

MYP Personal Project: Student Guide

Beginning in 2006-2007, all Middle Years Program (MYP) students must complete a Personal Project in 10th grade. The Personal Project holds a place of special importance in the MYP. When they are completed, the projects will be presented to the school community. A minimum grade of 3 (out of 7) for the Personal Project is necessary for achieving the MYP certificate to be awarded by Myers Park (see assessment below).

What is a Personal Project?

Have you ever wanted to build a musical instrument? Do you have a secret passion to write a play? Now is your chance! The personal project is **your** project to do what **you** want to do, to show the skills you have developed over the years in your subjects and through approaches to learning (ATL), and to apply them to the chosen goal that focuses on dimensions of the area(s) of interaction.

The personal project holds a place of special importance in the MYP, and so it should be clearly focused on an issue or theme closely related to the areas of interaction. Remember, you will be working on this project for an extended period of time, so it needs to be something you **really** want to do.

Whatever type of personal project you decide on, it should:

- have a clear and achievable goal
- be focused on at least one area of interaction
- allow you to express a truly personal message
- be the result of your initiative, creativity and ability to organize and plan
- reflect your special interests, hobbies, special abilities, or concerns about particular issues
- deal with a topic or area to which you are committed
- be entirely your own work—authenticity is very important and you may be required to sign a document stating that the personal project is your own work.

Your project must not:

- be part of any assessed course work
- take over your whole personal and social life, nor interfere with your studies, even though it will involve many hours of work
- be too closely linked to any specific subject.

The Areas of Interaction and the Personal Project

The areas of interaction form the basis of the MYP and should be at the core of the teaching of all subject groups. They contribute to an education resulting in global awareness, international understanding and an appreciation of cultural diversity. There are five areas of interaction: approaches to learning (ATL), community and service,

homo faber, environment and health and social education. Students should become familiar with the aims, objectives and dimensions of each area, and should be able to use them to enhance learning on relevant topics and issues.

The areas of interaction are central to the personal project and must be carefully considered when deciding on the choice of project. When the personal project is first introduced, we will hold an open forum where students can brainstorm ideas about topics. Students must always keep in mind that the aim of the project is not simply to display knowledge; they will apply methods and techniques developed through ATL and illustrate their appreciation of the dimensions of the areas of interaction.

Why Do a Personal Project?

The personal project is a culminating event in your time in the MYP. During this time you will have developed in many ways and learned about the areas of interaction. If you choose the right personal project, it will give you the opportunity to share with others something that is of great interest to you as an individual but that also shows some of what you have learned as a result of being in the MYP.

What Type of Personal Project Can I Do?

Depending on your goal, you might choose one of the following types of projects:

- an original work of art (for example, visual, dramatic or performance)
- a written piece of work on a special topic (for example, literary, social, psychological or anthropological)
- a piece of literary fiction (for example, creative writing)
- an original science experiment
- an invention or specially designed object or system
- the presentation of a developed business, management, or organizational plan, that is, for an entrepreneurial business or project, a special event, or the development of a new student or community organization.

All personal projects must include a structured piece of writing, whatever your overall plan. This piece of writing must follow this structure:

- a title page
- a table of contents
- an introduction, defining the goal of your personal project, describing an explicit focus on chosen area(s) of interaction, and providing an outline of how you intend to achieve the goal
- a description of the process, including production steps, the characteristics, aspects or components of the work
- an analysis of the inspiration, research and influences guiding the work, the findings and decisions made, the resulting product and the process in terms of the goal and its focus on the area(s) of interaction chosen (if you have chosen to write an essay about a specific issue, the essay itself will form the main part of this analysis)

- a conclusion where you will reflect on the impact of your project, and on new perspectives that could be considered
- a bibliography
- appendices, if appropriate.

Your project may involve others (for example, if you are directing a play, organizing an exhibition, or starting a new student/community organization). Remember, however, that your own contribution must be central to the event, and clearly visible. It is **your** work that will be assessed.

How Do I Start?

A **supervisor** will advise you throughout the project, meet you on a regular basis and make sure you complete the various stages of the project according to the deadlines set by your school. Your supervisor need not necessarily be an expert in what you want to do, but will be able to guide and help you as needed. You may decide with your school supervisor to have another person from outside who can give you more expert help.

You will receive information and guidelines (individually and/or in groups) about your school's regulations and advice about the completion of the personal project. You should also receive, read and discuss the assessment criteria for the project. These will be useful as a basis for discussion at different stages of development of the project (this is known as "formative assessment") and will state clearly what is expected of you in the final assessment of the project.

What Steps Should I Follow?

Your study of ATL has prepared you for your personal project. The stages in the development of your personal project will include the following:

- exploring and choosing themes and topics with a clear focus on the dimensions of at least one area of interaction
- planning the project
- gathering the necessary material
- working on the project
- using a process journal or log book effectively
- presenting the outcome (the product and the structured writing).

