

May 2015 extended essay reports

Theatre

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

Schools are to be commended for dispatching extended essays in time as majority of the essays were received well before the due deadline. This contributed to the smooth delivery of the marking.

In terms of knowledge base and suitability, the submitted work covered a broad range, from poor to excellent, in terms of the quality of research, setting up an appropriate research question, and formal presentation. Those candidates who excelled in this assessment component met all of the requirements of the task with research rigour and enthusiasm. Those candidates who undertook original research – whether in the form of surveys, interviews, studies, or actual involvement in the work of a theatre practitioner or troupe – were most successful in achieving their goals, and they were able to narrow down their exploration to either specific traditions or practices. The amount and range of practical exploration was impressive, however, there were also once again cases of those extended essays where such practical exploration was not underpinned properly with research and theory.

The essays that were less successful ranged from those presenting a research question that lacked focus, to those that were too broad to be treated within the required word limit, or those not clearly embedded in the subject of theatre or built on superficial or faulty research. In very few cases extended essays seemed submitted to the wrong subject area and would have sat more comfortably in the field of English A. In these instances candidates attempted to present a textual analysis of a play only. It should be made clear that the extended essay in theatre should be embedded in some form of theatre/performance context. In this exam session a new issue arose, of those candidates who were clearly guided by their teacher-supervisors to treat extended essays as purely dramaturgical research (thus turning them into versions of research investigations) or to base them purely on practical projects (thus encroaching onto TPPPs and independent projects). In such cases candidates misinterpreted the key requirements of this assessment component.

Content-wise the extended essays displayed a wide range of topics, and gave ample evidence that candidates had been encouraged by their schools to pursue topics of genuine personal interest. The range of essays suggests that there are schools in which the IB Coordinator works closely with the teacher-supervisors to ensure that the right materials are made available, that the consultations are effectively planned and that the candidates are properly supported. On the other hand, there are schools where there is little evidence of the research-planning stage/consultation with the teacher-supervisor.

Again, the best work evidenced a passion and commitment to theatre that was both refreshing and even in some cases displayed academic excellence. However, given the number of essays that misinterpreted criteria and objectives of the component, a decrease in quality of essay writing and research has been noted this year.

On the opposite end of the range, there were candidates who struggled to engage with their topic, or failed to dedicate it adequate research and write-up time. Overall, the number of successfully completed extended essays is on the rise.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Overall, it appears that the gap is slowly closing between those candidates who possess solid research, analytical and evaluative skills and those who may still lack in this area. Those candidates whose work was successful met all of the required criteria to some extent. A fair number of candidates presented successful, interesting and intelligently planned and executed work, having met all of the challenges with enthusiasm, good research base and flair. However, several key areas were identified as problematic. Some candidates lost points unnecessarily for mechanics: students lost marks on format based assessment criteria, like failing to follow simple guidelines about the abstract, forgetting to include elements such as the research question in the introduction, or the contents page and page numbering. Others struggled with showing evidence of relevant and adequate research or analytical and evaluative skills. The number of essays who use first person singular in an academic essay in instances where such use is unnecessary is also on the rise.

Criterion A: research question

Criterion A created some problem for a percentage of candidates. Some essays either lacked a proper research question or had identified a research question that was too unfocussed or too broad in scope to be treated within the required word count. Furthermore, there were essays that failed to put the subject into academic context or had difficulties remaining within the required subject field i.e. some were either mere literary analyses (without any reference to how textual analysis can be used in practice), or were embedded in other media (without any justification or rationale being given as to what a relationship between e.g. dance/film/art and theatre was or could be). A proportion of extended essays focussed on other fields of study, straying from the subject of theatre so widely that they failed to offer sufficient justification as to why they were submitted in this subject area. This rationale needs to be clearly defined and boundaries between media explored with a clear emphasis on theatre.

The stronger essays were written by students who not only had a research plan but were also familiar with the assessment criteria and worked towards analysis and reasoned argument rather than narrative or personal opinion.

Criterion B: introduction

Some essays lacked a proper introduction and/or conclusion, and those with basic introduction did not really set their research question into context. The introduction seemed problematic for some candidates in that they did not always manage to convey the significance or importance of their topic or they mistook this for an opportunity to state their own personal reasons for choosing that specific topic.

Criterion C: investigation

Marks for criterion C varied widely, depending on the level of rigour with which the candidates undertook their research.

There was a marked improvement, compared to previous years, in the range of research sources which candidates were using. Many students had gone well beyond the limitations of the internet in their research phase, which was commendable and generally led to a more profound and successful work. However, there were still cases of candidates who used sources that were either too broad or too narrow, and there was still much reliance upon internet sources, particularly Wikipedia, without a proper cross-referencing with scholarly sources. The number of essays using web sources only has been on the rise, and while candidates should be encouraged to use all of the research at their disposal, they should also ensure that the selection of the sources used to support their hypothesis continue to be rigorous.

Those candidates who scored lower on criterion C did this due to a failure to properly plan or to consult a range of relevant sources, which in turn had a knock-on effect on the quality in the entire essay.

Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

While many candidates demonstrated a degree of knowledge and understanding of their topic, a number of them found it difficult to formulate an effective, reasoned argument. In some cases candidates demonstrated a certain level of knowledge but little or no real understanding of the topic. In the best of cases, the level of knowledge and understanding was high, and the candidates made an effort to apply appropriate methodology.

Criterion E: reasoned argument

Several essays were comprised solely or predominately of contextualisation, without either appropriate analysis or application; some were based on assumptions that were not properly evidenced from sources, or featured a vague and poorly developed argument.

