

May 2018 extended essay reports

World Studies

Overall grade boundaries

Grade:	E	D	C	B	A
Mark range:	0-6	7-13	14-20	21-26	27-34

The range and suitability of the work submitted

The range and suitability of the work submitted is very wide, and wider than single-subject essays. At the top end of the mark range there are extraordinary essays which capture interdisciplinarity, concurrency of learning, emerging global consciousness and elements of the Learner Profile. The authors usually view the WSEE as an opportunity taken up with enthusiasm. At the bottom end of the mark range are essays “dumped” into World Studies because they do not fit elsewhere, where the supervision is derelict and no attention has been paid to the complex configuration required. Sometimes they appear to be recycled reports from other curricula, lacking entirely in IB learning.

Some topics seen often this year included sugar, obesity and nutrition, comparative treatment of epidemics such as avian influenza, zika and Ebola, antibiotics and their misuse, female genital mutilation, smoking and health, drug legalisation and contraception, and relationships between inequality and gender, race, minorities, wealth and equity, and the outcomes for inequality of development goals, trade policies, taxes, wars, genocides, slavery, microfinance, refugees and migrants. Most of the work submitted was suitable for WSEE, and there was a lovely range of subjects, ideas, issues studied - some incredibly thought-provoking and original e.g. whether big game hunting in certain African countries could be more sustainable than banning it altogether, whether nuclear fusion offers the most sustainable answer to the world's energy crisis.

There were many other topics, some imaginative and some poorly conceived.

The majority of candidates submitted work which was suitable for a World Studies EE, but a substantial number failed to fulfil the requirements:

- The two subjects for an inter-disciplinary essay were either not mentioned or clarified anywhere in the essay
- The topic chosen was not "contemporary" ("within the student's lifetime").

- The essay was based on subjects not offered by the IB such as Law and Education, which are not appropriate
- The local and global contexts of the issue were not identified or developed.

Poor supervision was evident in the number of essays which still contained the abstract, affecting the word count and the evaluation of essays.

As in previous sessions, the range of work covered the entire spectrum, from brilliant explorations of complex global issues to perfunctory, poorly researched and primarily narrative efforts.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: focus and method

The correct configuration of a WSEE is complex. There should be two IB Diploma subjects (not Medicine, Law or Education) and the basis should not be the title of the theme. There should be an issue of global concern properly established and paired with a relevant case study. The author should justify the interdisciplinary approach. This means a longer introduction than in single-subject essays. Cases where there is only one subject, no global issue or no case study but just an essay which investigates a topic will trigger caps of no more than 11 points (4, 4, 3) out of 24 over the first three criteria. Sadly, this happens in a lot of cases. Wrong configuration is largely down to poor supervision. Lack of attention to the model is costly.

Most essays were vague on methodology or sources with only a superficial attempt to explain sources used. Some mentioned the subjects to be utilised but gave no further explanation of how or why they would be used. To be 'complete', one would expect an explanation of what subjects have been used, why they were chosen, how they will be used and why a WS approach was needed.

The highest achieving essays set out their topic very clearly; they had a good RQ, that lent itself to an investigation that used analysis or understanding from two subjects, they explained how they were using the two subjects (specific methods, concepts, models, theories) to investigate and justified why a world studies approach was needed. They also had a named local case study/focus.

It is important to have a single, clear and focused RQ that lends itself to an evaluative, rather than a descriptive, essay. Asking 'How does X affect Y?' can only really result in a 'list' of possible effects. However, simply adding the phrase 'to what extent...?' to the beginning does not necessarily make an evaluative essay either.

A substantial number of essays performed poorly due to the lack of a clearly focused research question and lack of attention to the key requirements of a World Studies essay such as identification of the disciplines, establishing a contemporary focus, and clarifying the local and global contexts. "Method" was similarly affected if candidates chose a limited range of sources. Establishing a clear focus and method is the key to a successful EE.

Criterion B: knowledge and understanding

This is a demanding criterion for the WSEE. It is necessary to elucidate the issue addressed from the perspective of two disciplines. Few candidates can take whole-subject perspectives but rather choose a concept or theory typical of each subject and use it to reveal and apply the mode of thought underlying it. Careful choice of sources and the concepts from each subject requires good guidance from the supervisor. For example, Health and Development-themed essays often focused on epidemics or environmental topics and there was a temptation to compare case study countries at different stages of development. This sometimes became descriptive and obscured the issue of global concern. Similarly, Equality and Inequality-themed essays often focused on different types of social stratification, gender and race, again with a temptation to compare case study countries at different stages of development.

Knowledge and understanding were affected by the performance in criterion A. A clear identification of the inter-disciplinary focus was essential to enable effective demonstration of knowledge of key concepts from the selected disciplines and understanding of their applicability in the analysis.

Some subjects were more 'susceptible' to lower marks on this criterion than others. For example, just because an essay discusses money or profit, does not mean it shows good economic knowledge or understanding. Some use of economic models or theory needs to be referred to. For Geography to be used, the essay needs at least some analysis using Geographic factors (social, political, economic, environmental, demographic) perhaps, or element of spatial analysis, or some sort of fieldwork technique. For the Sciences (Physics, Biology, Chemistry), practical work is not needed, but there were some good essays that included some (small amount of) lab work. Again, for these subjects, the knowledge and understanding need to be applied to the topic of the essay to be useful. When using History, a descriptive narrative of some past event is also not effective (it may even mean that the issue is not 'contemporary' and therefore not suitable for WSEE at all).

