

May 2018 extended essay reports

English B

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

There was a wide range of topics this year, perhaps even wider than in previous years. It almost seemed that candidates and supervisors, adjusting to the changed criteria, took a new look at the topics and decided to try out some new aspects. Some of these were very successful and exciting, but far too many others, particularly in Cat. 2B, where there is still confusion on how to discuss the nature of artifacts, were inappropriate and lost marks accordingly. By far the best essays generally were those in Cat. 3, literature.

Common and popular topics included, as Cat. 2B, rap lyrics, Disney princess movies and their view of women, and speeches, especially US presidential speeches, as well as dystopian novels in Cat. 3.

Marks from the entire range were awarded.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: focus and method

Most research questions (RQs) were clearly stated and appropriate; the discussion, however, was not always well-focused on the topic. On the other hand, the RQ was a problem in many cases, because it was either inappropriate for English B (as stated above) or worded unclearly – or in some cases not worded as a question. Many essays did not make clear the approach or methodology to be used in the treatment of the topic. Some of the weaker essays tended to use websites such as Wikipedia, SparkNotes – leading to a descriptive treatment of the topic.

Several essays included an abstract, which often affected the mark total (based on it taking the essay over the 4000 word limit, as it would now be included in the wordcount), which in turn affected the examiner's reading of the conclusion.

Criterion B: knowledge and understanding

Most candidates chose resources that were appropriate to their topic, including a range of secondary sources, though there was a general tendency to treat them uncritically. In some cases, particularly literature essays (Cat. 3) only the primary source was used, which led to very limited discussion. Those who looked at multiple views of the RQ tended to develop sounder reasoning.

Many candidates had difficulty integrating quotes or references into the flow of their argument, at times expecting a lone quotation to speak for itself.

Accurate use of terminology was lacking at times. In addition, it is important to note that a formal register should be maintained throughout the EE. Colloquial register and personal opinion were particularly found in essays on social media or rap lyrics.

Criterion C: critical thinking

This is the most significant criterion, separating the better essays from the mediocre. Most examiners commented on the wide range of marks achieved here, and also the fact that few candidates scored really high marks. It was only the better students who presented personal and illuminating insight into the primary texts. The research was mostly well done, but the application of analytical and evaluative skills was often the weakest aspect of the essay since many candidates described rather than analysed.

Weaker essays failed to move on from descriptive comment to analysis, or relied on citing secondary sources for their analysis rather than engaging personally with the texts. Awareness of other views seems to help in focusing on evidence. There was little evaluation of different sources or ideas. There was also at times a lack of supporting evidence for points being raised – perhaps this was considered common knowledge, or simply oversight by the candidate, but it weakened the impact of the argument.

Criterion D: presentation

This was a criterion where candidates should be able to score well, and most did, gaining 3 to 4 marks. There is no excuse for not being able to set out a Works Cited page, or to omit aspects of the cover page, the table of contents and page numbering. Citations/footnotes were generally well-presented, though the font size was sometimes irregular. As examiners were told to evaluate D on appearance, this mattered here.

Criterion E: engagement

This new criterion clearly posed a challenge for candidates and supervisors). Many seemed uncertain what to mention and took refuge in description – of their changing ideas and their supervisors' advice. Comments tended to be superficial, with references to meeting with supervisor, but there were few examples of real personal engagement or true reflection on the process and challenges of addressing the research question. So – there were very few reflections that showed real and personal engagement.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

1) Students need more advice on finding a good RQ with a wide availability of academic sources relevant to the topic (Cat. 2B needs particular attention). Students should be encouraged to keep the topic and RQ straightforward and clear rather than overly intellectual or complicated – this will help retain focus.

Long, descriptive, narrative, or statistical passages were rarely relevant. It is important to realize that just because something is interesting does not mean that it is also relevant to the argument.

Candidates need to realize that they should have something important to say about their topic, and be convincing.

Often RQs do not really fit the EE that was finally written. Candidates should be encouraged to reformulate their RQ at the end, if necessary.

2) Candidates also need to:

- Practise giving critical analysis whenever it is possible to do so throughout everyday lessons in all subjects.
- Plan the essay so that the structure supports the reading, understanding and evaluation.
- Clearly state the category of the EE on the title page for clarity of purpose and use the guide in determining the proper category.
- Understand that a Language B essay is meant to show understanding and insight into the language, culture and/or literature of the target language. If it does not do that, it is likely inappropriate for the subject.
- Understand that an artifact(s) in category 2b should reflect the values or attitudes present in the target culture.
- Proofread the essay carefully before submission.

Candidates must be clear about the formal presentation requirements of cover page, table of contents, citations, works cited, (see *Writing the extended essay* section of the EE guide), and what is required on the RPPF.