

May 2018 extended essay reports

History

Overall grade boundaries

Grade:	E	D	C	B	A
Mark range:	0-6	7-13	14-20	21-26	27-34

The range and suitability of the work submitted

As has been the case previously, the quality of essays varied significantly. Some excellent essays revealed not only a very strong grasp of the requirements across the individual criteria but a genuine level of historical knowledge and understanding which was impressive to say the least at pre-university level. On the whole however there was a large group of essays that seemed to not have benefitted from sufficient Supervisor advice as to how to frame and phrase a suitable Research Question which would allow for an analytical response.

As noted in previous reports, the Supervisor's role in guiding the candidate in terms of selecting a suitable topic (historically based and not contravening the 10 Year rule) is vital. Too many candidates were disadvantaged by the choice of questionable topics and RQs which were phrased in such a way as to encourage narration and descriptive treatment rather than an analytical approach. The command terms 'How...?', 'What...?' and 'Why...?' are not recommended since, in the vast majority of cases, they end up producing responses which do not provide sufficient critical treatment to score well in Criterion C, the criterion with the highest mark tariff. The most popular command term continues to be 'To what extent...?' which does in theory encourage candidates to consider a variety of factors in addressing the task as well as producing a conclusion regarding the relative significance/importance of such factors – and why.

Some essays were not appropriate for History and others infringed, in part or in whole, the 10 Year rule which applies to EEs in History. In such cases candidates were disadvantaged in terms of being able to attain the higher mark bands in several of the criteria (A, B and C specifically which were capped for such efforts at a maximum of 4, 4, and 3 respectively)

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: focus and method

In Criterion A relatively few essays got beyond the marking level 3-4 because of the failure to develop sufficient context and methodology - or to provide a selection of sources which went beyond web sites which were often of questionable academic merit for a study in depth at this level.

For the most part candidates did identify the research topic but failure to remain focused throughout the essay on discussion of the RQ was not uncommon. Over-long background narrative/descriptive treatment meant the essay was at best only partially focused on dealing with the stated task. Methodology should include consideration of the areas of investigation to be undertaken in the attempt to address the question and evidence of an informed, relevant and appropriate choice of sources used in the investigation. Weaker essays often provided a limited list of History revision sites/ Wikipedia as a source base and examination of RPPF forms completed by candidates in such cases showed seemed to show no awareness why these sources, for an essay at this level, may be considered , inadequate.

Criterion B: knowledge and understanding

Knowledge and understanding, were generally satisfactory in the majority of cases but again, the paucity of an academic source base and how these were applied to demonstrate knowledge and understanding often led to awards hovering in the 3-4 band in too many essays. Effective use of sources was limited by the limited nature of the sources selected which in turn was reflected by a less than convincing and clear grasp of the topic area and the demonstration of effective, accurate detailed knowledge and understanding.

On the whole the use of subject-specific terminology was sound.

Criterion C: critical thinking

Criterion C was by far the weakest area for most candidates whose essays tended towards a descriptive/narrative rather than analytical approach. Describing what historians say does not constitute analysis/critical commentary and source evaluation was often done in the manner of an IA evaluation of two sources (in discreet sections rather than being incorporated in the essay's main body).

This 'stand-alone' type of evaluation using OPCVL in the style of the Historical Investigation, was pointed out in the past as being inappropriate in the EE yet candidates still seem to be under the impression that this method- or source evaluation in the form of extensive annotated bibliographies- will be rewarded. While there may be some credit given for the former, centres and candidates need to know that annotated bibliographies are not going to be rewarded for any source evaluation attempts made.

Interestingly, source analysis and awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the source material used was less in evidence than in former sessions and when some candidates did try to deal with evaluation they often focused on issues of content and utility rather than a critical

assessment of the source and its provenance and how this could affect its value for the study being undertaken. At the top end however, confident handling of the sources and evaluation of not only the material, the factors being discussed and also the varying historiographical schools and their merits/validity in relation to the task were very good indeed.

Given the high tariff for this criterion (a maximum of 12 marks) centres and candidates need to concentrate on this area in future. Effective and reasoned argument based on the information researched was not always evident and conclusions often introduced new material that had not been dealt with in the main body of the essay.

Criterion D: presentation

With the new approach to presentation in comparison to the previous EE regulations, more students were successful in terms of gaining awards in the 3-4-range -even though the referencing was often very poor. Referencing inaccuracies was not penalized as was the case in the past but instead such essays were referred to the Academic Honesty department of IB for consideration as issues of 'suspected malpractice'. These occurrences are monitored on a school-level.

Success in terms of Presentation consists of producing an essay which is visually appealing (properly formatted and neatly set out in terms of double spacing and a suitable font style and size) and fulfills the requirements of producing a cover page which consists of a Title, a RQ (phrased as a question) and a word count. Candidates are also required to make sure pagination is provided as well as a formal conclusion.

The provision of a Table of Contents which goes beyond the bare 'Introduction, Main body, Conclusion' is strongly recommended. The Table of Contents should set out the main areas being investigated in the essay (indicated in subheadings) along with accurate page numbers for these sections. Subheadings that are noted on the Contents page should also appear in the essay.

Criterion E: engagement

As a new element this has caused some confusion. Frequently what appeared was either a description of the findings of the essay, a narrative along the lines of "I went to the library.../I looked at web sites..." or a description which revealed more about what the Supervisor told them to do (step by step) rather than charting the process of the 'journey' undertaken and the challenges/conceptual understanding/ skills development which accompanied the 'journey'.

The student voice was often muted or quite absent in the RPPF and there was a need for more evidence of engagement in the process from topic/RQ choice to an acknowledgment of the difficulties faced and how they were resolved- and if not, why not.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

Good supervision remains the key in terms of selection of an appropriate topic, a focused RQ (phrased as a question and directing candidates towards a critical treatment of the RQ). The single greatest resource of a candidate is the supervisor and on occasions, candidates were

let down. It is always the case that some candidates will simply fail to heed advice and continue on their own path but the impression gained too often was of weaker students being disadvantaged by weak supervision.

Centres have a responsibility not only for their candidates but also for providing help for the supervisors who were faced by new information in this first iteration of the new EE. There is a need for a simplified instruction process for both supervisors and candidates but nothing will compensate for commitment on the part of the supervisor in ensuring that the candidate is knowledgeable about the process - and about the specific assessment descriptor bands which are the key to a successful performance in the EE

Further comments

Criterion E: candidate performance will no doubt improve in future sessions as an awareness of what is required is gained both by students and their supervisors. Hopefully 'template comments' from centres, which tick boxes and could become a mechanical exercise for many candidates, will not dominate the Reflection which is intended to be an opportunity for the student voice. With up to 6 marks on offer the RPPF is an important element of the assessment. Even weaker candidates can score well in this criterion if the reflections are indicative of the candidate's awareness of the challenges of the necessary decision-making and skill development. Although the supervisor comment is valuable, the mark awarded is based on the candidate's reflections in the 500-word maximum RPPF.

Future emphasis needs to be on Criteria C and D in particular: the former due to the lack of critical commentary and analysis which impacts strongly on the final award and the latter because it is a criterion in which even the weakest of candidates can be expected to gain a respectable award if the basic elements of presentation noted above are neatly and accurately provided.