

## GERMAN 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

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

### The range and suitability of the work submitted

This session the subject matter of the Extended Essays covered a wide range of topics and was spread over all three categories, with perhaps a predominance of Category 3 literary topics. Marks represented the full range from excellent to elementary, but on the whole the quality of essays has improved, compared to previous years.

There were few pure Category 1 essays submitted. Popular choices were ‘Jugendsprache’ and ‘Der Einfluss des Englischen auf die deutsche Sprache’, as was the case in previous years. These essays varied in quality – the topic is a complex one, and weaker students tend to remain purely descriptive.

Category 2 essays also varied, often depending on how the focus and topic were chosen. Surveys to determine the nature of language use were not always successful, due to broad, even irrelevant question design and the lack of analysis. Category 2b essays, however, tended to be varied and often interesting. One caveat: the analysis of lyrics is not as easy as it may seem and although German ‘Rap’ is an attractive development, the material needs to be chosen very carefully. I really enjoyed one essay on German Cultural Artifacts in Latin America – the detailed description of beer mugs and antlers in second-generation immigrant homes was followed by a focused and clear analysis of that culture and a comparison to Germany. A worrying number of candidates chose to write on the musical version of ‘Spring Awakening’, which is NOT German, and has extremely limited lyrics. Only one candidate managed to link this to the ‘Verfremdungseffekt’ of setting the play to music, and submitted a successful piece of work.

In Category 3, many candidates chose classic or popular texts. This is problematic when no knowledge of secondary texts is evident; although secondary study is not formally required, superficial and bland comments on the material cannot score very highly. Conversely, the analysis of primary texts was sometimes less dominant than the summary of secondary sources, which was also unsuccessful. Some essay topics were based on texts that were not originally written in German, e.g. ‘Die Welle’.

## Candidate performance against each criterion

### **A: research question**

The majority of candidates included the research question appropriately in the introduction. However, not all candidates managed this, and it is important to refer to the category descriptions (Extended Essay Guide pp 39-43). A clearly focused research question usually led towards a clearly structured essay, so special care needs to be taken.

### **B: introduction**

A number of candidates successfully integrated the research question; stronger students often seemed to enjoy giving a context to their question and made it clear why their investigation was interesting. In some cases, however, the introduction merely repeated the abstract, or explained the candidate's personal connection to the subject, rather than giving academic context.

### **C: investigation**

The best essays made good use of secondary sources to support their arguments. All essays showed evidence of planning, even though some included chapters lacking relevance to the argument. In literary essays sources were dealt with relatively competently, both primary and secondary ones, but in Category 1 and 2 this seemed to be more of a challenge.

### **D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied**

Some candidates showed thorough awareness of their topic and used the Extended Essay to deepen their understanding of an aspect of German culture or literature that was of interest to them. Others, however, failed to go beyond a superficial awareness and had obviously not thought very deeply about their subject.

### **E: reasoned argument**

Poorly phrased research questions rarely achieved high marks in this criterion. Stronger essays, however, stayed focused and presented coherent and convincing arguments with pertinent points made. In the case of literature, merely narrating plot does not constitute an argument.

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

In Category 1 essays the analysis and evaluation often proved to be a challenge – candidates had enthusiastically gathered material but then seemed at a loss as to what to do with it. Literary features, on the other hand, were often analysed competently, even if in some cases quotations were paraphrased instead.

**G: use of language appropriate to the subject**

The general level of German contributed to the clarity of the essays, though weaknesses in technical terminology, or occasionally its absence, could be observed in a number of essays, even if they were stronger in other criteria. Some candidates seemed to struggle with complex German, so that their insights were hampered by unclear articulation. However, teachers need to be commended on encouraging students to follow their inclination and their passion, regardless of linguistic perfection.

**I: formal presentation**

Overall, the presentation of the essays has improved steadily over the years. However, a few points should be repeated:

The 'Table of Contents' should be an outline of the major sections, which match the section titles within the essay. Merely listing 'Einleitung, Hauptteil, Bibliographie' should be avoided.

Quotations should contain proper quotation marks and should be relevant to the point being made. 'Decorative' quotes are a waste of space.

The bibliography must be consistent in its reference formats. There is ample help with this available, even within the EE guide itself. It also makes sense to structure a bibliography into different text types, and not list everything in one big jumble.

**J: abstract**

This requirement is not always understood; abstracts sometimes included introductory material. The best abstracts succinctly summarized the essay using the three relevant factors (research question, scope, conclusions reached).

**K: holistic judgment**

The stronger essays showed a clear commitment and interest. However, too many supervisors leave the comment section of the coversheet blank, which makes the application of the criterion rather subjective for examiners. Some comment on challenges overcome, and perhaps the outcome of the viva voce would be welcome.

**Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates**

I would encourage supervisors to spend a good deal of time on the choice of research question. Early intervention is recommended, if the candidate seems to be heading into a dead end. Part of starting off the process should be a detailed review of the assessment criteria, in which the supervisor should refer to the subject report, and also perhaps previous examples of both good and bad practice. Candidates are often writing this kind of research essay for the very first time in their career and must not be left groping in the dark. Although this is an independent investigation, there can still be some close guidance.

Supervisors might encourage candidates to write on topics of personal interest, when appropriate, and also to analyze less popular texts for Category 3 essays, as these give more room for innovative approaches and more original interpretations.

One word of warning: although surveys can make an interesting addition to an EE, they rarely form the basis for an effective essay. They also take up a huge amount of time to devise, and don't always produce the desired results.

Finally, all students should be made aware of the requirements and conventions of formal academic written work – in some schools this is a task undertaken by the librarian. Referencing etc. has to be consistent – and this is a vital skill to learn in preparation for university studies.

## Further comments

On the whole, candidates in this session produced interesting and varied essays that showed inspiration and creativity. As an examiner, one learns about such a variety of fields and topics previously unknown, that this component really is one to look forward to. However, in conclusion it should be repeated and emphasized, that candidates are rarely familiar with this kind of task, and need close guidance in order to do well. I would like to encourage teachers to present the EE as an opportunity, not a chore.