

## Further guidance for developing MYP written curriculum

### Reference excerpt

#### ***Programme standards and practices (2014)***

#### **MYP requirements for written and taught curriculum**

The written curriculum includes subject group overviews for each subject group offered for each year of the programme. (C2.1c)

Unit plans are documented according to the MYP unit planning process. (C2.1d)

The written curriculum includes the prescribed key concepts and related concepts in each subject group. (C2.4a)

Teaching and learning at the school uses global contexts as contexts for inquiry. (C3.1a)

#### ***MYP: From principles into practice (May 2014)***

#### **Planning a coherent curriculum**

The written curriculum is a formal, comprehensive, school-wide set of documents written by the school that describes what will be taught in each subject to each age group. The MYP presents schools with a framework within which schools are expected to develop their own written curriculum, whether this includes external requirements or not. It is acknowledged that many schools will not have autonomy in deciding subject content. The development of learner profile attributes, conceptual understanding, incorporation of global contexts and approaches to learning (ATL) skills is a school-based process.

Curriculum development centres on four major elements.

- Key and related concepts
- Global contexts
- ATL skills
- Subject-group objectives

From these elements, documents such as subject overviews and unit planners will be developed through vertical and horizontal planning. In the written curriculum, MYP teachers can plan for service activities arising from inquiry that will be engaging and relevant to students.

#### **Vertical planning**

The goal of vertical planning is to sequence learning to ensure continuity and progression from year 1 to year 5 of the programme and beyond.

#### **Horizontal planning**

To explore subject content fully using the key concepts and global contexts, a collaborative approach to planning and teaching is essential. This allows teachers to communicate regularly on matters concerning content and pedagogy. Planning horizontally will involve teachers of the same year level working together between and within subject areas to plan the scope of learning in a particular year.

## Subject-group overviews

The subject-group overview provides evidence of vertical and horizontal planning, documenting the written curriculum in each subject group across all years of the programme. The overview includes the unit title, key and related concepts, global context, statement of inquiry, objectives, and ATL skills and content.

Unit title	Key concept	Related concept(s)	Global context	Statement of inquiry	MYP subject group objective(s)	ATL skills	Content (topics, knowledge, skills)

Subject-group overviews allow teachers and school leaders to reflect on the vertical articulation of the written curriculum. Through collaborative planning, schools can, over the years of the programme, ensure that the curriculum has:

- included all required key concepts
- addressed all related concepts
- explored the complete range of MYP global contexts
- appropriately developed all ATL skill categories
- offered students opportunities to meet all subject-group objectives in a balanced way.

This reflection can lead to action in terms of modifying units and ATL planning.

Subject-group overviews can also provide a horizontal view, allowing teachers to reflect upon:

- common concepts or contexts among subject groups of a particular year level that could provide the basis for interdisciplinary learning
- the scope and variety of key concepts, global contexts and ATL skills in a particular year level.

Schools can adjust overviews to add further information that might be useful, including local, state or national requirements and standards. Subject-group overviews also provide a record of how the school organizes the subject group through courses of study in various subjects and disciplines.

## ATL planning

Using the ATL skills framework, teachers can develop a progression of ATL skills to be taught and formatively assessed at different stages of the programme.

## Developing MYP units

### MYP key concepts

The MYP identifies 16 key concepts to be explored across the curriculum. These key concepts represent understandings that reach beyond the eight MYP subject groups from which they are drawn.

Teachers use key concepts from their own subject group(s)—as well as key concepts from other subject groups—to plan disciplinary and interdisciplinary units of work. Teachers identify one key concept that drives the unit's development.

### Using key and related concepts

When planning a unit of work and determining the conceptual understandings for students to explore through the unit, it is important to note the following.

- Students need multiple opportunities to explore the concepts defined for each subject or discipline. Students should have meaningful inquiry into all of the key and related concepts for each relevant subject group at least once over the course of the MYP.
- Over the course of the programme, students need to develop an understanding of the key and related concepts at increasing levels of sophistication and abstraction.
- Summative assessments should offer students opportunities to reach the highest achievement levels with regard to their conceptual knowledge and understanding.