Investigating and Choosing the Goal and Topic

Any project will involve an important phase of investigation or research. When you are choosing your topic or theme, and the goal of your project and your approach, you must remember that the personal project is your way of demonstrating your understanding of the areas of interaction. You must therefore choose a goal and focus on one or more areas of interaction that will allow you to do this.

You should discuss ideas with different people, both inside and outside the school, to help you to focus on precisely what you are going to do.

It is also important that you have a discussion with your supervisor about your choice to see whether or not your intentions are realistic. This may be the first time you have been asked to do a significant independent investigation. You should realize that your supervisor is not looking for work of university standard. Instead, this is an opportunity for you to demonstrate such things as the approach you are taking, the methods you are using, and your ability to describe and justify a focus on your chosen areas of interaction.

Your topic or theme should not be too general, nor must it be one that would lead you to paraphrase or summarize what you have read in a book, in an encyclopedia, or on the Internet. It should be a topic or theme that you really want to explore, and that will allow you to reflect on and analyze ideas to express a personal point of view.

It is important that you keep the goal of your personal project in mind continuously, although the goal could be modified in the light of experience gained during the process.

Planning the Project

The next part of the process is to plan the steps towards completing your personal project. You should write an outline of your main ideas, guided by a statement of your goal, as discussed with your supervisor. The purpose of the outline is to:

- define the investigation
- help in the choice of appropriate sources and material.

Ask yourself the following questions, which are neither definitive nor exhaustive.

- Where do I find the necessary material?
- Who has information about my topic?
- Do I have to carry out my own experiments?
- Do I need to prepare, circulate and analyze a questionnaire or survey?
- Do I need to go to libraries other than the school library?
- Do I need to visit museums?
- Do I need to interview individuals?

You should write down these questions, and others, along with the answers, as a way of reminding yourself of the variety of potential sources. It is only by looking at a variety of sources that you can make a judgment about their relative usefulness.

After checking with your supervisor that you have investigated all the options, you should make a list of tasks so that you can collect the necessary material. You will need to consider the order of the tasks. Once your list of sources is complete, start gathering the material.

Completing any type of project is not usually a simple process; it may be messy and involve changes in your plans, especially in the developmental stages.

Collecting the Necessary Material

When you have found a source of information or inspiration, you will need to decide how useful it is. The list of sources in your report should only include those you have actually used.

Remember to keep the goal of your project in mind. This will help you to select what is useful and relevant.

Always write down the source of your material. This information will vary according to the type of source consulted.

- A book: record the author(s), title, edition, series, bibliographical address (city, editor and date of publication).
- An interview: record, for example, the name, address and function of the person.
- An experiment: record, for example, the apparatus and the circumstances.
- A work of art: record, for example, the name, artist or other reference (such as the location of a gallery or museum).
- An Internet site: record the address, the name of author and the date of publication.

Other sources can also help you: a book might have a bibliography, mentioning other useful books; the person you interview might have a suggestion to investigate something else; an experiment might lead to other investigations.

Working on the Project

Depending on the nature of your project, you will need to reflect on, analyze, criticize and synthesize the material in a constructive way. You may also have to change your original plans in the light of circumstances or new information. Consult your supervisor regularly.

You must keep a process journal or log book containing all your thoughts, decisions and actions. This is a document that allows you to record your progress as you work on the project. It need not be neat or well presented, but should be completed honestly and regularly to show you how your project is developing. It can be used to show your supervisor the rate and direction of progress being made. It will also guide you as you write your project report.

Presenting the Outcome

Towards the end of the personal project you will need to think carefully about how you should present it. You must always consider your presentation from other people's perspectives: perhaps you and your school will want to exhibit the outcome.

The nature of the presentation will vary depending on the type of personal project. However, all personal projects must include a structured piece of writing. Please refer to the structure described above to guide you in the organization of your content.

Remember that if you have decided to explore a particular issue for your personal project, your structured writing will include a description of your process and your findings as well as your analysis of the issue and your observations and reactions. In that case, the piece of writing will be much longer than the presentation of a creative product or an event, for example.

The personal project must not be longer than 4,000 words.

Useful Ideas

- Always assume that the people who will look at your personal project know little or nothing about the topic.
- Use drawings and pictures only when necessary, for example, if they add to the clarity of the personal project.
- Access to a computer at different stages of the development of the project would be very helpful as you write your personal project, making it easier to edit a draft version and produce a neat, easy-to-read product. In any case, your final structured writing should be typewritten or word-processed, where possible.
- Research examples of personal projects that other students have done and see how they have presented their ideas. Discuss the final structure you propose to use with your supervisor before you start work on it. You could also perhaps ask other students for their opinions. Remember, however, that your personal project is **your** piece of work.

The following assessment criteria have been established by the IBO for the personal project in the MYP. The final assessment required for IBO-validated grades and IBO certification at the end of the MYP must be based on these assessment criteria.

Criterion A: Planning and Development

Maximum level: 4

Students should be aware that it is essential to define a clear goal before starting detailed research and work. A goal can be defined as a statement, or one or more key questions, which identify the focus of the personal project based on one or more areas of interaction. The goal may alter during the course of the personal project but students need to state and explain clearly the reason(s) for a change in goal.

