

Environmental ethics · supported focus

International Baccalaureate · IB Diploma · Environmental Systems
and Societies · HL

Scope and prerequisites

Supported HL focus. First assessment 2026; current SL/HL brief acquired. Remaining guide, assessment and practical requirements retain their recorded holds.

Prerequisites: read the stated quantities and units, use arithmetic and the model conditions below. Each lesson develops its own method before independent transfer.

These are original or explicitly fictional teaching examples, not actual measurements or completed assessed learner investigations.

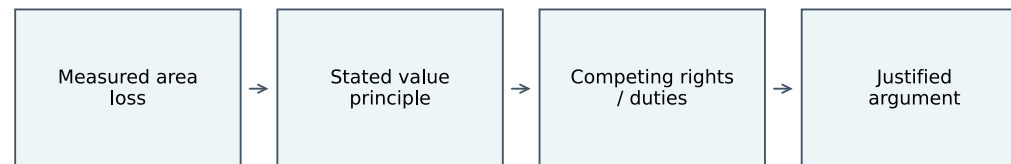
Environmental ethics: make the value judgement explicit

■ What would explain this observation?

- People may agree on the measured loss of a wetland but disagree on whether a development is acceptable. The disagreement can concern values as well as scientific uncertainty.
- Start with a prediction. State the quantities or features you would compare, then decide what evidence could distinguish two explanations.

■ Build the model

- Environmental ethics examines reasons for responsibilities toward people, other organisms and ecological systems. Anthropocentric reasoning emphasizes human interests; biocentric reasoning recognizes moral standing of living organisms; ecocentric reasoning emphasizes ecological wholes. These positions are lenses for analysing arguments, and real individuals can combine them.
- **intrinsic value** : Value considered independent of usefulness to another party; **environmental justice** : Fair treatment in environmental burdens, benefits and decision-making.



■ Choose evidence that can test it

- Separate descriptive claims from normative claims. A species count is evidence about the sampled community; deciding that every species has intrinsic value is a value position. Compare consequences, rights, duties and fairness across generations. A defensible argument states its values, uses accurate evidence and acknowledges competing claims rather than disguising a value choice as a calculation.
- Use a fictional planning dispute or an attributed historical case. Build an argument table: stakeholder, factual claim, evidence, value principle and possible response. Include affected communities and future generations without pretending to speak for them. Use voluntary anonymous classroom positions; assess the reasoning rather than agreement with a preferred worldview.

■ Work from known quantities

- State the known values and their units. Choose the relation because its assumptions fit this case, then rearrange before substitution.
- Known: a wetland proposal affects 12 hectares of a 60-hectare site, or 20%. This quantifies the stated area change. An anthropocentric argument might examine flood protection and livelihoods; a biocentric argument might consider affected organisms; an ecocentric argument might consider hydrological connections. The 20% figure cannot alone decide which ethical argument is strongest.

Example:

A project affects 9 hectares within a 45-hectare site. Calculate the percentage of area affected. Use the same sequence: known quantities → model → relation → substitution → unit and interpretation.

■ Check the conclusion and its limits

- Worldview labels are analytical aids, not fixed stereotypes of cultures or people. Neither a stakeholder majority nor a numerical index automatically resolves a rights-based or intergenerational objection.
- Return to the original observation. Explain what the result supports, which conditions it assumes, and one way to test a competing explanation.

Warn:

A percentage of habitat lost alone settles the ethical acceptability of a development. This claim is false: Worldview labels are analytical aids, not fixed stereotypes of cultures or people. Neither a stakeholder majority nor a numerical index automatically resolves a rights-based or intergenerational objection.

Key:

Environmental ethics: make the value judgement explicit: Separate descriptive claims from normative claims. A species count is evidence about the sampled community; deciding that every species has intrinsic value is a value position. Compare consequences, rights, duties and fairness across generations. A defensible argument states its values, uses accurate evidence and acknowledges competing claims rather than disguising a value choice as a calculation.