

HISTORY

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

The majority of senior examiners involved in assessment of this component of the IB programme in history, have stressed **the importance of the role of the supervisor** in the extended essay process- from the selection of a suitable topic through to the final stages of the essay prior to submission. It needs to be stressed at the outset that while the extended essay is, of course, the work of the individual student, the **guidance of the supervisor plays a crucial role** in aiding the candidates to firstly understand and then effectively address the demands of the task. Only in relatively few cases can it be expected that the candidate is able to take ownership of the process from the start. The supervisor is charged with providing the candidate with accurate advice on how to meet the demands of the various criteria which are assessed in the extended essay.

It has been most heartening to witness the production of successful essays which are the result of student engagement and supervisor support. It needs to be said however, that **a significant number of candidates do not appear to understand what is required of them in this exercise**: they fail to select an appropriate topic/area of study in history, plan and write a structured, well supported and adequately referenced extended piece of work which conforms to most of the criteria. These problems can of course be laid at the door of the candidate in some cases – but of considerable concern is the fact that supervisors themselves are at times unaware (or unclear in their own minds) of the expectations of candidates and the regulations in the *Extended essay guide*.

Supervisors should be offered the opportunity by their centres to participate in professional development- either through attendance at IB Conferences or through on-line opportunities provided by the IB. Such professional development can only help supervisors realise the importance of their task and aid candidates in undertaking this valuable academic exercise. Candidates need to be advised right from the start of the process of the appropriateness of the chosen research question which will be submitted in history. The emphasis of some candidates on investigating events within the last ten years does not constitute a valid field of enquiry and such efforts should have been picked up by supervisors and disallowed for submission as history EEs.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: research question

Most essays submitted for assessment continue to be appropriate to the study of history in terms of **chronology** (i.e. should not focus on events in the last 10 years) and **suitability** (i.e. dealt with issues which focused on the **human** past and avoided triviality). However, a significant number of candidates continue to choose RQs which are far too broad (in length of time period or scope) and/or complex to permit feasibly the “in-depth” treatment required, within the word limit. Supervisors, as indicated above, can legitimately be expected, therefore, to actively discourage such poor choices of research question.

Candidates are required to place a ‘clearly stated’ and ‘sharply focused’ research question **in** the introduction to the essay. This allows a natural (and hopefully smooth) transition to meeting the requirements of criterion **B** where the chosen task can be commented upon in terms of context and worthiness of the research question

Criterion B: introduction

As was noted in the previous report and addendum (May 2010 and 2011) candidates need to deal with both the issues of **context** and **worthiness of the investigation**. The former requirement does **not** necessitate ‘lengthy, irrelevant background material’ but the provision of information which sets the research question concisely and precisely into its historical and/or academic context. The latter requirement is often ignored or dealt with by candidates in a very generalised manner in which they explain why the topic was of interest to them personally rather than why the topic merits an historical investigation. For level two both areas have to be effectively addressed.

Criterion C: investigation

The most successful essays used evidence from an appropriate number and range of sources and were well planned. Increasingly, Internet sites have formed the bulk of the resource base used by some candidates and in some cases this is both legitimate and understandable –for example if essays are based on primary materials which are available on dedicated and academically creditable sites. More worrying is the use of sites of little real academic value by weaker candidates who fail to realise that the sites and the material contained within them may be subjective and/or inaccurate.

One trend which has become increasingly apparent in recent sessions has been the tendency of candidates to narrate or describe what various historians say about events rather than selecting and deploying historical knowledge as the basis for the candidate’s own interpretation. Perhaps these candidates labour under the impression that this is ‘historiography’ and that this will impress the examiner. In essence the views of historians should be used to support the student’s argument, not as a substitute for it.

It is worth reiterating that candidates who successfully identify relevant **areas of investigation or themes** at the outset (this is obvious from the table of contents which

indicates how a candidate has planned and structured the essay) are more likely to produce essays which are fluent in their presentation of a case.

Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

Performance here always varies widely. The highest achieving essays moved beyond the general and showed evidence of research which resulted in the selection and deployment of relevant historical knowledge. This enabled the candidate to construct a convincing level of argumentation revealing a sound grasp of the topic area and at the highest levels an awareness of the academic context of the investigation

Where the evidence base was weak, or sources were inadequate in terms of number or quality, candidates encountered much difficulty in reaching the upper levels of criterion D.

Criterion E: reasoned argument

Most students were able to construct a reasoned argument in terms of 'a logical and coherent structure.' For the argument to be convincing- especially in the case of essays which used a 'To what extent...?' approach, 'other factors' and contrasting opinions need to be identified and dealt with. Essays that relied on descriptive/narrative treatments of the selected topics fared poorly in terms of this particular criterion. Similarly, weaker candidates who stated 'personal views' were unable to effectively access the higher awards in this criterion.

