

CHINESE A1

Overall grade boundaries

Grade:	E	D	C	B	A
Mark range:	0 - 7	8 - 15	16 - 22	23 - 28	29 - 36

The range and suitability of the work submitted

For the first exam session with the newly introduced guide, the majority of the candidates selected a suitable topic for investigation. These topics were not only appropriate in terms of their nature, as they focused on the literary aspect of the work, but also in terms of the scope, as the aspect was specified and permitted an efficient treatment within the word limit. However, there were some essays which failed to choose an acceptable topic of the subject, as they were not of literature, or covered more than one aspect to deal with.

Of the appropriate topics, they, as in the past, could be divided into three groups, e.g. technical devices, the political or social issues as addressed in the works and character study. Such a variety of choices reflected the different interests of the candidates. Yet they gave the candidates different degrees of intellectual insight and initiative and in some way played a crucial role in determining the final mark of an essay. In general, candidates, who explored a technical device of a work, showed their maturity and thoroughness in literary analysis. However they should remember that technical means employed by the writer never stand alone and they need to dig out the underlying meaning that he/she attempts to convey. In some essays of this group, this has proved a problem in some way and, besides, their personal response was not evident. While it is legitimate to examine a political or social issue in an essay, the primary focus should be on how it is treated literally by the writer. Some candidates in this group tended to forget this in their discussion and turned their essay to be, in some cases, a rather portentous or shallow discussion of a sociological problem. As usual, character analysis, as a topic, was selected by a number of candidates. Most of them explored with care the features of the character under discussion and his/her cultural context and examined the interactions between the character and the social environment. The rest merely described its qualities and social causes. Their approach was mainly narrative and, in some cases, even chronological, and as a result, failed to achieve a high mark especially against criterion K, as the elements required were absent.

As far as the other category, essays with an inappropriate topic, is concerned, those who failed to choose a topic of literary nature is a clear indication of inadequate supervision provided by the schools. Those who attempted to deal with a broad or several issues in their essay could not perform well against the criteria. The rather wide scope inevitably prevented the candidates from producing a sharply focused and in-depth examination. The overall quality of these essays was also affected because of the narrative, insufficient and, in some cases, shallow discussion. As a result, the overall quality of their arguments was hardly beyond satisfactory.

Candidate performance against each criterion

As indicated above, due to the thorough and proper supervision provided in most of the schools, the candidates normally followed closely the official regulations to complete this exercise and displayed in various degrees enthusiasm and personal engagement. Their handling of their respective issues was based on their good understanding of IB's relevant rules and in general appropriate and solid. Yet, the standards were diverse and the marks scored were widely ranged, with a few essays being awarded almost the highest marks possible and some others judged as mediocre. This is due to the reasons given below along the lines of each of the criteria set up by IB.

A: research question

As pointed out in the previous section, the choosing and defining of a proper research question served as the crucial beginning of the whole process. It was apparent that most of the candidates displayed a great deal of awareness of this. They not only selected a specific task for investigation, but also made a clear statement of it in the essay's introduction. Yet quite a number of them were awarded a low mark for this criterion, due to the facts that were mentioned above and the vagueness in their phrasing/formulating the research question.

B: introduction

Again candidates can be divided into three groups with regard to their performance on this criterion. While most of them met the requirement, including the elements needed in this part of their essay, quite a number of them either showed a low level of cautiousness of or totally ignored this, or were unable to provide meaningful information in this regard. They should be clear that to establish the context of the piece of their research, it is important for them to express briefly the reason/significance for their choosing of the topic and its relationship to the existing knowledge if needed.

C: investigation

The majority of candidates were awarded a 3, due to their gathering and employment of relevant and sufficient sources and a proper planning for their research. Yet it was noticeable that their analysis basically involved the primary texts and did not attempt make reference to other related sources, or, if so, not critically. They were, as usual, reluctant to show their personal opinion on or challenge the published criticism. Some of the candidates heavily relied on the data gathered from the Internet and failed to consider its "potential unreliability".

D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

As for criterion C, most of the candidates achieved the same level of performance, as they demonstrated a good knowledge of the primary text(s) and their discussion was thorough and convincing. As stated before, some candidates' performance was judged as inadequate. This was largely caused by their choice of the broad and general/several issues for interrogation. Such a wide coverage made their essay, instead of a systematic investigation, the mere

assortment of sources and a series of loosely connected points without a sharp focus. Another point that is worth noticing here is that, although it is not considered as essential, it would be of help to render a piece of research an extended dimension and place the argument in the relevant the "academic context" by using secondary sources.

