Economics for the IB Diploma
Answering Paper 1 questions

Assessment Advice

There are two examination papers in economics for standard level (SL) students, and three papers for higher level (HL) students. A summary of the assessments for the course is shown in the table below.

Component	**SL**		**HL**	
Paper 1	30%	1 hr 15 mins	20%	1 hr 15 mins
Paper 2	40%	1 hr 45 mins	30%	1 hr 45 mins
Paper 3	–	–	30%	1 hr 45 mins
External assessment	3 hours		4 hours 45 minutes	
Internal assessment	30%	20 hrs	20%	20 hrs

The Paper 1 examination

Paper 1 at a glance – the essay paper

The Paper 1 examination is an externally examined component taken by all DP economics students (HL and SL). For HL students, the paper is worth 20% of the final grade. For SL students, the weighting is 30%. Hence, it can be said that essays will have a greater importance in the determination of the final grade for SL students than for HL students. Regardless, essay writing is an important skill that is likely to play a significant part in your assessment should you choose to go to university/college.

The examination paper

The Paper 1 examination will consist of three questions, which can come from any part of the two-year course. You need to choose **one** of these questions to answer in 1 hour and 15 minutes. Each question is worth a total of **25 marks** and has two parts, namely *part (a)* and *part (b)*. The demands of each part are different (to be discussed later).

The three questions presented to each candidate can be taken from any of the four sections of the syllabus, namely:

1. Introduction to economics
2. Microeconomics
3. Macroeconomics
4. The global economy

Naturally, the SL paper will only examine content from the SL syllabus (that is, the HL extension topics will not be examined on the SL paper). HL students can be examined on the HL only topics.

The Assessment Criteria

Knowledge of economics is not enough to guarantee success in the examination. You are not being assessed on your knowledge of economics alone but are also being assessed on a range of skills and how well you demonstrate these in the examination.

If the assessment of this course were purely knowledge-based, then the IB might choose to use multiple-choice tests. Instead, both SL and HL students are assessed according to a set of assessment criteria.

The *Economics guide (*First assessment 2022**)** explains this:

> 'Assessment criteria are used when the assessment task is open-ended. Each criterion concentrates on a particular skill that students are expected to demonstrate. An assessment objective describes what students should be able to do, and assessment criteria describe how well they should be able to do it. Using assessment criteria allows discrimination between different answers and encourages a variety of responses. Each criterion comprises a set of hierarchically ordered level descriptors. Each level descriptor is worth one or more marks. Each criterion is applied independently using a best-fit model. The maximum marks for each criterion may differ according to the criterion's importance. The marks awarded for each criterion are added together to give the total mark for the piece of work.'
>
> *Economics guide*, page 55

Assessment objectives and mark bands

The Paper 1 examination requires candidates to demonstrate competency of the following assessment objectives (AOs):

AO1 – Knowledge and understanding (of relevant economics theories and concepts).
AO2 – Application and analysis (of theories and concepts relevant to the question).
AO3 – Synthesis and evaluation (of the theories, concepts and arguments put forward when answering the question).
AO4 – Use and application of appropriate skills.

When marking your answers, IB examiners will determine your score based on published assessment criteria (below). Examiners will use a ‘best-fit’ approach, which allows them to place your answers within the mark band that best describes your work for part (a) and part (b) of the essay.

Mark bands for Paper 1 part (a) 10-mark question essays

Marks	Level descriptor
0	The work does not reach a standard described by the descriptors below.
1–2	• The response indicates little understanding of the specific demands of the question. • Economic theory is stated but it is not relevant. • Economic terms are stated but they are not relevant.
3–4	• The response indicates some understanding of the specific demands of the question. • Relevant economic theory is described. • Some relevant economic terms are included.
5–6	• The response indicates understanding of the specific demands of the question, but these demands are only partially addressed. • Relevant economic theory is partly explained. • Some relevant economic terms are used appropriately. • Where appropriate, relevant diagram(s) are included.
7–8	• The specific demands of the question are understood and addressed. • Relevant economic theory is explained. • Relevant economic terms are used mostly appropriately. • Where appropriate, relevant diagram(s) are included and explained.
9–10	• The specific demands of the question are understood and addressed. • Relevant economic theory is fully explained. • Relevant economic terms are used appropriately throughout the response. • Where appropriate, relevant diagram(s) are included and fully explained.

