

GERMAN B

Overall grade boundaries

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

General comments

Most extended essays were submitted on time and paperwork was generally filled in correctly. Teacher's comments in the supervisor's report were useful, but there were a few essays without any comments whatsoever which makes Criterion K difficult to award. In one or two cases teachers had filled in the examiner grid. Supervisors must provide a predicted grade but they should not mark or write comments on the final essay that is submitted to the examiner. Abstracts are not necessarily familiar to all German teachers, and in a few cases the abstract was missing altogether. However, careful reading of the *Extended essay guide* should provide all the necessary help, and samples of good practice are available as IB publications.

The range and suitability of the work submitted

In 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 2 topics. Marks represented the full range, from excellent to elementary, but on the whole the quality of essays was encouraging, continuing the positive development in previous years.

There were few pure Category 1 essays submitted. Popular choices were "Schweizerdeutsch" and "Der Einfluss des Englischen auf die deutsche Sprache", as was the case in previous years. These essays varied in quality; the topics are complex, and the essays of weaker students tended to remain purely descriptive.

Category 2 essays also varied, often depending on how the focus and topic were chosen. For Category 2A, surveys to determine the nature of language use were not always successful due to broad, even irrelevant, question design and a lack of analysis, but "Schweizerdeutsch und die Identitätsfrage" and "Sexismus und das Binnen-I" were relevant and interesting essays, showing involvement and insight. "Performance Sprache – Verbreitung und Auswirkung von Anglizismen in der deutschen Werbesprache" was an example of a successful and focused essay in this category, but there were also titles such as "Anglizismen in der deutschen Sprache", which was far too vague. Category 2B essays, as usual, tended to be varied and often interesting. As an example, there were some essays which focused on the integration of Turkish immigrants in German society based on Fatih Akin's films, and there were also a couple based on films such as 'Goodbye Lenin' or 'Das Leben der Anderen'.

In Category 3, many candidates chose classic or popular texts. This can be problematic when no knowledge of secondary texts is evident. Although secondary text 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. This year it was gratifying to see that there were no essays based on texts not originally written in German, and only a couple of comparisons between German and translated texts. These latter essays are only allowed in Group 1.

Candidate performance against each criterion

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 also important to refer to the category descriptions (*Extended essay guide* pp. 39-43). A clearly focused research question usually leads towards a clearly structured essay, so special care needs to be taken. There was also a worrying number of essays in Category 2B of a quite general nature and not based on a cultural artifact as required. This means that limited marks are awarded for Criterion A, C, D and E, which affects the final grade significantly.

Criterion B: introduction

A number of candidates successfully integrated the research question. Stronger candidates 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.

Criterion 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 both primary and secondary sources were dealt with relatively competently, but in Category 1 and Category 2 this seemed to be more of a challenge.

Criterion 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.

Criterion 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 the plot does not constitute an argument.

Criterion F: application of analytical and evaluative skills

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.

Criterion G: use of language

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 though they were strong 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 candidates to follow their inclination and their passion, regardless of linguistic perfection.

Criterion H: conclusion

Conclusions were generally clear and succinct summaries of the points presented. It can be challenging to genuinely synthesize, but most candidates did their best. In some cases the conclusion was only a few lines long, which is not useful at all.

Criterion 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.
- The abstract should immediately follow on the cover sheet, not be glued to the back of the yellow folder.
- Quotations should contain proper quotation marks and should be relevant to the point being made. Decorative quotations are a waste of space.
- The bibliography must be consistent in its reference formats. There is ample help with this available, including within the *Extended essay guide*. It also makes sense to structure a bibliography into different text types, rather than mixing everything together.

Criterion 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). For the sake of clarity this may be done in three brief and concise paragraphs. The word count was not always added, which creates a problem as the examiner has to stop and do the counting manually.

Criterion K: holistic impression

The stronger essays showed a clear commitment and interest. However, a few supervisors still leave the comment section of the coversheet blank; some comment on challenges overcome, and perhaps the outcome of the viva voce would be welcome. It is not necessary to add a mark sheet.

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 in terms of research or methodology. Part of starting off the process should be a detailed review of the assessment criteria, in which the supervisor can refer to the subject report, and also previous examples of both good and bad practice which are published by the IB. 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 as to how to approach the task and plan the structure, where to find secondary sources, etc.

The guide explicitly warns against the unreflective use of internet sources, and it was worrying to see that nearly all EEs contained Wikipedia sources without any comment made. Wikipedia is not academically reliable, and candidates need to be made aware of this.

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 do not always produce the desired results. However, if a survey is undertaken, it needs to be presented in detail, with questionnaire and full evaluation attached in the appendix.

All candidates should be made aware of the requirements and conventions of formal academic written work. Referencing has to be consistent, and this is a vital skill to learn in preparation for university studies.

Here is an extract from the September 2009 edition of the Diploma Programme *Coordinators' Notes* to clarify the definition of the "cultural artifact", which has to be the focus in a Category 2B essay:

Cultural artifacts include anything concrete or tangible that helps to give insight into the target culture and language.

Some examples are given below.

Written documents

Newspapers, magazines, news headlines, articles, books (other than literary), cartoons, adverts, leaflets, brochures or manifestos, Laws or policies, historical

documents or records.

Spoken documents

Screenplays, radio or television programmes, song lyrics, interviews.

Visual documents

Works of fine art, architecture (buildings, monuments, etc), films, stamps,

Cultural icons

Fashion items and accessories (as a manifestation of culture), food items, dishes (as a manifestation of culture), brands (as a manifestation of culture).

The following do not qualify as “cultural artifacts”:

Political events (elections, referendums), historical events, social movements (e.g. riots), social issues (unemployment, immigration, racism, school, violence, the role of women in X country, etc), towns or regions (“travel guide” extended essays), (minority) ethnic groups, media trends, styles of music, sports, traditions, institutions (school systems, political parties, etc).

On the whole, candidates in this session produced interesting and varied essays that showed inspiration and creativity. 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. Supervisors should be encouraged to present the EE as an opportunity to develop their interests and increase their knowledge, not a chore.