

Music 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 in every session, there was a wide range of achievement in the EE submissions. The range of the work was in general from satisfactory to good. Some essays lacked academic rigor, creativity, engagement, and commitment. On the other hand, some essays demonstrated excellent focus, knowledge, methodology, and all the other characteristics of a good research paper.

While topics were often suitable, there is the perception that topics start to lack innovation. The same topics seem to reappear every year. Film music continues to be a very popular topic. Comparisons between K-Pop and USA-Pop are now also becoming a trend. Computer game music is another topic that has gained traction in the past years. Students often select topics based on the instruments that they play. Essays on world music seem to become less popular.

Unfortunately, several topics were outside the subject. In general, these are related to the combination of science and music. For instance, music as therapy; in these cases, the investigation related more to psychology or neuroscience than to music. Some topics explored music and social sciences such as the use of music in protests, where students analysed the social and political aspects of the topic but the analyses were on the lyrics and not music.

Some of the research questions were too broad in scope. Others had an emphasis on music but on a topic where scores are not easily available, such as recent commercial music and/or film music (copyright issues). As all the relevant evidence must be contained within the essay this presented a problem for the candidates. The best scripts were focused on an appropriate topic and approached them from a musical perspective. There is also an emerging trend of essays with research questions that are unnecessarily complicated. Some students state their questions in a rather complicated way, probably with the intent to imitate academic terminology. The result is that in some cases these unclear questions jeopardized the chances to develop a successful essay.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: focus and method

This criterion is still challenging for students. It is extremely important to have suitable research questions that lend themselves to a systematic investigation. Without one, a high score in this criterion may be difficult to achieve. Topics were not always clearly communicated. The research questions were quite often not completely appropriate. Students did not always justify the selections of music at the centre of their research. While there was a clear need to use online sources this session, there was a tendency to rely too much on YouTube videos and some online sources which cannot be regarded as scholarly. Supervisors should make students aware that not all sources are reliable and that students need to critically evaluate them.

Criterion B: knowledge and understanding

Quite a few essays lost the opportunity to demonstrate an excellent understanding of terminology and concepts. Only a few candidates demonstrated accurate and sophisticated knowledge of concepts and used technical terminology with skill and understanding. In some cases, candidates attempted challenging subjects such as the use of microtones in western music and these cases demonstrated a good

understanding of concepts. Unfortunately, many candidates made simplistic generalizations about music history and produced only a superficial level of analysis. Students should be careful to only include information that is related to the research question in the body of the essay and not to divert to present information that is anecdotal and not relevant to the research.

Criterion C: critical thinking

This was an area where the level of the students became more apparent. The presence of critical thinking was not always present in the essays. In several cases, this was the weakest area, with only a few scripts that ranked in the highest band. One of the problems is that many essays lacked a clear and coherent structure with a focus on answering the research question. These cases did not include an analysis or discussion/evaluation, focusing mostly on the presentation of information. They often lacked a sense of direction and ended with conclusions that did not correspond to the analyses made. Another flaw was that comments on the music were often descriptive. Essential aspects of the arguments were often omitted. For instance, dates of composition or first performance, basic information about bands, composers, performers, etc., elements that provide contextual information necessary to make a sensitive analysis of the music.

Criterion D: presentation

The presentation often had many flaws that should have been easy to correct. For instance, examples often lacked informative captions and figure numbers. Often the student cut and paste illustrations but forgave to include clefs and key signatures, making it difficult to evaluate the examples. Figures were often placed far from the comment area that they were supposed to illustrate. Once more, this made it difficult to assess these examples. Many essays could have done with a further edit to pick up things such as missing footnotes, figure numbers, or examples.

Criterion E: engagement

There were reflections that showed that the candidate's work had resulted in learning experiences preparing them for future academic research. However, many reflections were simply a narrative/journal of what the students did lacking demonstration of the development of thinking as the inquiry progressed. In many cases, students simply described a step-by-step series of actions taken, almost as if the RPPF was a process diary. In other cases, narrations were limited to describe the instructions received from supervisors. The concept and purpose of the RPPF do not seem to be fully understood by the students.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

For many students, this is the first time they embark on a project of these dimensions. Please insist on using an appropriate citation system. Make students aware that not everything available on the internet is reliable. Perhaps introduce students to scholarly articles such as those found in academic databases. The role of the supervisor is very important when guiding the student to define a clear research question.

Further comments

Supervisors are encouraged to review the EE guidelines. Some of the errors made by the students could have been prevented by appropriate advice. Please attend EE workshops whenever possible. The same advice applies to students. Some students begin their research with only superficial information about the requirements for the EE.