

History extended essay

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Extended essay

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For grade boundary information, please refer to the Grade boundaries for Diploma programme coordinators document available on the PRC.

Extended essay

The range and suitability of the work submitted

As has been the case previously there was a wide range of achievement across the essays. Some excellent essays revealed not only a very strong grasp of the requirements across the individual criteria but a genuine level of historical knowledge and understanding which was impressive to say the least at secondary school level. There was though a large group of students presenting essays that definitely did not appear to benefit from sufficient supervisory advice as to how to frame and phrase a suitable research question which allows for an analytical response as opposed to a narrative /descriptive treatment of the task.

As noted in previous reports, the **supervisor's role** in guiding the candidate in terms of selecting a suitable topic (historically based and not contravening the 10-year rule) is vital. Too many candidates were still disadvantaged by the choice of questionable topics and/or research questions phrased in such a way as to encourage narration and descriptive treatment rather than an analytical approach.

The command terms '**How...?**', '**What...?**' and '**Why...?**' are often problematic since, in the majority of cases, they end up producing responses which fail to provide sufficient critical commentary to score well in criterion C, the criterion with the highest mark tariff. The most popular command term continues to be '**To what extent...?**' which encourages candidates to consider a variety of factors in addressing the task as well as producing a conclusion regarding the relative significance/importance of such factors – and why. In too many cases though, however the research question was phrased, it did not end up being the research question addressed in the actual treatment of the task. '**To what extent...**' questions do require acknowledgement and **consideration of 'other factors'** in order to produce an appropriate treatment of the task.

Some essays were not appropriate for History and others infringed, in part or in whole, the 10-year rule which applies to EEs in History. In such cases students were disadvantaged in terms of being able to attain the higher mark bands in several of the criteria (A, B and C specifically which were capped for such efforts at a maximum of 4, 4, and 3 respectively).

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: focus and method

In criterion A relatively few essays got beyond the marking level 3-4 because of the failure to develop sufficient context and methodology - or to select reliable sources. Too often the extent of the sources selected were web sites which were often of questionable academic merit for a study in depth at this level.

For the most part candidates did identify the research question but the inability to remain focused throughout the essay on discussion of the task was not uncommon. Methodology should include consideration of the areas of investigation to be undertaken in the attempt to address the question and evidence of an informed, relevant and appropriate choice of sources used in the investigation.

Weaker essays often provided a limited list of History revision sites/Wikipedia as a source base and examination of RPPF forms completed by candidates in such cases seemed to show little awareness why these sources, for an essay at this level, may be considered , inadequate.

Criterion B: knowledge and understanding

Knowledge and Understanding were generally satisfactory in the majority of cases but again, the paucity of an academic source base sometimes led to awards hovering in the 3-4 band in many essays. Effective use of sources was limited by the limited nature of the sources selected which in turn was reflected by a less than convincing and clear grasp of the topic area and the demonstration of effective, accurate detailed knowledge and understanding.

On the whole the use of subject-specific terminology was sound.

Criterion C: critical thinking

Criterion C was noticeably the weakest area for many candidates whose essays tended towards a descriptive/narrative rather than analytical approach. Describing or cataloguing/chronicling what historians say does not in itself constitute analysis/critical commentary and source evaluation was often done in the manner of an IA evaluation of two sources (in discrete sections rather than being integrated into the essay's main body).

This 'stand-alone' type of 'evaluation using OPCVL in the style of the Historical Investigation, was pointed out in the past as being inappropriate in the EE but many candidates still seem to be under the impression that this method - or source evaluation in the form of extensive annotated bibliographies - will be rewarded with grades in the upper levels. It is very clear that some schools have taught candidates that these approaches to source analysis are what is expected but while there may be some credit given for the former, schools, supervisors and students need to know that annotated bibliographies cannot be rewarded for any source evaluation attempts made.

Effective source analysis and awareness and explicit evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the source material used were less in evidence than in former sessions. Often when some candidates did try to deal with evaluation they often focused on issues of content and utility rather than a critical assessment of the source and its provenance and how this could affect its value for the study being undertaken.

However at the top end, confident handling of the sources and evaluation of not only the material, the factors being discussed and also critical commentary regarding the merits of varying historiographical schools in relation to the task were very good indeed and suggested such skills have been well reinforced in the teaching of the subject and the EE History process.

Given the high tariff for this criterion (a maximum of 12 marks) schools and students need to concentrate on this area in future. Effective and reasoned argument based on the information researched was not always evident and conclusions often introduced new material that had not been dealt with in the main body of the essay.

Criterion D: presentation

A good number of students were successful in terms of gaining awards in the 3-4-range - even though the referencing was often very poor. Poor referencing is not penalised as was the case in the past but instead such essays are referred to the Academic Integrity department of IB for consideration. Schools and supervisors must ensure that students are familiar with the document entitled *Effective citing and referencing* available on the PRC which details the minimum requirements as well as best practice.

Success in terms of presentation consists of producing an essay which is visually appealing (properly formatted and neatly set out and fulfills the requirements of producing a cover page which consists of a title, a research question (phrased as a question) and a word count. Students are also required to make sure an accurately numbered table of contents and pagination are provided as well as a formal conclusion and a Bibliography.

Students should note that the provision of a table of contents which goes beyond a very basic structure of **'Introduction, Main body, Conclusion'** is strongly recommended. The table of contents should set out the main areas being investigated in the essay (indicated in subheadings) along with accurate page numbers for these sections. Subheadings that are noted on the contents page should also appear in the main body of the essay.

Criterion E: engagement

As an element this continues to cause some confusion. What often appeared was either a description of the findings of the essay, a narrative along the lines of "I went to the library..."/"I looked at web sites..." or a description which revealed more about what the supervisor told them to do (step by step) rather than charting the process of the 'journey' undertaken and the challenges/conceptual understanding / skills development which accompanied the 'journey'.

The student voice was sometimes muted or quite absent in the RPPF and there was a need for more evidence of engagement in the process from topic/research question choice to an acknowledgment of the difficulties faced and how they were resolved- and if not, why not.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

Good supervision remains paramount in terms of selection of an appropriate topic, a focused research question (phrased as a question and directing candidates towards a critical treatment of the same research question).

The single greatest resource of a candidate is the supervisor. Sometimes candidates, it appears, were not always well served. It is always the case that some candidates will simply fail to heed advice and continue on their own path, but the impression gained often was of weaker students being further disadvantaged by insufficient supervision.

Schools which have committed the IB Diploma Programme have a responsibility not only for their students but also for providing help for the supervisors. Professional development opportunities and time for supervisors to process the instructions and discuss approaches with other practitioners are recommended in the interests of promoting success for candidates in the EE.

Further comments

Future emphasis needs to be on criteria C and D in particular: the former due to the lack of critical commentary and analysis which impacts strongly on the final award and the latter because it is a criterion in which even the weakest of candidates can be expected to gain a respectable award if the basic elements of presentation noted above are neatly and accurately provided.