Criterion F: application of analytical and evaluative skills

Application of analytical and evaluative skills are amongst the most problematic areas for students partly because a significant number of students have not been sufficiently well advised as to what constitutes analysis and what evaluation of the sources entails. Better essays revealed a high level of attainment in these areas as candidates were able to critically comment on the factual evidence being used in the construction of the argument **and** were able to evaluate evidence/sources being used **in an integrated manner within the essay!**

In the 2010 report the following point in relation to evaluation was highlighted in the hope that the practice would diminish:

'A worrying development in terms of evaluation is the fact that individual supervisors and entire centres have instructed candidates that it is appropriate to adopt an internal assessment approach here to evaluation. This led to candidates writing discrete sections, labelled 'Evaluation' and then proceeding to evaluate (usually) two sources for O, P, V, and L. This is not an internal assessment investigation and evaluative skills should be integrated within the main body and not dealt with in this way-or in the form of an annotated bibliography.'

The hoped for diminution has not occurred - indeed there has been an increase in the 'IA approach' and 'stand alone' treatment by entire centres. The annotated bibliography continues to survive in some centres but since this can gain no credit for candidates in terms of awards, it is difficult to understand why supervisors and centres should insist on this approach for the extended essay.

Criterion G: use of language

Clear communication of the information is the norm rather than the exception. Sweeping generalisations abounded only in the very weak essays. Candidates for the most part appeared aware of the need to support claims being made and to use vocabulary and subject specific terminology in keeping with the nature of a history extended essay.

Criterion H: conclusion

Virtually all essays were provided with a conclusion but candidates need to be reminded that the judgments reached here must be **consistent** with what has gone before. The introduction of new material is not only inappropriate but can lead to marks being lost.

Criterion I: formal presentation

In relation to 'formal presentation' it remains the case that marks are lost needlessly by candidates who are not well versed and practised in the use of an appropriate bibliographical and referencing system. There are 4 marks available for this section and it is quite rare to see the award of the four marks. This should be an area in which all candidates should be able to pick up a decent award –if they are sufficiently prepared and then conscientious in applying what they have been taught in relation to the presentation of references, bibliographies etc.

Candidates should be reminded that **the bibliography should contain only sources which have been cited in the essay**. If a candidate wishes to provide information about works which have been read but not cited in the essay they can do so at an appropriate point in the essay-for instance in the introduction.

Criterion J: abstract

The abstract is usually done last by candidates and perhaps candidate fatigue may explain the failure of so many to achieve the full marks here. Three areas need to be present and clearly stated (within a 300 word limit). The scope is usually the element which is most poorly done. Candidates are **not** required to give a précis of the essay but have to explain what themes or areas of investigation are to be undertaken in order to allow them to reach a balanced judgment on the question they have chosen and hopefully identified at the beginning of the abstract.

Dealing with the three requirements of the abstract in the specific order of RQ, scope, and conclusion is recommended. Sometimes candidates produce abstracts in which the actual research question is not obvious until the end- or the areas of investigation (scope) are only referred to in passing in the conclusion. This can lead to a lack of clarity and the inability therefore to gain full marks.

Criterion K: holistic judgment

Supervisor comments are welcomed by examiners and can aid in deciding the award for the holistic judgment criterion.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

- Supervisors are crucial to the success of the great majority of students undertaking an extended essay and need to be clear as to their responsibilities- through reading of the guide but also through exposure to professional development opportunities.
- Make sure that students have access to the *Extended essay guide* and to reports such as this.
- Candidates should be instructed in the basic skills of presentation and need to be acquainted with and comfortable with the use of an accepted bibliographical and referencing convention.
- There are a number of skills associated with the writing of the extended essay that should form part of the general educational programme of students long before undertaking an EE and arguably could be introduced at a pre- IB level so that students are familiar with requirements.
- The extended essay in history is **not** the internal assessment component and the treatment of evaluation as recommended in the IA (in a discrete section) is **not** what is expected in the extended essay where comments should be integrated into the essay.
- Some centres encourage candidates to provide an **annotated bibliography**. Please be aware that since the **bibliography does not form part of the word count**, any **evaluation of sources** by candidates in this section is irrelevant and **cannot be considered for purposes of awards in relation to 'evaluation'**.
- In the **abstract** avoid a précis and provide the themes/areas for investigation for 'scope'.
- The research question really belongs in the introduction- as indicated in the guide and this should be encouraged. Even if it has been written on a title page, it should be **integrated into the introduction** where it allows for a smooth transition to identification of 'context' and 'worthiness' (as required by criterion B)
- Essays that are 3,000 words or less are unlikely to achieve satisfactory levels of attainment in many of the criteria.