E: reasoned argument

As a whole, the candidates' performance on this criterion was rather mixed, from being excellent to very poor. The strong candidates showed the capability to build an argument around the research question and to develop it in a layer upon layer structure. This coherence helped them to reveal their ideas in a convincing and logical fashion. Some of them also made clever use of the established arguments by the critics in the field to support their own views. The weaker ones, in contrast, mainly presented the authors' ideas/themes as revealed in the works and pieced together others' arguments and ideas about the certain authors. As a result, they used the essay writing as the avenue to present others' criticism and the backbone of a developing argument was somehow absent in their essays.

F: application of analytical and evaluative skills appropriate to the subject

In dealing with their respective topic, most of the candidates applied a good level of skills for analysis and evaluation about the material gathered and awarded a 3. There were still a quite big number of them who tended to replace the critical judgment with a narrative approach. Their essays therefore somehow lacked the flair of sharpness and persuasiveness.

G: use of language appropriate to the subject

This has always been the area in which candidates display their strength. This session was no exception, as most of the candidates showed their confidence in communication and chose an appropriate register for literary discussion. Yet, there were a number of them who were struggling to use the language correctly and fluently in a consistent manner and some of the terminologies used lacked precision and clarity. In some other essays, typos and other errors occurred here and there and as a result, the overall flow of their arguments was affected.

H: conclusion

The key to score well for this criterion is the conclusive statement to be relevant to the research question and consistent with the evidence presented in the essay. While some candidates failed to incorporate a conclusion at the end of discussion, those, who followed the rule, provided an effective conclusion in light of the investigation, and some of them even include an unresolved question which was relevant to the topic. Yet, there were a large number of candidates who were just able to rephrase the points given in the introduction.

I: formal presentation

In general, candidates achieved a relatively good mark, as they met the official requests regarding the word limit, provision of references/bibliography and other elements. Their essays were constructed in accordance with the convention of formal writing and composed of the introduction, main body and conclusion, with a clear heading for each section. Some essays were given a zero under this criterion, as they exceeded the word limit rather excessively.

J: abstract

Many candidates failed to obtain a good mark on this criterion, as they either failed to include the required three elements, especially that of the conclusion, or did not make a clear statement about them.

K: holistic judgment

As indicated earlier, to produce a successful extended essay with those qualities as required for this criterion, candidates must first of all choose an appropriate and stimulating topic for investigation. Such a choice will not only give them the room for displaying their intellectual initiative, depth of understanding and insight, but also allow them to execute it effectively within the word limit. This session, the strong candidates selected a topic which offered them the opportunity to show their pace and helped them to gain a 3 or even a 4 for this criterion. In contrast, a big number of the weak ones selected a routine topic which was well worn, such as character analysis, and gave them a limited chance to show their insight and inventiveness. In particular, their narration of the texts also prevented them from demonstrating personal engagement and in-depth critical thinking.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

In accordance with the issues that have been raised above, the following suggestions may be made with regard to the future supervision of the writing of extended essays.

Schools should understand well the aims and objectives of this exercise and pay close attention to each of the general rules of the extended essay, in order to assist candidates to prepare for such a research process.

Supervisors should first of all give candidates advice on how to select the appropriate subject/topic and to formulate a manageable research question. Such a selection should present an opportunity for students to engage in an in-depth study of the topic, reflect their personal interest and allow them to display their personal insight into it. A routine or a broad topic is unlikely to enable them to produce a successful essay. Their research question should also be stated clearly at the beginning of the essay and involve the literary discussion of the work(s). A mere analysis of the social or political aspects as addressed in the work(s), or a general as well as narrative approach, cannot be regarded as appropriate.

During the discussion, candidates should develop an argument. They should also learn to analyse, synthesize and evaluate the information gathered in relation to the question and

display the qualities of critical thinking and personal engagement. Where appropriate and necessary, they should make use of secondary sources in their essays and give a clear indication of their origins where the citing occurs. Such an inclusion of the research results by some of the experts in the field would broaden their view on the topic concerned and give their essay some depth. When dealing with the material taken from the Internet, they should do with caution.

In providing an abstract, they should focus on these required elements, including the conclusion. Their conclusion should be drawn on the basis of the previous discussion and relevant to the research question. To paraphrase what has been said in the introduction will not be attributed to an effective conclusion. In order to demonstrate the academic significance of their research, candidates may also give a clear indication, where available, of the unresolved problems, as well as some new issues which have emerged from the studies and might have some significance for future research.

Last but not least; please observe the official requirement concerning the word limit. A longer essay does not mean a better one.