What to avoid in the Individual Research

- whole topic areas being chosen rather than specific issues or questions to be answered in the study
- too much information gathering
- too much cutting and pasting rather than selecting information and using own words
- limited understanding, analysis, evaluation, reflection, selection, use of evidence and development of reasoning
- different perspectives mentioned in passing but not developed or used in coming to a judgement
- unstructured submissions, making assessment more difficult
- word limits being exceeded
- plagiarism
- candidates demonstrating limited understanding of future possible scenarios (and considering actual situations instead)
- judgement/evaluation being tacked on at the end rather than informing the entire study

Get it right at the start

It’s important that students frame questions which can be answered within an area of study, so as to avoid many of the common mistakes seen in Individual Research. For example, a study entitled ‘Water, Food and Agriculture’ is likely to lead to a student gathering as much information as possible about water, food and agriculture but is unlikely to help them to analyse, evaluate or reflect on any of these issues.

On the other hand, the question, ‘To what extent can water shortages be dealt with on an individual level?’ is likely to lead to a student using evidence and information from a variety of sources in order to answer the question (which will involve analysis, evaluation, reflection, etc.). It should also encourage students to consider the extent to which national and global actions are necessary, and to weigh up the importance of actions at these different levels. This question might also stimulate the student to consider the different perspectives of people upstream who will benefit from a dam, and those downstream, who may find that their water supply is diminished. It could also encourage students to consider the different personal perspectives of people in countries where there is plenty of rainfall and those where there is very little rainfall, also considering their own situation and that of the community they live in.

Plagiarism

It is equally important that students are aware that all the work they produce must be their own, and plagiarism carries serious consequences.

Any quotations must be marked as such, and sources must be acknowledged. Sources used must be listed in a bibliography. Cutting and pasting large chunks of another person’s work is plagiarism and is strictly forbidden. This includes cutting and pasting direct from websites.
Examiners would rather see a student’s own attempts to make sense of and reflect on an issue, even if the student finds thinking/writing in English problematic, than long paragraphs of work which have obviously been cut and pasted from another source.

Candidates will need to sign a declaration statement indicating that the Individual Research is their own work. The teacher responsible will be required to countersign this declaration, verifying that regulations regarding plagiarism and the role of the teacher have been observed. This declaration must accompany the presentation of the Individual Research on submission for moderation.

**Structure of the Individual Research for assessment/moderation**

When students put their Individual Research together, they should ensure that each study is clearly labelled with the title/question of the study. There must be some extended writing, but this does not mean that all pieces have to be written essays. A study will be much more stimulating if it includes other ways of meeting the assessment criteria, for example, a poster representing the views of different people concerned with saving the Amazonian Rain Forest and why they feel it is important to them personally and/or globally, or an interview with different people about how they feel water shortages can be dealt with and whose responsibility it is in their country. Students may like to voice their own opinions by creating a short podcast, which they can embed within their work. Including a transcript will help with assessment and moderation.