International Baccalaureate®
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PHILOSOPHY

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

This report on the achievements of this session considers the essays presented with the main purpose of providing guidance for future work. The submitted essays cover all levels of success, from excellent performance, better than satisfactory, to clearly less than satisfactory or even very poor. Two excellent investigations were:

- Brahman and Māyā: the nature of reality in the philosophical context of Śankara's Advanta Vedānta
- Does Wittgenstein refute solipsism in the *Philosophical Investigations*?

Candidates who underperformed generally selected a topic which was too broad or which was not suitable for this subject. Some essays were not focused on philosophy but mainly on pop culture, psychology, or sociology. Other essays were based on general topics or researched wide questions. The most successful candidates avoided over ambitious research and focused on a narrow and relatively accessible area of philosophy.

There were cases where many marks were lost for failure to present essays properly. The requirements for the abstract are clear, yet some simply did not follow them. Some essays lacked an identifiable introduction and/or conclusion. .

Candidate performance against each criterion

A: research question

Many of the research questions were clearly and precisely stated. Well focused questions were open to sustained philosophical analysis. A main problem is to narrow down the focus of the question. Weaker essays seemed to struggle with this starting point, causing difficulties in all other criteria.

B: introduction

The better essays offered an introduction adhering to the requirements. The introduction should explain succinctly the philosophical significance of the topic, and how the research question fits into a philosophical context. It should refer to the specific research question or to the argument that is going to be developed.

C: investigation

Most work submitted showed at least some planning. There were two important difficulties: a) a tendency to exclusively rely on www. resources, and b) reliance on the exposition of secondary sources. This kind of essay is too general, mainly descriptive, without a well-defined focus or personal line of argument. The problem is not the use of these kinds of resources as such, but the lack of achievement of the expected objectives.

D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

A significant proportion of essays identified relevant philosophical issues. The higher achieving candidates clearly showed a distinct identification and in-depth exposition of the philosophical issues. In poorer essays the approach was superficial and no philosophical insight or awareness was present.

E: reasoned argument

An argument was usually present. In the better essays arguments were well developed, sustained and convincing. In these cases, they properly addressed the research question. In the poorer essays, the argument was either not philosophically relevant, or without justification of the main statements. In a significant number of cases the descriptive approach predominated.

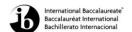## F: application of analytical and evaluative skills appropriate to the subject

A significant number of the essays showed a detailed philosophical analysis and evaluation of themes, and some of them in-depth and extensive treatment. Some presented a shallow analysis of the bibliography or examples used. Others achieved a commendable balance between presenting their own ideas and making use of learned books and articles. In strong essays counter arguments were well presented and investigated, while a lack of counter arguments was one of the shortfalls for weaker candidates.

G: use of language appropriate to the subject

Overall, the essays were readable. The use of language in the three languages showed, at least, a satisfactory level, being in many cases good or even better. In essays that were philosophically relevant, the standard was fairly high. Some essays displayed a biographical and/or anecdotal style.

H: conclusion

Nearly all candidates made an attempt at a conclusion based on their arguments. However, some of the candidates merely restated the aims and summaries of their essays without identifying areas for further investigation or making some overall evaluative statements.

I: formal presentation

Most candidates presented and referenced their essays well. A significant group of them were excellent in this respect. However, there were a number of essays that did not comply with the formal requirements. Some essays had bibliographies, but a few did not have any references or footnotes to the items in the bibliography.

J: abstract

A good part of the essays presented adequate abstracts, in many cases meeting all three requirements. A significant minority of essays did not present a satisfactory abstract. The distinction between abstract and conclusion or introduction was not always understood.

K: holistic judgment

In most cases essays showed some degree of personal engagement. Some of them showed a high degree of initiative too. A significant number of essays presented the expected qualities such as depth of understanding, insight and inventiveness. In the instructions it says that the supervisors report may be taken into consideration. However, too many extended essay coversheets did not contain a supervisor's report.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

- The *Extended essay guide* provides clear guidelines including aims, objectives, and school and supervisor's requirements. Supervisors and candidates should have full knowledge of it and act on its recommendations. Examiners pointed out that in some cases the supervision was practically absent and/or candidates were not aware of the requirements. The criteria and their interpretation for philosophy have to be not only read, but employed as a guide through the whole process of researching and writing.

- Essays have to construct a personal philosophical argument. The construction of an argument in philosophical investigation fulfils the role of empirical research in empirical sciences or the role of logical proof in the formal ones. The presentation of information about the issue analyzed should be concise, relevant and clearly orientated to sustain the argument. The presentation of information not explicitly related to sustained argument should be avoided.

- Extended essays in philosophy must be clearly philosophical; they should not be exclusively based on approaches from other subjects, unless these can be philosophically framed.

- The focus of the investigation must be narrowed down as much as possible and must be stated in a concise and sharply defined leading research question, which should be purposefully treated within the words limit. The research question can be formulated as a question or as a statement.

- Whilst not wanting to stifle student initiative and enthusiasm, some assessors recommend that students who have no prior experience in philosophy should be

advised not to write an extended essay in this subject. Practice and familiarity with philosophical thought, language and questions is invaluable. .

- Tables of contents should indicate specific issues, which are relevant to the presented argument. Subdividing the essay into specific sections tends to tighten up the structure and make clearer the transitions in the line of thought.

- When the essay is about a topic or aspect of a philosopher's ideas, the research must be based on primary resources. Essays should avoid exclusive reliance on the repetition of secondary sources.

- Give strict guidelines for the format of the abstract and stress its function.

- Draw attention to the disadvantages of a descriptive approach to the topic. Emphasize the importance of personal critical thinking.

- Supervisors should, as a matter of course, give students the marking criteria.

- Supervisors should write some background on how the research was undertaken to help examiners with their assessment of criterion K.