## MYP global contexts

Teaching and learning in the MYP involves understanding concepts in context. Global contexts provide a common language for powerful contextual learning, identifying specific settings, events or circumstances that provide more concrete perspectives for teaching and learning.

These and other contexts for teaching and learning inspire explorations of our common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet. They invite reflection on local, national and global communities, as well as the real-life issues and concerns of 11- to 16-year-old students. For each MYP unit, teachers should identify one global context that establishes a focus for meaningful teaching and learning in a programme of international education. Over the course of their study, students should encounter all six global contexts.

## MYP subject guides

In the MYP, conceptual understanding is framed by prescribed key and related concepts. Teachers must use these concepts to develop the curriculum. Schools may identify and develop additional concepts to meet local circumstances and curriculum requirements.

Teachers must identify a global context for teaching and learning, or develop additional contexts that help students explore the relevance of their inquiry (why it matters).

## Clarifications

As a key programme design principle, the revised MYP framework offers schools increased flexibility to develop curriculum that meets local requirements and individual student needs. To that end, the programme prescribes concepts and contexts that represent a shared understanding of what students need to know and why they need to know it. However, the MYP curriculum framework does not require specific, year-on-year “coverage” of these design features, nor does it prohibit schools from adding concepts and contexts that are relevant in local circumstances and in line with IB educational philosophy and MYP design.

## Coverage of concepts and contexts

MYP-prescribed key concepts, related concepts and global context explorations represent the essential programme components that form the basis of MYP eAssessment. External assessment that leads to MYP grades validated by the IB will be based solely on the concepts and contexts included in official IB documents.

Concepts and contexts are powerful tools that frame teaching and learning that is engaging, relevant, challenging and significant. They should not be used mechanically or pressed into service in order to meet strict requirements for horizontal or vertical mapping. The result of such practices can be false coverage and forced connections that do not promote meaningful teaching and learning.

It is the nature of concepts and contexts that they have natural associations and affinities with certain subject groups or disciplines. Each subject group guide identifies specific key concepts that contribute to the broader list of 16 MYP key concepts that all subject groups share.

Subject group	Key concepts contributed/disciplinary focus
Language and literature	Communication, connections, creativity, perspective
Language acquisition	Communication, connections, creativity, culture

Individuals and societies	Change, global interactions, time, place and space, systems
Sciences	Change, relationships, systems
Mathematics	Form, logic, relationships
Arts	Aesthetics, change, communication, identity
Design	Communication, communities, development, systems
Physical and health education	Change, communication, relationships

MYP key concepts have currency across subject groups. Nonetheless, teaching and learning in an individual subject group may often most naturally fit with the key concepts it contributed. Over the course of an academic year, it would be reasonable for teachers to engage most, if not all, of the identified key concepts for their respective subjects. However, this is not a programme requirement and, over the course of students' experience in the MYP, they should encounter a range of key concepts in each subject group, including concepts contributed by other subject groups. The quality of disciplinary and interdisciplinary learning is more important than a clerical exercise that documents the written curriculum's inclusion of all key concepts in all subject groups over a fixed period. At the same time, it is good practice for teachers and school leaders to review the extent to which the curriculum includes a broad range of possible interdisciplinary connections that are based on shared key (or related) concepts that look beyond the disciplinary focus of a single subject group.

Similarly, some global contexts have natural affinity with what students need to understand and be able to accomplish in various subject groups. For example, the study of literature may lead naturally to explorations of personal and cultural identity, while the study of biology is almost certain to entail explorations of scientific and technical innovation. However, over time, teachers and students can explore less likely contexts that are not as immediately apparent and will expand horizons and engage less familiar perspectives. For example, the role of history and culture in decisions about genetically modified crops could provide an interesting and important context for the study of human and animal nutrition.

