

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

The following comments are the result of the shared examiners' views which present the relevant characteristics of the candidates' achievements in this exam session within the context of the accumulative experience coming from previous sessions; they are intended to contribute to improve the performance of future candidates.

The submitted essays cover all levels of success, from essays of excellent performance, better than satisfactory, to clearly less than satisfactory or even very poor. The stronger essays had a clear, well-focused, and sufficiently narrow research question; the question was researched using a solid reference bank comprising relevant primary and secondary sources, which were integrated thoughtfully and carefully to support the developing argument; displaying an effective use of philosophical terminology, clarity, and conciseness of expression. The best essays were logically structured, with an analytically clear and coherent flow of ideas, conceptual distinctness, and an effective and sophisticated application of evaluative skills which were conducive to the development of a well-reasoned and cogent argument. The weaker essays were mostly narrative and descriptive in their approach; many times, they merely listed, in a perfunctory manner and with a limited clarity, series of opinions collected from secondary sources.

Some of the main problems encountered this session are: a) Problems in dealing with philosophical information: some students did not work with primary texts. This hurt many students on criteria C, D and sometimes I; b) Problems in referencing: many essays did not quote page numbers or philosophers' works, and they work and quote only secondary bibliography; c) A group of essays that show that they are simply doing something different, according to own ideas, without taking into account at all what the EE guide advises. Within this context the following issue appeared in a relevant number of cases deserving special attention. A group of essays did not manage to identify an adequate research question, in these cases the research question which is too broad, without any further qualification which indicates a reasonable study in this context. The EE guide is very clear in this respect: A

precisely circumscribed topic should be selected, so that it can be treated thoroughly. For example, it may be preferable to choose as a starting point a specific hypothesis rather than a general one, certain of the ideas of one philosopher rather than several, or a single text by a philosopher rather than the whole of his or her work. The research question indicates the result of the work done, encapsulated in a concise formulation the degree of intellectual maturity of the whole research; pages 109 and 110 of the EE guide offer a series of examples.

The examples of excellent and good essays are the result of simple and effective work which is the outcome of having developed the personal interest and initiative within the framed provided by the EE guide. One example: Is democracy a necessary condition of individual liberty? The essay lays out three conceptions of liberty: negative liberty as characterized by Berlin, freedom as non-dominance as developed by Pettit and freedom as self-rule. The essay concludes that freedom as self-rule is a necessary condition of individual liberty. This is a strong essay displaying excellent research techniques and argumentative skills. There are some weaknesses in the full development of some points made. Good summary, following all requirements in a clear way. Clear and accurate use of philosophical key concepts. Relevant analysis is offered. Formal aspects are clearly worked. Good investigation and material collected. Concise, effective and purposeful presentation and evaluation of the ideas of both guided by a central idea and line of argument. Sophisticated line of work. Conclusion is relevant and clear. Bibliography listed. Good and interesting work. A clear example of an excellent EE.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: research question

In general, this was satisfactory but, as said, there were many research questions presented in a broad/general manner. This criterion is very important to make possible a focused analysis and clear argumentation. Many students who presented broad research questions had also problems with criteria E and F because their starting point led them to general and narrative approaches.

Criterion B: introduction

Most essays got at least one mark here. The introductions were mostly appropriate. There were essays that did not present all the required elements, such as relevance/importance of the topic, academic context and a reference to the argument that is going to be developed. The academic context should be demonstrated more clearly, in combination with a well-planned investigation. Some essays only presented anecdotic and general information. The well-focused and richly researched essays had a clear and effective introduction. The introduction needs to clearly delineate the philosophical context of investigation and demonstrate the philosophical significance of the topic, while remaining focused on the argument that is going to be developed.

Criterion C: investigation

Most work submitted showed at least some planning. Many essays presented a close to satisfactory investigation. Some difficulties were: 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.

Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

The stronger essays demonstrated an in-depth and insightful elaboration and analysis of the identified philosophical issue(s), whereas in the weaker ones, the approach was superficial with little genuine awareness or understanding of the relevant philosophical ideas/concepts/arguments. Further, the stronger essays had a good critical understanding of how to apply their knowledge. The knowledge of philosophical theories and authors, in general, was based on secondary sources, instead of a careful reading of philosophical texts.

