

German B

This is a supplementary report following the May 2011 session and should be read in conjunction with the full May 2009 subject report and any subsequent reports.

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

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 was on a similarly high level to last year.

There were few Category 1 essays submitted. Popular choices were 'Deutscher Rap' and varieties of the influence of the English Language on German, 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 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. A couple of essays were mainly descriptive, and it was obvious that the candidate's interest in the lyrics had not led on to an analytical reflection.

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. However, this session all essays were based on works written originally in German, which is a step forward.

Teachers should be encouraged to allow students to investigate a topic of interest in a Group 2 essay, even if the language skills are not quite up to 'native' academic standard. However, at the same time these students must be guided towards topics that are within their linguistic capability, as they still need to express complex ideas, and also research secondary material.

Candidate performance against each criterion

A: Research question

The majority of candidates included the research question appropriately in the introduction. A clearly focused research question usually led towards a clearly structured essay, so special care needs to be taken in formulating a precise question.

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.

H: Conclusion

No comment given

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. Quotations should contain proper quotation marks and should be relevant to the point being made. The bibliography must be consistent in its reference formats. There is ample help with this available, even within the EE guide itself.

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, how the investigation was undertaken, conclusions reached).

K: Holistic judgment

The stronger essays showed a clear commitment and interest. However, a few supervisors still leave the comment section of the coversheet blank, which makes the application of the criterion more difficult for examiners.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

Supervisors should spend a good deal of time helping candidates with the choice of research question. Early intervention is recommended, especially if the candidate seems to be heading into a dead end area. 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. It is also most helpful for candidates to be given past successful essays in their category to model their approach on. 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. 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 do not 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.