

ENGLISH B

This is a supplementary report following the May 2010 session and should be read in conjunction with the May 2009 extended essay report.

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

Marks this session represented the full range from excellent to elementary with a healthy percentage of essays achieving excellent or good and demonstrating solid knowledge of the investigative process. Nonetheless, candidates continue to submit a good number of inappropriate topics or topics with a poor approach or development that severely limits the awarding of high marks in a number of criteria. This seems to indicate less than satisfactory guidance in the early stages of the essay process. Far too often the less successful essays took the form of a descriptive report rather than an investigation that allows for development of an argument. Many essays were not well suited to any of the prescribed categories, which indicates a need for greater familiarity of the basic criteria laid out in the Extended Essay Guide. Essays that were clearly framed within a category often exhibited a more successful focused approach to the RQ.

Category 3 literary topics appeared noticeably more often than Category 1 and 2 topics. There were many strong essays treated a large variety of novels and plays appropriately. Many of the most successful essays focused on the development of one or more characters within one work or compared characters or themes in two works of a similar nature. Weaker essays dealt superficially with plot or character description with not much in the way of focused argument. Film or television programs presented a challenge when submitted as Category 3 essays unless the screenplay or script becomes the primary source for analysis. Comparing a novel with its film version nearly always proved less than successful.

Category 2b, essays of a general cultural nature, were popular though problematic in that many failed to focus on the required “artefact” to illustrate the research question. Just as anthropologists might draw conclusions about the values of a society based on the objects they find, so too should an extended essay use particular documents, works of art, cultural icons and so on to illustrate concretely the values and trends of the society investigated. In some cases, failed to adhere to the requirement that topics must be limited to Anglophone culture.

There were few Category 2a topics dealing with the cultural impact of language. Media topics such as “How do adverts use language to persuade consumers?” tended to be broadly connected to media in general with little or any focus on the target language or culture. More successful topics tended to be specifically targeted on adverts that clearly reflect a society’s

attitude toward an issue. For example, one candidate illustrated the changing attitude toward British women's image through recent Nivea and Dove campaigns launched in the UK.

There were very few Category 1 essays submitted. One topic compared the language use by Sarah Palin and the Tea Party Movement with that of the government (Obama) on the issue of national health care in the US. There are many more possibilities in the Category 1 area that could be explored and that could serve many candidates well given the natural focus of general linguistic analysis and semantics. The academic register of the majority of essays was generally appropriate.

Candidate performance against each criterion

A: research question

Most candidates included the RQ appropriately in the introduction. 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. RQ's that merely elicit a yes/no response or simply present an unsubstantiated opinion tend not to be successful. Proper treatment of film in particular presented a problem. Film may be considered a cultural artefact in category 2 only when the film(s) reveals a particular socio-cultural attitude or phenomenon. Guidance on how to write on film in such cases would be most helpful. If the film is being analyzed under Category 3, the film script or screenplay must be employed as the literary text. There should be consistency of topic in the title, the RQ in the abstract, and in the introduction.

B: introduction

A number of candidates successfully integrated the research question, pertinent background for the question, and a sense of the worth/significance of the topic 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. Clear references should be given if a theoretical framework is being employed.

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 modern thinking on the subject while the best challenged such thinking. Too many essays rely almost entirely on web sources. Candidates and supervisors are reminded to evaluate the reliability of all sources especially those from the web and to endeavour to use a variety of sources.

D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

Though most candidates seem to have a basic knowledge of the subject, full marks were not the norm here often because of the limited range of sources. Candidates often quoted relevant information but did not always develop their own thoughts sufficiently to show a thorough understanding of the material. Some essays contained large amounts of unsourced material that undermines the impression of 'knowledge'.

E: reasoned argument

Having a worthy argument is key to a successful extended essay. 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 smoothly integrated evidence from primary texts and where appropriate from secondary texts with insightful explanation. Merely paraphrasing or summarizing sources does not suffice. At times, very interesting arguments lacked relevant supporting evidence and thus were not rewarded under this criterion. Literature based essays must use textual evidence to forward the argument. The best essays were well organized into logical headings and subheadings allowing for clearly focused treatment.

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 proofread 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. Candidates should try to remain clear and genuine rather than try to impress with overly embellished prose.

H: conclusion

This is an area of general weakness noted by many examiners. Though many of the conclusions were at least consistent with the information presented, too many essays merely restated the main points without synthesis or thoughtful consideration. Candidates should be reminded that the conclusion is not the place to present new ideas not already considered earlier in the essay.

I: formal presentation

Overall, the general presentation of essays continues to improve, often containing headings and sub-headings that enhance organization. Nonetheless, there are a few sections which

need some attention.

- The Table of Contents should essentially be an outline of the major sections that match the section titles within the essay. Merely listing “introduction, body, conclusion” is of no help whatever to the reader and should be avoided. The contents of any appendix should also be noted here. Adding an appendix without references to it within the essay is quite common.
- Quotations should contain proper quotation marks and should be relevant to the point being made. Excessive reliance on long tracks of text is neither effective nor desirable.
- The Works Cited page (in bibliographic format) and reference formats must be consistent. There are many sites to assist candidates and it is imperative to choose one style to use throughout the essay. 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. With all the sources currently available from libraries and the web, there is really no need for poor citation or bibliographic form.

J: abstract

While many essays presented clear abstracts, this requirement is still not well understood; examiners noted that a number of abstracts often included purely introductory material. The best abstracts succinctly summarize the essay using three relevant areas; the research question, the scope or how the question was dealt with, and the conclusions reached. These should be presented in a straightforward manner. The abstract should be placed after the title page. It is not part of the body of the essay and need not be included in the TOC.

K: holistic judgment

Few candidates received top marks in this criteria. Too many supervisors continue to leave the supervisor’s comment section of the coversheet blank or make inappropriate comments of a personal nature. This makes the application of criterion K far more difficult for examiners to determine and often leaves a poor impression. Reference to the essay process and significant outcomes of the viva voce are useful. Supervisors should refrain from evaluating the essay itself.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

Supervisors and candidates are strongly advised review the assessment criteria together and consult the OCC for pertinent documents such as the most recent subject reports. (see Further Comments)

Consultation with librarians on preferred styles and sites for generating bibliographies/works cited pages and footnotes or in text references is encouraged. Though the IB does not specify any one format, schools should consider adopting a standard format, for example, MLA or APA, for all Group 2 essays.

Candidates would do well to explicitly indicate to which category the RQ belongs either on the

EE cover or in the introduction.

Supervisors should encourage students to take fresh looks at classic or popular texts e.g. *Pride and Prejudice*, *1984*, *Catcher in the Rye*, *Lord of the Rings*. Better yet, encourage candidates to analyze less popular texts that give more room for innovative approaches and more original interpretations. A film script or screen play text may be considered literature though generally comparing a film with a novel should be avoided.

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.

Also, as an academic source, Wikipedia is often suspect and should be used judiciously if at all.

Further comments

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 pointed guidance. Candidates must be made aware of the possible global or non-culture-specific nature of certain topics (eg advertising, climate change, abuse of drugs or alcohol), where much of the material could be applicable to any culture. The consideration of an appropriate artefact will focus the essay properly and lead to a more satisfying investigation.

Although a lack of academic resources may be a serious drawback, candidates and supervisors need to be reminded that on its own this is not an adequate excuse for submitting mediocre work. It would be better to alter the RQ.