Criterion E: reasoned argument

It has to be emphasised that in a well-argued essay the parts of the essay will be related coherently and explicitly. 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. In the stronger essays, the argument was well-structured (coherent and consistent), with a clear and progressive line of development resulting in a well-nuanced and convincing conclusion.

Criterion F: application of analytical and evaluative skills

The stronger essays demonstrated an effective application of philosophical analysis and evaluation of arguments and counter-arguments, whereas the weaker ones either lacked analytical, conceptual, and terminological clarity, or merely reiterated and recounted the insufficiently understood points from secondary source material. Most of the essays illustrated positions with supporting examples. However, only the best essays put forward possible counter-arguments and proposed strategies to overcome them. Some mediocre essays offered a mere statement of personal opinion as evaluation. Good essays briefly set up the question and quickly move to dealing with interpretation, clarification, critique and evaluation: weaker essays do not go beyond exposition.

Criterion G: use of language appropriate to the subject:

The use of language was mainly appropriate to the subject. Whereas the effective use of subject-specific terminology was evident in the stronger essays, the weaker ones usually lacked clarity of expression or proper understanding of philosophical terminology. Some candidates used philosophical language, especially relating to epistemology, metaethics and

continental theory with skill and confidence, whereas others would take a topic which really requires technical vocabulary, and use no technical language at all.

Criterion H: conclusion

The conclusions presented were suitable in most essays, but there were also many students who repeated material taken from other sections instead of presenting effective conclusions developed out of the argument. The conclusions must not be definitive, that it is not necessary for them to say the last word on the topic chosen, but to establish some points in relation to the previous discussion.

Criterion I: formal presentation

A reasonable number of candidates presented and referenced their essays well. There were a number of essays that did not comply with the formal requirements. Some essays had bibliographies, but others did not have any references or footnotes to the items in the bibliography. The IB does not prescribe or favour a particular documentation style, but candidates are expected to be consistent in applying one. The formal presentation could be improved especially in relation to providing better referencing/quotation systems and footnotes. Also, not all tables of content presented the structure and informative contents that show understanding, but instead provided just lists of sections.

Criterion J: abstract

Part of the essays presented adequate abstracts, meeting all three requirements. Other part of essays did not present a satisfactory abstract. The weaker essays were usually deficient in explaining how the investigation was undertaken or the way in which the argument was structured. The distinction between abstract and conclusion or introduction was not always understood.

Criterion K: holistic judgement

Most essays showed at least some personal engagement and reflection, but the weaker ones had clear shortcomings in terms of depth of understanding or intellectual initiative. Many candidates clearly showed a passion for their chosen topic, even if they had struggled with the investigation. When examiners mark this criterion they do take into consideration what the supervisor has written. With regard to the application of this criterion: the general recommendation was that 0 applies only in the extreme poor cases; satisfactory research / work deserved usually 2 marks, and 3 or more when something more was noticeable.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

Teachers and candidates should work with the guidelines given by the *Extended essay guide*. It provides clear orientation including aims, objectives, and the requirements for schools and supervisors. 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. Within this frame, schools, supervisors and candidates must be aware of the following:

- Essays must 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
- 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
- It could be useful to give instructions to the students about the formal requirements of the essays. Especially in relation to the research question and also the academic use of bibliographic information and citing methods. It could be also clarified the difference between primary and secondary bibliography. It might be useful the publication: *Effective citing and referencing*, IBO 2014
- Investigation: emphasize the priority of primary sources for a good investigation. It is preferable that an essay is developed through an effective use and understanding of a small number of appropriate primary sources than an essay developed through the use of a great amount of secondary sources which could be inaccurate
- Supervisors should: a) as a matter of course, give students the marking criteria, b) give strict guidelines for the format of the abstract and stress its function, c) draw attention to the disadvantages of a descriptive approach to the topic and emphasize the importance of personal critical thinking, d) recommend primary texts of an adequate level for the student and good introductory and exegetical texts that give a solid mapping of the topic and the positions, e) writing a philosophy EE requires practicing a way of argumentative thinking, which some students have not practiced, supervisors should provide a frame in which students can work on this aspect of the essay, f) write some background on how the research was undertaken to help examiners with their assessment of criterion K.