

HISTORY

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

In reading over the comments from senior examiners of extended essays in history for the May 2011 session, there is little that is new in relation to the findings and suggestions of the May 2010 report. The summary of 'Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates' posted on the OCC for the 2010 session is still worthy of repetition – and implementation – by supervisors.

Essays which cover events of the last 10 years are not acceptable and this has been clearly stated in the past. Supervisors must actively discourage candidates from undertaking such a task which will result in a very weak history essay.

Annotated bibliographies have been less in evidence this session- possibly as result of the comments made about this in last year's report but there are still candidates (and supervisors?) who continue to believe that writing a self-contained/stand-alone evaluation of two sources as in the history Internal Assessment will result in high awards for criterion F. This is not the case.

Copious quotes by historians may appear impressive- but more important is consideration of the evidence which these historians have used as the basis for argumentation. Quotes when used in this way (essentially as a substitute for historical knowledge/detail) are largely window dressing. The point is to construct an argument based upon accurate and relevant historical knowledge.

Overall, perhaps there were rather fewer really unsuitable research questions presented as history EEs this year, though still some disconcertingly inappropriate examples. There were a few essays on Ancient history, Medieval and Early Modern periods but, the overwhelming majority concentrated on the late 19th and 20th Centuries.

The most evident problem remains that of over-ambitious/too broad research questions simply not feasible for the in-depth studies required within the word limit of an IB EE!

Candidate performance against each criterion

A: Research question

Please read carefully the recommendations on the placement of the research question. Examiners have reported this session on the continued need for supervisors to ensure that from the outset candidates have a suitable topic area and focused research question which allows for an in-depth investigation within the 4,000 word limit. As in previous sessions, many research questions were poorly formulated, so lacking clarity and focus with predictable effects on the essay that followed.

B: Introduction

Relatively few candidates fulfilled all the demands for the criterion to an equal degree, if at all. Candidates are reminded of the necessity of considering both context and significance/worthiness.

C: Investigation

There were some truly remarkable, well-researched EEs, leading in most cases to exceptional essays. In contrast, however, rather too many others, just relied instead, on a few textbooks and/or limited sources.

D: Knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

Most candidates showed at least a fair level of mastery of knowledge, and some understanding, essential for the treatment of their research question. There were several instances of chunks of irrelevant material being included and even pointless quotations. Explicitly linking the information found to an academic context was extremely rare.

E: Reasoned argument

As usual, success in this criterion was influenced by the clarity and focus of the research question itself. Generally, nevertheless, an attempt to construct a reasoned argument was perceivable even if, too often, rather obscured by a too narrative/descriptive approach (especially where the research question was vague), and/or undermined by the absence of specific evidence to support claims. There was also some tendency for candidates to supply a string of quotations to make points, instead of using their own words.

F: Application of analytical and evaluative skills appropriate to the subject

Again, marks frequently depended on the degree to which the wording of the research question encouraged the display of the skills expected.

G: Use of language appropriate to the subject

Happily, the general level of language was mostly adequate for satisfactory communication but a large number of candidates lost marks for their liberal use of generalizations. Please also advise candidates that the use of slang or colloquialism is to be actively discouraged.

H: Conclusion

A majority of candidates managed to provide concluding statements basically consistent with the contents of their essay and relevant to their research question, even if they did not always draw together all points masterfully. However, quite a significant number included new material that should have been found in their argument before.

I: Formal presentation

The area of formal presentation still causes concern. While many candidates have acquired the necessary skills of referencing and bibliographical layout using an accepted system, marks are needlessly thrown away by some candidates who have little awareness of suitable conventions and practice. These marks could make significant differences in the awards for candidates.

J: Abstract

While the research question and conclusion were presented in the majority of cases, in a recognisable form, “how the investigation was undertaken” still poses the most problems for candidates.

K: Holistic judgment

Many essays still have no or very minimal comments provided by the candidates’ supervisors. Supervisor comments are welcomed by examiners and can assist them in deciding the award of the holistic criterion judgement.