Mark bands for Paper 1 part (b) 15-mark question essays

Marks	Level descriptor
0	The work does not reach a standard described by the descriptors below.
1–3	• The response indicates little understanding of the specific demands of the question. • Economic theory is stated but it is not relevant. • Economic terms are stated but they are not relevant. • The response contains no evidence of synthesis or evaluation. • A real-world example(s) is identified but it is irrelevant.
4–6	• The response indicates some understanding of the specific demands of the question. • Relevant economic theory is described. • Some relevant economic terms are included. • The response contains evidence of superficial synthesis or evaluation. • A relevant real-world example(s) is identified.
7–9	• The response indicates understanding of the specific demands of the question, but these demands are only partially addressed. • Relevant economic theory is partly explained. • Some relevant economic terms are used appropriately. • Where appropriate, relevant diagram(s) are included. • The response contains evidence of appropriate synthesis or evaluation but lacks balance. • A relevant real-world example(s) is identified and partly developed in the context of the question.
10–12	• The specific demands of the question are understood and addressed. • Relevant economic theory is explained. • Relevant economic terms are used mostly appropriately. • Where appropriate, relevant diagram(s) are included and explained. • The response contains evidence of appropriate synthesis or evaluation that is mostly balanced. • A relevant real-world example(s) is identified and developed in the context of the question.
13–15	• The specific demands of the question are understood and addressed. • Relevant economic theory is fully explained. • Relevant economic terms are used appropriately throughout the response. • Where appropriate, relevant diagram(s) are included and fully explained. • The response contains evidence of effective and balanced synthesis or evaluation. • A relevant real-world example(s) is identified and fully developed to support the argument.

Source: *Economics guide*, pages 63–64

Command Terms

Command terms relate to the assessment objective that is being assessed. This means that each command term indicates the depth that you will need to go into when you write your answers. For example, a Paper 1 examination question that uses the command term 'explain' requires the candidate to 'give a detailed account including reasons or causes' (*Economics guide*, page 75). This relates to the AO2 assessment objectives. This is different from the command term 'evaluate', which requires a candidate to 'make an appraisal by weighing up the strengths and limitations' (*Economics guide*, page 74). This relates to the AO3 assessment objectives.

In general, part (a) questions use command terms that relate to AO2 and part (b) questions will use AO3 command terms.

The full range of command terms used in IB Economics and their meanings is available on pages 74 and 75 of the *Economics guide*.

Layout of part (a) and part (b) responses

There are several ways that a candidate can approach a question in Paper 1. What follows here should be understood as merely *one* method of approaching part (a) and part (b) Paper 1 responses. It is important that you follow the advice of your teacher.

A closer look at the assessment criteria indicates a sequence in which the assessment objectives are assessed. This is based loosely around an educational theory that your teachers will be familiar with called *Bloom's Taxonomy*, which aims to rank learning/assessment objectives according to the degree of complexity:

Learning objectives	**Notes**
Specific demands of the question are understood	The candidate has identified the correct command term, section of syllabus and required depth.
Relevant economic theories are fully explained	The candidate has demonstrated correct selectivity of relevant theories and explained these appropriately in the context of the question.
Relevant economic terms are used appropriately throughout the response	The candidate uses the correct terms, and provides relevant definitions where appropriate.
Where appropriate, relevant diagram(s) are included and fully explained	When a diagram is necessary (usually the case), the candidate provides a correctly labelled diagram and a full and accurate

Learning objectives	Notes
	explanation written in the context of the question.
A relevant real-world example(s) is identified and fully developed to support the argument **(part b only)**	Examples should be used to highlight economic concepts, theories and relationships in the real world. When examples are used, the candidate should not just state the example (as this is too limited) but should also explain the real-world example in relation to the question asked. (*Economics guide*, p. 59).
The response contains evidence of effective and balanced synthesis and evaluation **(part b only)**	The candidate demonstrates the limitations of the arguments and the theory presented in the answer. The candidate also makes substantiated judgements based on the evidence presented.

Summary

- All students take the Paper 1 examination.
- Paper 1 is an extended response paper (essay).
- The duration of the examination is 75 minutes.
- Students answer **one** question from a choice of three.
- The total number of available marks is 25 marks. Part (a) is worth 10 marks and part (b) is worth 15 marks.
- You must use real-world examples in part (b) of the essay.
- The examination questions cover the whole syllabus, with questions specific to respective SL and HL content in the syllabus.
- The weighting of the paper is 30% for SL and 20% for HL.

For exemplar responses and further tips and hints, please see *Prepare for Success: Economics for the IB Diploma* by Paul Hoang (Hodder Education): ISBN 9781398340893 (publishes February 2022) https://www.hoddereducation.com/prepforsuccess-economics