

Business management extended essay

Grade boundaries

For grade boundary information, please refer to the **Grade boundaries for Diploma programme coordinators** document available on the PRC.

Extended essay

In many ways, this subject report (M24) is similar to the previous one (M21), as key aspects have not changed. The task is the same, the criteria are the same, the benchmarks and expectations remain the same; students' performance overall is equivalent, with similar strengths and weaknesses, year after year.

The range and suitability of the work submitted

The majority of EEs submitted were suitable, except for a small number that followed the instructions for EE in economics, rather than EE in business management.

The highest marks rewarded students who:

- formulated and investigated an original research question
- demonstrated effective research skills, quoting academic sources such as articles from peer-reviewed journals
- applied specific business models, relevant to their research question (unlike the ubiquitous SWOT analysis)
- displayed analytical skills and evaluative thinking skills
- reflected on their learning and research journey, in their own words.

Students who did not perform so well often had problems linked to their methodology:

- Some students solely relied on ready-made analyses downloaded from 'essay mills'. Such sources are of very limited value, as they do not show students' ability to use business tools (for example: how to apply the Ansoff matrix to an organization or how to interpret financial statements); they only show their ability to find webpages and summarize what they read online.
- Some students tended to follow the approach of the Higher Level IA (of the previous DP *Business management guide*), collecting primary research data and ending their work with recommendations for business owners.
- Some students wrote a detailed case study of an organization, applying as many tools from the syllabus as possible. This showed a misunderstanding of the nature and scope of the EE: it is not a written framework to show everything students have studied in class, but the opportunity to carry out further research on a specific business topic, anchored in the syllabus, but going further.

Examiners noted a tendency to formulate very 'routine' research questions without much originality, largely reusing the approach of previous EEs (such as the ones available on the IB EE website, or the ones used in teachers' training workshops) – for example, many EEs had the following research question: "To what extent is XXX's success due to its corporate culture and organizational structure?" Depending on the chosen organization, this may be a good research question, or not. Likewise, starting with the words "to what extent..." may be very suitable in some cases, but not always. Those comments were made in the M21 subject report.

Student performance against each criterion

Criterion A: focus and method

Criterion A has three strands: (i) communication of topic, (ii) formulation of research question, (iii) methodology.

Strands (i) and (ii) were rarely a problem, as long as students had a balance of 'theory' and 'practice' (i.e. addressing both 'contents' and 'context'). Very few EEs had a question leading to research that was only theoretical or only empirical; very few were not applied to a business, organization or industry. Strand (iii) was a key differentiator: the [5-6] mark band rewarded students who had carried out relevant academic research, as shown in their bibliography (see Recommendation 1 at the end of this document).

Criterion B: knowledge and understanding

Criterion B refers to both knowledge and understanding of the subject (business management) and knowledge and understanding of the topic under investigation (e.g. corporate social responsibility, promotion strategy, branding, supply chain, business modelling, product innovation, crisis management, M&A, etc.). Put differently, this criterion goes beyond the knowledge of a case study, or an organization or an industry.

Students can show their knowledge and understanding through the accurate and consistent use of subject terminology throughout their EE. Due to the demands of the EE in business management regarding secondary research, the best students were usually able to refer to specific tools, techniques and theories that they had researched beyond the DP syllabus, such as Carroll's pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility, "red ocean vs blue ocean" strategy, Mintzberg's 5 Ps of strategy, Mintzberg's theory of organizational structure, Barney's VRIO analysis, etc. Their meaningful application was rewarded with higher marks for criterion B, as students then showed excellent subject knowledge. By the same token, students whose work had a limited theoretical underpinning (e.g. only SWOT and/or some subject terminology) could not reach beyond the [1-2] mark band, as they did not show sufficient knowledge and understanding of the subject.

Criterion C: critical thinking

Criterion C has three strands: (i) research, (ii) analysis, (iii) evaluation. In the context of business management, it is easy to distinguish between:

- the research carried out (secondary research, and, if appropriate, complementary primary research, although primary research is rarely appropriate for EE in business management, because of the scope of the research question)
- the analysis resulting from the application of business tools, when the student applies models (such as a positioning map or Porter's Generic Strategies) to their chosen organization (or, if they decided to study an industry, models such as Porter's 5 Forces)
- the evaluation, which proved more difficult for some students, who often did not include any discussion in their EE. In some cases, analytical tools were successively and successfully applied, but there was no discussion afterwards, and no consideration of different viewpoints, just an abrupt conclusion. Analytical tools are not an end in themselves: their aim is to frame knowledge and to lead to a discussion (see Recommendation 2 at the end of this document).