Evidence of students' achievement in this criterion will be found in the introduction, the body of the work and the conclusion.

Criterion B: Collection of Information/Resources

Maximum level: 4

This criterion allows the student to demonstrate the ability to collect relevant information from a variety of sources and to compile a bibliography of sources used in the project. Students should select sufficient information and appropriate resources to substantiate

all arguments and/or to support the project. Students should also acknowledge their sources of information clearly in the body of their text through clear referencing.

Criterion C: Choice and Application of Techniques

Maximum level: 4

This criterion assesses students' abilities to choose techniques relevant to the personal project's goal, as defined by the key questions, or statement of intent of the personal project. Students should justify this selection and apply the chosen techniques consistently and effectively.

Students should choose a goal that is achievable. Because of circumstances that may be beyond their control, students may find unforeseen difficulties prevent successful completion of ambitious projects. These types of ambitious personal project may still result in a good level of achievement for this criterion.

Criterion D: Analysis of Information

Maximum level: 4

This criterion measures students' abilities to analyze information in terms of the personal project's goal and focus on the chosen area(s) of interaction. Students should express personal thoughts and support arguments with evidence.

Criterion E: Organization of the Written Work

Maximum level: 4

This criterion focuses on the presentation of the written work (including title page, contents page and page numbering, overall neatness, the appropriate use of graphs, diagrams and tables, where appropriate). It also assesses the internal structure and coherence of the work.

Criterion F: Analysis of Process and Outcome

Maximum level: 4

Evidence of students' achievement in this criterion will be found in the conclusion and also in the body of the structured piece of writing. Students are expected to describe, and reflect on, the stages of development of the personal project and the thought processes followed. Students should reflect on the ways in which the personal project has fulfilled the initial goal. In this reflection, students should review the ways in which the project has been focused on the chosen area(s) of interaction, and on how dimensions of the area(s) have been explored and developed. Students should attempt to define new perspectives that could be investigated further through future inquiry into the topic/theme. Using their process journals as a prompt for reflection, students will provide comments on such questions as:

- What have been the strengths and the weaknesses of the personal project at different stages of development?
- What would the student do differently next time?

Criterion G: Personal Engagement

Maximum level: 4

This criterion focuses on an overall assessment of students' engagement and application of approaches to learning skills during the planning and development stages of the personal project. Qualities such as organization and commitment to the task should be considered. By their very nature these are difficult to quantify and the assessment should take into account the context in which the personal project was undertaken.

The assessment should also take account of working behaviors such as the amount of encouragement required by students, the interaction between students and supervisors, the attention to deadlines and procedures, as well as the appropriate use of supporting documentation such as log books and process journals.

The levels of achievement awarded should be based on a holistic judgment of the degree to which these qualities and working behaviors are evident in the personal project.

General Grade Descriptors

The generic grade descriptors that illustrate the MYP 1–7 grade scale are stated below. They should be considered as broad descriptions: simpler, more generalized statements about the skills and knowledge mastered by the student. They are not specific to any particular subject group assessment criteria.

The assessment philosophy established for the MYP requires a criterion-referenced approach rather than one that is norm-referenced. Therefore, the inclusion of normative type statements such as “above average” has been avoided. The approach relies on teachers' professional expertise in making qualitative judgments similar to those that they make every day in the classroom.

Grade 1 (Very poor) **Minimal** achievement in terms of the objectives. Grade boundary 0–5.

Grade 2 (Poor) **Very limited** achievement against all the objectives. The student **has difficulty** in understanding the required knowledge and skills, and is **unable** to apply them fully in normal situations, **even with support**. Grade boundary 6–9.

Grade 3 (Mediocre) **Limited** achievement against most of the objectives, or clear difficulties in some areas. The student demonstrates a **limited understanding** of the required knowledge and skills and is **only able to apply** them fully in normal situations **with support**. Grade boundary 10–13.

Grade 4 (Satisfactory) **A good general understanding** of the required knowledge and skills, and the ability to apply them effectively in **normal** situations. There is **occasional** evidence of the skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Grade boundary 14-16.

Grade 5 (Good) **A consistent and thorough understanding** of the required knowledge and skills, and the ability to apply them in a variety of situations. The student **generally** shows evidence of analysis, synthesis and evaluation where appropriate and **occasionally** demonstrates originality and insight. Grade boundary 17-21.

Grade 6 (Very good) A consistent and thorough understanding of the required knowledge and skills, and the ability to apply them in a **wide variety** of situations. There is **consistent** evidence of analysis, synthesis and evaluation where appropriate. The student **generally** demonstrates originality and insight. Grade boundary 22-24.

Grade 7 (Excellent) A consistent and thorough understanding of the required knowledge and skills, and the ability to apply them **almost faultlessly** in a wide variety of situations. There is consistent evidence of analysis, synthesis and evaluation where appropriate. The student **consistently** demonstrates originality and insight and **always** produces **work of high quality**. Grade boundary 25-28.