For criterion B, it was the words 'effective' and 'appropriate' that could be applied to the highest scoring essays. Understanding of the topic and accurate use of terminology needed to be applied throughout the essay itself in order to be 'effective'.

Criterion C: critical thinking

The important aspect of critical thinking for WSEEs is whether the essay succeeds in being integrative of the two disciplines. Mere juxtaposition is not sufficient for the higher mark bands. Analysis is helpful, but discussion and evaluation are the higher order skills to which WSEEs should aspire, and it is hoped that the lessons of the case study might shed different discipline lights on the issue of global concern. This again is difficult and initial topic choice must be appropriate for any of this to work well. It is worth remembering that the cap for an inappropriately configured essay on this Criterion is 3/12, and there were more than a few of these. Criterion C proved challenging for most candidates due to the multiple elements linked to higher order thinking; for many, description and narration tended to replace critical analysis.

A truly integrative synthesis of the disciplines and evaluation of the sources and research were rare.

It is important to state that a WSEE is not a summary of other people's work. Many essays were descriptive, giving narrative summaries of other people's research, and in extreme cases, listing (quoting mass sections of) information, rather than coming up with any original analysis or evaluation. It is important to ensure that students are answering the question they have set, and respond to the command term that they have used.

Criterion C is strongly linked to the research question, and so often when the research question lacked focus, so too did the critical thinking.

Criterion D: presentation

A small minority of essays departed from the expected format for academic writing. Examples were missing page numbers, missing word count, lack of contents page and essays whose contents comprised just introduction, main body and conclusion. Acknowledgement and referencing was generally good, though many weak essays lacked any referencing. Because the WSEE relies on the application of IB subjects, it is always reassuring to see references and bibliographies which contain IB learning materials. Essays which rely entirely on broadcast news media sources are likely to miss the required academic content. Charts and tables must always show a source if not the author's own work. Where diagrams are self-drawn it should be stated, so that they can be rewarded. An astonishing number of essays evidenced poor, incomplete, or inconsistent referencing, and this aspect needs to be flagged to schools. The presentation of visual data tended to be particularly unsatisfactory, with unclear presentation of maps, tables, graphs (often without reference).

Criterion E: engagement

Reflections on planning and progress forms were generally a pleasure to read as they constitute a chance to hear the student's voice.

The reflections were new this year and it was noticeable that some students exceeded the word limit. The advice is to be concise where possible. Also, some reflections were procedural or descriptive only, giving a list of events or a record of discussions. What the examiners wish to see is critical and reflective thinking, such as questions that emerged, how understandings changed and lessons learned for future research assignments. At the viva voce the student should really be in the position of expert, and there is nothing wrong with expressing some pride in that. Criterion E was challenging for most candidates, partly because of the word limit. Many candidates/schools resorted to rather formulaic accounts of topic selection, challenges encountered, and satisfactory outcomes (particularly as preparation for further academic work). Reflections on the "academic journey" and personal growth were evident only in a few cases, but it was encouraging to witness the student voice emerging in these.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

Supervisors should not allow a candidate to decide on a topic first and then try retrospectively to fit it into a World Studies theme and IB subjects. This results in essays which “occupy the territory” of subjects without applying any IB learning. For example, setting the topic in the past does not mean History is the subject, or setting it in a country does not mean Geography, or mention of monetary values does not mean it is Economics. This approach will almost automatically trigger the caps referred to above for being inappropriate in nature, as they do not constitute an interdisciplinary study (maximum of 11/24 on the first three criteria).

In view of the complexity of the WSEE model, candidates should be advised by supervisors to take their time over the introduction.

Supervisors and candidates are urged to read the EE guide. Valuable advice on the WSEE can be found in section 14.4 Subject-Specific Guidance.

For acknowledging the work of others, supervisors and candidates should look carefully at the last two pages of the IB publication *Effective Citing and Referencing* (2014). A problem is incomplete URLs (uniform resource locators).

Unfortunately, poor supervision was evident in many essays, both in the selection of topics and in the conceptual frameworks adopted. Schools and coordinators must make a greater effort to inform and monitor supervisors on the complex requirements for World Studies EE. In many cases, as gleaned from the RPPF, the “choice” of World Studies appeared to be an after-thought for candidates who struggled to find a suitable topic in a particular subject area, with predictably low outcomes. This practice should be actively discouraged.

At the same time, schools should be encouraged to raise the profile of World Studies EE as an ideal opportunity for research and exploration of topics of great relevance to contemporary learning as well as further academic inquiry.

Further comments

Examiners do not mark negatively in the IB Diploma but wish to award marks and reward candidates for what is submitted. Greater familiarity with the WSEE model and better supervision would help.

Supervisors comments have, occasionally, been concerning - e.g. 'this candidate could not do a science practical as they were too late, so they did world studies instead' or 'the candidate wrote their first draft but there was no economics in, only geography, so they went back and added it'.

Supervisors should be instructed (not just advised) to explain how, if they have spent only 1 hour, or no time at all with the candidate, how they know the work is original. Work that cannot be authenticated by the school must not be submitted for assessment.

Supervisors must not recommend marks or grades in their comments. The EE is externally assessed.