Criterion D: presentation

The vast majority of students reached high marks for this criterion. When they did not, the most common issues were:

- issues regarding structure:
 - lack of coherence in the organisation of the ideas
 - lack of clarity in the progression of the argumentation.
- issues regarding layout:
 - pages consisting of “big blocks of text” without any paragraph nor indentation,
 - no table of contents (or a superficial one: “introduction, main body, conclusions”), no page number, no system of headings/subheadings
 - poor labelling of tables, graphs and other illustrations.

Criterion E: engagement

As noted in the previous subject reports, although students write the three RPPF reflections after the three reflection sessions, the text of the RPPF should not just summarise what was discussed in the meetings with the supervisor. Those meeting provide the opportunity to talk about the RPPF (as mentioned in the *Teaching Support Material*, in the section “Pedagogical support for the EE”) – but the RPPF must be about the EE process more holistically.

As also noted in the previous subject reports, the text of the RPPF should be specific to the student’s own experience, about what they personally did and learnt, why and how, with contextualized examples (see Recommendation 3 at the end of this document). Generic “one-size-fits-all” reflections that could be written by any IBDP student about any EE will not lead to high marks for criterion E – neither will a text generated by AI tools, which is clearly not “*the student voice*” (to quote the descriptor itself). Examiners noted that an increasing number of students used IA tools generating some strange text in their RPPF, for example about a “quintessential learning experience” and about the EE journey “fostering a deep appreciation of the intricate dance between corporate responsibility and business strategy”.

Recommendations for the supervision of future students

Supervisors are reminded that the EE requirements are the ones in the IB *Extended essay guide* and official IB documents such as this subject report – and not what they may read in some books or websites, whose contents may not always be accurate and reliable.

Recommendation 1

The EE is an enquiry assignment based on academic research: students must carry out scholarly research, for example in specialized literature (books or ebooks) or using an article from a peer-reviewed, academic journal (such as the *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, the *Human Resource Management Review* or the *International Journal of Logistics Research and Applications*). It is not enough to work from the generic business management textbooks used in class. For example, a student writing an EE about sports sponsorship could use an article from the *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship* or could work from a book on that topic, the sort of book read by university students on degrees such as sports management. Librarians may play an invaluable role in terms of research skills, especially about

how to select and access suitable sources. The EE must be based on academic sources, unlike the IA based on journalistic sources.

Recommendation 2

The EE needs a coherent, overall framework that should be presented at the end of the introduction. Just listing a series of business models (e.g. PEST followed by SWOT followed by Ansoff matrix followed by 4Ps followed by BCG matrix followed by ratio calculations etc) is not a good approach, as it leads to a fragmented, disjointed analysis. Students must be reminded that the aim of the EE is not to assess their mastery of all the business tools and models from the IBDP curriculum: this is the role of IA. To quote the subject-specific guidance on the IB EE website: *“An extended essay (EE) in Business Management gives students an opportunity to carry out in-depth research in an area of personal interest relating to business management”* – this is very different from the IA which is *“a research project in which students apply appropriate business management tools and theories to a real organizational issue or problem using a conceptual lens”*. Both are based on research, but the paradigms are different: for the IA, students are expected to apply tools and models from the syllabus (see criterion C in particular), but not for the EE. Students need to understand the differences between IA and EE. As their timing may overlap (with the same supervisor), students could easily get confused, mix the two and end up producing, instead of an EE, an “extended IA”.

Recommendation 3

Make sure that students are aware of the criteria and expectations, especially criterion E and the RPPF. Even weaker students (whose research and analysis may be limited) can score high marks for criterion E, if they reflect well on their commitment and process. Examiners noted that some students who wrote an otherwise very good EE, missed valuable marks for their RPPF, as they seemingly did not understand the requirements and expectations of criterion E.

Further comments

Supervisor comments at the end of the RPPF are very useful to contextualize the work submitted. Although they are not taken into account to determine the marks for criterion E, examiners always highly welcome them.