

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 strengths and weaknesses encountered this session essentially reflect the typical kind of issues which have been evident over the last examination sessions. The essays submitted for assessment ranged from the excellent to the unsatisfactory. The most successful candidates avoided over-ambitious research and focused on a narrow and relatively accessible area of philosophy. The examples of excellent and good essays are the result of simple and effective work which is the outcome of having developed personal interest and initiative throughout the essay.

Some of the main problems encountered this session were:

- Poor supervision which results in inappropriate research questions.
- There were cases where many marks were lost for failure to present essays properly and adhere to formal requirements explicitly outlined in the EE guide. For example, the requirements for the abstract are clearly stated, yet some simply did not follow them. Some essays lacked an identifiable introduction and/or conclusion.
- Essays which compared and contrasted positions and not arguments proved problematic to sustain and perform adequately against all criteria, particularly criteria E, F and H.
- Problems with handling philosophical information: some students did not use primary texts. Criteria C, D and sometimes I were affected by this. Problems of referencing: many essays did not quote page numbers or correctly cite works. Some essays did not demonstrate a consistent application of an academic referencing system of choice.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: research question

Some research questions were clearly-focused and precisely stated. Well focused questions were open to sustained philosophical analysis. A main problem was the inability to narrow down the focus of the question. Weaker essays struggled with this starting point, which caused difficulties in all other criteria.

Criterion 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.

Criterion C: investigation

Most work submitted showed at least some planning. Many essays presented a good to satisfactory investigation. Some difficulties were: a) a tendency to exclusively rely on internet-based sources, and b) reliance on the exposition of secondary sources. This kind of essay is too general, mainly descriptive, and 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

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 had no philosophical insight or awareness.

Criterion E: reasoned argument

In a well-argued essay, the parts of the essay will be linked 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.

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

Some essays showed a detailed philosophical analysis and evaluation of themes, and some of them demonstrated in-depth and extensive treatment. Some presented a shallow analysis of the bibliography or examples used, while others achieved a commendable balance between presenting their own ideas and making use of academic books and scholarly articles. A lack of counter arguments was one of the shortfalls for weaker candidates.

Criterion G: use of language appropriate to the subject

Overall, the essays were assessable. Some essays displayed a biographical and/or anecdotal style.

Criterion H: conclusion

Nearly all candidates made an attempt at a conclusion. 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.

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 favor a particular documentation style, but candidates are expected to be consistent in applying one.

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 distinction between abstract and conclusion or introduction was not always understood.

Criterion K: holistic judgement

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

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

Teachers and candidates should work with the guide which states that an extended essay in philosophy provides students with an opportunity to undertake a philosophical investigation into a topic of special interest. The student is encouraged to engage in serious, personal thought, to develop and explore in a disciplined and imaginative way a specific philosophical question appropriate to the subject, and to arrive at a clear conclusion. This statement is essentially simple, but quite difficult to accomplish.. The guide provides clear guidelines including aims, objectives, and the requirements for schools and supervisors. Within this frame, schools, supervisors and candidates have to be aware of the following.

- Supervisors and candidates should have full knowledge of the relevant parts of the guide and act on its recommendations. 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.
- 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.
- Students should be courageous enough to make their own assessments and use their own examples.
- 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) emphasize that writing a philosophy EE requires practicing a way of argumentative thinking, which some students have not practiced, supervisors should provide a frame with which students can work on this aspect of the essay or directly, f) write some background on how the research was undertaken to help examiners with their assessment of criterion K.