

ENGLISH B

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

The new criteria in many cases seem to have clarified many of the grey areas inherent in the former guide. The subject matter this session covered a wide range of topics, yet Category 3 literary topics seemed the slightly more popular choice. Marks represented the full range from excellent to elementary, though overall there were far fewer essays of “elementary standard” than in past sessions. There are still, however, a fair number of inappropriate topics being submitted, which severely limits mark awards. The academic register of the majority of essays was generally quite appropriate. Nonetheless, there is still a tendency for candidates who take on topics for which they are particularly enthusiastic to sometimes confuse their passion and an informal personal style for academic rigour.

There were few pure Category 1 essays submitted. The most successful of these focused purposefully on a particular language use like a comparison of rhetoric in a pair of speeches, or an analysis of feminist language in teen magazines to give just two examples. Linguistic studies on the whole could be better exploited.

Category 2 essays varied in quality often depending on how clearly these aligned with the descriptions provided in the *Extended essay Guide*. Category 2a essays, though not particularly popular, i.e. socio-cultural in nature with an impact on the language, tended to be broad in approach and often lacked emphasis on the impact of the language. Surveys to determine the nature of language use were rarely successful due to broad even irrelevant question design and the lack of adequate socio-linguistic analysis. In this subject area some candidates chose to study the impact of English on the candidate’s native language in various ways. This is often a difficult approach to organize properly. The most successful of these tended to be very focused on specific language elements and gave proper emphasis to the impact of English rather than lapsing into a broad description of some loosely related aspects of the native language.

The category that has been affected most by the changes in the new guide is perhaps Category 2b, essays of a general cultural nature based on specific cultural artefacts. The advantage of this approach is that it avoids topics that are too broad or that could apply to any culture rather than focusing specifically these topics as seen in the English-speaking world. This is often a problem with some subjects like advertising, or body image, or in a broader cultural context like the effects of globalization or the fight against aids. Artefacts or cultural icons may be thought of as symbols of the culture. An essay on advertising might target a specific advertising campaign that in some way reflects the culture of a community. One example was how images in early 20th century advertising of company X reflected the

mainstream racism of the time. Other artefacts might include films, TV programs, themes in popular music, and documents such as laws or government policies, niche magazines, works of art or other similar objects that symbolize some aspect of the culture. The most successful essays in this category used specific objects purposefully to reflect some attitude or value within the culture. Unfortunately, a number of essays remained too broad in approach without focusing on a specific symbol or artefact.

In Category 3, many candidates choose classic or popular texts that have been written about extensively (e.g. *Romeo & Juliet*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *1984*, *Catcher in the Rye*), which in itself is not a problem; however, these often had little fresh insight to add to the corpus of knowledge on the work. Some candidates showed little awareness of current interpretations. Though nearly all the literary topics were relevant and treated appropriate works, the weaker essays tended towards plot or character description with not much in the way of focused argument. Category 3 essays should concentrate on the literary analysis avoiding bibliographic information or the feelings of the author as this becomes highly speculative and misses the point of this category.

Candidate performance against each criterion

A: research question

The majority included the RQ appropriately in the introduction or early in the essay. Some essays included several questions, or stated the question in the very broadest of terms. It is important that a sharply focused RQ clearly fit one of the category descriptions (*Extended essay guide* pages 39-43). It would be very useful for candidates to explicitly identify to which category the RQ is related either on the title page, or within the introduction.

Proper treatment of film presented a problem. Film can be considered a cultural artefact when the film(s) reveals a particular socio-cultural attitude or phenomenon. If the film is being analyzed under Category 3, the film script or screenplay should be treated as any other literary text.

B: introduction

A number of candidates successfully integrated the research question, pertinent background for the question, and a sense of the significance of the subject under investigation. In some cases, however, the introduction merely mirrored the abstract or explained the candidate's personal connection to the subject rather than presenting the academic context of the investigation.

C: investigation

The best essays made good use of secondary sources to support their arguments. In literary topics, the primary text remains central, but good essays showed awareness of conventional thinking on the subject while the best challenged such thinking.

D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

Full marks were not the norm here. Candidates often quoted relevant information but did not always develop their own thoughts sufficiently to show a thorough understanding of the material.

E: reasoned argument

Poorly phrased RQ's had difficulty achieving high marks in this criterion. Inclusion of interesting but largely irrelevant information also lowered achievement. The best essays had a clear sense of purpose in logically revealing the thesis of the investigation. In the case of literature, merely narrating plot does not constitute an argument.

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

The highest marks were awarded to essays that integrated quotations from the primary texts with appropriate context and explanation. Candidates should not adopt a style of leading with a quote followed by a paraphrase instead of interpretation/analysis. Frequently very interesting arguments lacked proper supportive evidence.

G: use of language appropriate to the subject

The general level of language use in the majority of essays was impressive. A few candidates would do well to edit their work more carefully. Improvements could also be made in using proper terminology for a given subject. Knowledge of appropriate literary terms, for example, would be rewarded. Cultural topics, for example in the media or fine arts, also use specific vocabulary common to the subject.

H: conclusion

This was an area of general weakness this session. Though many of the conclusions were at least consistent with the information presented, too many essays merely restated the main points without synthesis or further consideration.

I: formal presentation

Overall, the presentation of essays has improved steadily often containing headings and sub-headings that improve organization. Nonetheless, there are a few persistent misconceptions to address.

The Table of Contents should be an outline of the major sections, which match the section titles within the essay. Merely listing "introduction, body, conclusion" is of no help whatever to the reader and should be avoided.

Quotations should contain proper quotation marks and should be relevant to the point being made. Excessive reliance on long tracks of text is not effective or desirable.

The Works Cited page (in bibliographic format) and reference formats must be consistent. There are many sites to assist candidates and it is best to choose one style to use throughout the essay. Also, candidates should only include materials that have been cited in the essay on the Works Cited page. Other books that may have been consulted and influenced ideas but are not cited should be acknowledged in the introduction.

J: abstract

This requirement is still not well understood; abstracts often included introductory material. The best abstracts succinctly summarized the essay using the three relevant factors; the research question, the scope or how the question was dealt with, and the conclusions reached. The abstract should be placed after the title page. It is not part of the body and need not be included in the TOC.

K: holistic judgment

Too many supervisors continue to leave the supervisor's comment section of the coversheet blank. This makes the application of criterion K far more subjective for examiners. Reference to the essay process and significant outcomes of the viva voce would be useful as well.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

- Supervisors and candidates must review the assessment criteria together and consult the OCC for pertinent documents such as the most recent subject report.
- Consultation with librarians on preferred styles and sites to use for generating bibliographies/works cited pages and footnotes or in text references is encouraged.
- Supervisors also would do well to spend a good deal of time on the choice of RQ. The supervisor should intervene early on especially if a candidate seems to be headed toward a potentially poor or failing essay. The EE is an independent investigation, but this does not mean the process is not without some close guidance.
- Supervisors should encourage students to take fresh looks at classic or popular texts. Better yet, encourage candidates to analyze less popular texts that give more room for innovative approaches and more original interpretations.
- The use of surveys as the main data source in language or culture topics does not usually form the basis for an effective essay. Alternative sources of information should also be used.
- Though IB does not specify any one format, schools should choose a standard format, for example, MLA or APA, to be used in all Group 2 essays.

Further comments

The new criteria often resulted in slightly higher marks for mediocre essays as examiners went to great pains to mark each criterion on its own merits thus avoiding double penalties for

candidates. The overall achievement level this year was slightly higher than in previous sessions. Generally, examiners seem to regard the new guidelines for the extended essay as a welcome improvement that fairly assesses candidates' efforts.