## The written curriculum and MYP eAssessment

Schools that choose to participate in MYP eAssessment have an ongoing obligation to prepare their students, and so they face a clear challenge to ensure the written curriculum provides sufficient opportunities for candidates: (1) to understand all key and related concepts in the subjects for which they are registered for IB-validated grades, and (2) to work within all global contexts. MYP eAssessment (and the general grade descriptors that detail what each grade means) focuses on the demonstration of higher-order cognitive skills and the transfer of understanding to unfamiliar situations. MYP curriculum has to be sufficiently complex to allow the assessment of these curriculum demands. Students need multiple opportunities to practise analysis and application rather than simply extended exercises in memorizing facts and algorithms.

The MYP offers a rigorous curriculum framework that demands careful coordination and that creates opportunities for multiple approaches to its successful implementation. The MYP leads teachers and schools to use a constructivist approach in developing the written, taught and assessed curriculum—the same approach to teaching and learning that underpins all IB programmes. To the greatest extent possible, the MYP aims to empower teachers and school leaders to use their professional judgment to make curricular decisions informed by the unique circumstances of individual IB World Schools. The process leads to powerful learning conversations as teachers and school leaders discuss and analyse the written curriculum using the required documents.

## Frequently asked questions

With this background in mind, following are succinct answers to some frequently asked questions.

**Do teachers have to use all key concepts from the subject group each year?**

No.

**Do teachers have to use all 16 key concepts in each subject/course they teach each year?**

No.

**Do coordinators have to ensure that all 16 key concepts are used somewhere in each year of the programme (horizontal mapping of concepts across the curriculum)?**

No.

**Do teachers have to use each global context in each subject/course they teach each year?**

No.

**Does the subject-group overview have to show that, over the course of the programme, students will have encountered all six global contexts at least once within each subject group?**

No.

**Do subject-group teachers have to use that subject group's focus key concepts every year?**

No, but it would be good practice.

**Do subject-group teachers have to use that subject group's focus key concepts before choosing any other key concepts from which to develop an MYP unit plan?**

No.

**Should subject-group teachers use key concepts that are not that subject group's focus *only* in interdisciplinary units?**

No, teachers can use any key concept to develop a unit.

**Are there limits to the number of key and related concepts that teachers can use to develop a unit?**

No, but it is advisable to choose only one key concept because these ideas are big enough to merit individual consideration. Most teachers find that two or three related concepts provide the right scope for a meaningful inquiry.

**Can teachers use more than one global context in a unit?**

Yes, but most teachers find that one exploration (or one aspect of that exploration) of a single global context provides the most effective means for students to develop contextualized understanding. Global contexts are interconnected by their very nature, so it is natural for them to overlap and to provide related but separate perspectives on many concepts.

**Does the subject-group overview have to show that, over the course of the programme, students will have encountered all six global contexts multiple times within each subject group?**

No.

**Does the school's collection of subject-group overviews have to document that all six global contexts are used in each subject group over the course of the programme (vertical mapping of the global contexts)?**

No. In all these cases, the requirement is that, **over the course of the entire programme as it is implemented in the school**, the written curriculum should include all prescribed key and related concepts and all global contexts.

**Can I add a key concept, related concept or global context to use in my classroom, my school or my group of schools?**

Yes.

**Must all teaching and learning in a school offering the MYP use the prescribed concepts and contexts?**

No, but all MYP courses must use the MYP unit planning process to organize teaching and learning.

**Does *all* teaching and learning in an MYP course have to be organized according to the MYP unit planning process?**

No, but everything that contributes to judgments about student achievement against prescribed MYP criteria must be developed in the context of MYP unit planning. In most cases, however, the written–taught–assessed curriculum as developed in the MYP constitutes all teaching and learning in courses developed by IB World Schools that offer the programme.

**Can non-IB programmes be offered in MYP schools (for example, ROTC or AVID)?**

Yes, so long as all other IB programme requirements are met.

**Must teaching and learning in non-IB programmes in MYP schools be organized according to the MYP unit planning process?**

No, but because the curriculum design principles underlying the MYP are sound and transferrable, the process can be used for courses that are not part of the programme.