Criterion F: application of analytical and evaluative skills

The candidates' analytical and evaluative skills ranged from poor to excellent. A number of candidates struggled with application and evaluation of their research, with modifying their hypothesis if necessary, or with understanding that an extended essay in theatre should always have a link to a practical dimension. Often, these were the candidates who digressed into peripheral issues and whose essays lacked a clear backbone/reasoned argument.

Criterion G: use of language appropriate to the subject

In many cases candidates demonstrated their mastery of appropriate scholarly register. However, there was still a frequent use of colloquialisms, and a sense that not all students have mastered specialist vocabulary and concepts sufficiently. There was also a tendency in a number of essays towards subjectivity, with some candidates using language that was too informal for an academic essay. There was an increased usage of 'I' voice where the candidates mistook such subjectivity for expression of engagement with the topic. This served to undermine the authority of the student's argument and subsequently affected their achievement levels.

Criterion H: conclusion

Performance here varied. A good conclusion draws together the various arguments of the essay without simply restating them, however, in some cases candidates went to extreme by neglecting to reiterate any relevant evidence presented in body of essay. At times there was an attempt to introduce new information or new avenue of discussion in conclusion, the candidates should remember to avoid this at all cost.

Criterion I: formal presentation

The candidates' presentation skills ranged from limited to excellent. It would be fair to say that many more candidates could have reached higher mark bands in this criterion if they sourced images, attributed sources within the body of their essay, or, as evident in a percentage of cases, if they included a complete bibliography. There was a marked improvement in this area this year, when compared to the last year, with a larger number of essays showing adequate to strong ability to find relevant sources and annotate correctly.

Criterion J: abstract

Some candidates struggled to produce all of the required elements for the abstract; subject matter, scope, methodology and expected research outcomes. Amongst the most frequent errors was a failure to mention methodology or expected outcomes (conclusion) in the abstract, or were very descriptive and vague in its delivery. On the whole, those essays that lacked in a clearly laid out abstract also showed weaknesses in their methodological approach overall.

Criterion K: holistic judgement

Overall, candidates continue to show improvement in both theory and practice-oriented essays. On the one hand, many candidates showed initiative in choosing an original research

topic and research pathways that took them beyond obvious choices of methods and sources. This was evidenced by a larger number of essays being awarded with top marks compared to previous years.

On the other hand, the criteria continue to be adequately stringent to expose, more than before, weaknesses in those essays where research question was not properly chosen/focused and/or planning, research and editing processes were not given adequate time and care.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

Candidates should be advised that research planning is an absolute must and clearly differentiates strong from weak essays. Time spent discussing the research question, pathways of research, specific evidence and possible sources with the supervising teacher is time well spent. Clarifying and understanding the specific requirements of the extended essay and showing students the assessment criteria as they review their work may help. The formation of an appropriately focussed research question is particularly significant as it lays the foundation for the extended essay. It must be clear, specific, focused, and geared towards an investigation, therefore requiring the need to come to conclusions. Candidates would also benefit by a keener focus on presenting the research question in an introduction.

The extended essay guidelines state that it is expected that the final essay is a product of approximately forty hours of work. The quality of some essays would suggest that no more than twenty hours was being allocated to planning, research editing and paragraphing, structuring and presentation of the essay. This had direct impact on the selection and quality of evaluation and presentation of evidence. Candidates need to be reminded of the forty hours requirement.

Candidates should be discouraged from offering descriptive passages (plot summaries, brief historiographies or biographies) when not required by the scope of their chosen research question. Instead, they should be encouraged to develop their analytical and evaluative skills, as well as pay more attention to research - identifying and selecting appropriate research sources, which are essential ingredients for successful treatment of an extended essays topic. When choosing to complete practical research candidates must enhance their finding with academic research that is appropriate, relevant and sufficiently in-depth. Any mention of other assignment components such as research investigation, TPPP or independent project, or duplication of either content or formatting in an extended essay should be avoided at any cost.

Candidates should be reminded that they need to comply with all of the assessment requirements, that they need to present their essays accordingly, and that they need to justify and give a clear rationale for any topic that crosses over to another medium. While interdisciplinary approaches are welcome and should continue to be encouraged, any crossing over into other media/art forms, or other subject areas such as sociology, philosophy and psychology, that cannot prove a clear link with performativity in theatrical terms should be discouraged or re-focussed.

Candidates should be discouraged from veering into plot summary or offering lightweight 'report-on' writing. Instead, they should be encouraged to place emphasis on analysis and evaluation.

Candidates should be reminded to provide appropriate annotation throughout the essay. Furthermore, visual images must be properly annotated and used to support argument rather than merely for illustrative purposes. All of the sources that are mentioned or quoted from must be referenced appropriately and, most importantly, consistently.

Candidates should be reminded that extended essays which are over 4000 words or abstracts which are over 300 words must be given zero for the appropriate criterion. By the same token, candidates should be encouraged to work towards 4000 word count mark as many interesting ideas remain underdeveloped by candidates who limit their essays to a word count considerably under what is required by the guidelines.

Candidates should be encouraged to structure their ideas in a coherent and logical manner. Clear sectioning is essential for clarity and readability of the entire essay; in some of the essays sometimes it was difficult to know when the introduction finished and when the conclusion began.

Candidates should be reminded that abstract is not an introduction or a mere outline of the essay. Also, they should be made aware that abstract needs to include all of the required elements, particularly methods used for investigation, and outcomes of the research. Supervising teachers should provide candidates with examples of abstracts.

Supervisors should include in their commentary information on the process on the candidate went through in determining the research question, as to offer examiners a clue as to how a research question, and focus and scope of the essay have been decided upon. Another stipulation is to comply strictly with the prescribed number of supervision meetings between teacher-supervisor and candidates. Changes in supervision should be avoided where they can be, and dealt with gradually and with care where it cannot be avoided.