

ENGLISH A

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

Of the 760 essays submitted, approximately six per cent were Category 3 titles: whilst this is an encouraging start for the first November session of the new programme, centres might wish to look again at the opportunity offered to their candidates to write on linguistic, cultural or media subjects.

There appeared to be overall parity in the performance of candidates in Category 1 and 2, or Category 3 essays – there were some outstanding, and at the other end of the scale, some poorly constructed and argued topics. Very low scores tended to reflect the choice of an inappropriate or unworkable topic as much as a lack of effort or a poor grasp of what was required.

Some very detailed supervisors' reports were submitted, containing a lot of useful information for the examiner. There appeared to be a real and growing appreciation amongst supervisors of the importance of these for a holistic appreciation and history of the essay. There were virtually no blank or incomplete reports in evidence and levels of contact time recorded were also, for the most part, appropriate.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: research question

There were some original and enterprising choices of topics and texts, including essays on the function of place in Tim Winton's *The Riders*; postmodernist features in the poetry of Brian Patten; the portrayal of loss in selected poems from Carol Ann Duffy's *Rapture*; and the significance of belonging in Captain Corelli's *Mandolin*. Other topics successfully explored were novels about young people by Roddy Doyle; the primary influences on the poetry of

James K. Baxter; and one candidate offered an inversion of the dramatic function of victim and perpetrator in Ariel Dorfman's *Death and the Maiden*. Very clearly worded and focused research questions were often the most effective; these included "How does Oscar Wilde explore the power of suggestion in his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*?" and "To what extent can E.E. Cummings be considered childlike in his poetic vision and use of language?" Successful Category 3 essays included an exploration of how motivation is achieved using public speaking techniques in state-of-the-art speeches with different contexts - in this instance Steve Jobs' Stanford University graduation commencement ceremony speech (2005) and Martin Luther King's *I Have a Dream* discourse (1963) - and an analysis of rhetorical and propaganda techniques used in the songs of the Anti-Vietnam war movement.

Areas of investigation which would have benefited from a more refined research question included a comparison between Ernest Hemingway and Scott Fitzgerald (Category 1) and a discussion of whether culture affects the English Language (Category 3). Examples of topics which were clearly too broad to be handled effectively included "Female characters in 19th Century Literature" (Category 1) and "The history of advertising: how has advertising changed throughout time?" (Category 3).

The choice of texts for Category 2 essays was also often problematic; one examiner observed that "It is the symbiotic possibility of exploring how one text may illuminate another, or how when considered in tandem the texts throw light on an issue, that should be being seized - rather than simply putting superficial descriptions of the two texts side by side." When the research question is expressed in the form of a statement there is a tendency for this to be taken as a given, rather than critically examined and evaluated - in the words of another examiner, "essays which begin in this way seek to prove rather than probe, to draw conclusions rather than explore alternatives."

Criterion B: introduction

Introductions were varied, ranging from virtual repetitions of the abstract to helpful historical/cultural contexts.

Criterion C: investigation

The best investigations were largely focused on the primary text, were well planned and had good reference to secondary source material. As was noted in the May 2013 report, there needs to be a balance struck between effective use of primary and secondary source material - the candidate's own voice needs to be heard, as opposed to merely reciting critical opinion.

Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

The rubric in the Extended Essay Guide is quite clear that essays in all categories must be text-based. In one case, in answering the research question not one single text was mentioned nor offered up for discussion. Having said that, knowledge and understanding of the chosen text(s) was quite impressive in most cases, with lots of personal engagement in evidence.

Criterion E: reasoned argument

One examiner felt that critical essays had been pillaged for sound-bites, rather than studied as cases of how to develop arguments or debate the points of view of others. Examiners enjoy the opportunity to encounter an essay which, however old and well-trod the argument, presents a fresh ownership and force through an informed choice of new examples and illustrations. The most frequent shortcoming noted by examiners was the substitution of narrative, descriptive or plot paraphrase for analysis: papers which were assertive rather than illustrative, narrative rather than analytical or vague rather than clear tended not to present their ideas in a logical and coherent manner.

Criterion F: application of analytical and evaluative skills

The second issue about which examiners felt strongly was that second-hand interpretations and collages of critical opinions cannot replace personal interpretation and engagement. As noted above, too many students relied on the analysis and interpretations of critics instead of doing their own analysis and making their own judgements – and very few challenged the interpretations of a critic. The best candidates, however, never stopped evaluating and analyzing.

Criterion G: use of language appropriate to the subject:

Students almost always wrote in an appropriate register and the language usually communicated clearly. Many of the papers showed a sophisticated use of literary terms.

Criterion H: conclusion

Too often a resumé or indeed a restatement of the introduction, conclusions rarely offered a new synthesis. Very few candidates managed to produce a conclusion that did more than sum up what had already been stated.

Criterion I: formal presentation

Examiners were unanimous in their view that, in addition to the subject-specific pages of the Extended Essay Guide, the general advice to candidates and supervisors on presentation and the constituent parts of the essay would repay re-reading. Many presentational issues were still in evidence - lack of page numbers, contents pages - all of which lost valuable

marks and could have been rectified with the minimum of effort. Referencing needs consistency of approach or methodology. There was a marked increase in the number of candidates opting to sub-divide the essay into chapters; whilst this is often an appropriate approach for Category 3 essays, it can tend to fragment, or even impede, the argument for essays submitted in Categories 1 and 2. Indeed, another examiner commented that the headings were arbitrary - or for the convenience of the 'Table of Contents' – rather than the efficient flow of the essay. Finally, it was clear that many candidates had omitted to carefully, and with pride, read through finished work which after all, had been done over time and should be crafted using all resources and care possible.

Criterion J: abstract

Students still encounter difficulties with the purpose of the abstract and a few failed to heed the word limit.

Criterion K: holistic judgement

Many essays were intellectually acute and original, and convinced the reader of their seriousness by demonstrating a 'voice' and a literary vision. These scored highly under this criterion.

Administrative issues and recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

Supervisors should take a more pro-active role in advising their candidates about the choice and wording of the research question. Teachers should realise and tell their students that primary sources are more important than the secondary sources consulted. Use of secondary source material needs to be more discriminating. Teachers need to teach the differences between description and analysis. Proof reading should also be encouraged - there was a needless loss of marks for those who were inattentive to what they had written. Conventions of effective presentation and referencing need to be reinforced by centres. Candidates should be reminded to label their papers as Category 1, 2 or 3.