For example, in SL paper 1 and HL paper 1, the 90 minutes (one and one-half hour) you have available must be divided between the two questions you must answer, so that you spend about 45 minutes doing one micro question and 45 minutes for one macro question. Ideally, you would spend less than 20 minutes on part (a), which is worth 10 marks, and more than 25 minutes on part (b), which is worth 15 marks. In SL paper 2 and HL paper 2, which contain questions with several parts, it is especially important that you do not spend too much time on question parts that earn you only a few marks, leaving insufficient time for questions that are worth more marks.