

## STUDENT TESTIMONIAL

*"I think the key to getting the most out of the IB diploma is to follow your heart's passions."*

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Stephanie Xin Yue Gao received her IB diploma at the Shanghai American School, China. She is pursuing her university studies with interests in literature and critical theory, English, book and media studies, and visual studies.

### Why did you originally decide to pursue an IB Diploma?

I heard a lot about the programme at the end of my sophomore year and thought it was a challenge that could test my physical and intellectual limits. There seemed to be this aura of prestige surrounding IB diploma students, and I wanted to share that feeling. I also viewed the IB diploma as beneficial to university applications—I had wanted to apply to the UK then—and felt that an IB diploma would show my well-roundedness and persistence.

### As an IB student, how did you shape your IB diploma studies to your interests?

Course selection is an integral part of the Diploma Programme – the standard of your IB experience rests mostly on the quality of your courses. I am very interested in English and art, and so I played to my strengths by picking those courses for my higher level courses (HLs). I think the key to getting the most out of the IB diploma is to follow your heart's passions, as clichéd as it sounds because at the toughest times your love for the subject is one of the only things pushing you forward.

I found my English literature class to be an absolute gem, the highlight of my week, and a class I cannot thank enough for all its benefits. I know that not everyone will have the same experience, as I had the luck of being surrounded by likeminded classmates and a teacher who wasn't afraid to let the students take the reins, but even without these components, I feel like the structure of the course was solid enough to provide a fresh perspective and intellectual engagement to any student.

### Who inspired you most as an IB student?

The person who inspired me the most both as an IB student and as an individual, in general, wasn't directly involved in my two-year IB diploma journey. My tenth-grade English teacher used to teach IB English language and literature

and was heavily involved in the IB programme at my school. He was a phenomenal teacher who inspired a love for English in me and gave me a new lens to view the world with, inadvertently leading me to the path I am on today. I used to strongly dislike language arts and English classes. In hindsight, this class was able to give me a pre-IB experience by allowing class discussions in a way reminiscent of theory of knowledge (TOK) and English literature, and by combining bits of theoretical knowledge into captivating bites of introductory philosophy. He was fun, down-to-earth, and critical but never discouraging. The best teachers don't just teach about the subject; they teach about the world in a way that teaches you more about yourself.

Before tenth grade, I felt like I was a balloon with no tether. I was afraid to speak up in class and didn't find any of the texts particularly engaging. I was stressed by pressures from my parents and the looming implications of college applications. My tenth grade English class changed that sullen, frustrated "I don't know" to something more concrete.

### Did you face any obstacles during your education and what advice do you have for current IB students?

Everyone faces obstacles to a certain extent, and I am lucky in that I did not encounter anything major, as a lot of it was me against myself. My friends and family offered great advice and always made me feel better by pointing out that despite the struggle everyone somehow pulled through. One thing I will say, though, is to be proactive. In most cases, the squeakiest wheel gets the oil, and if you don't ask you won't ever know.