

May 2018 extended essay reports

Theatre

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

A wide range of topics were investigated. Many had sharply-focused questions, but a number of RQs were far too broad to allow an in-depth investigation in 4000 words. There also continues to be far too many EEs with questions inappropriate to an investigation in Theatre. A large number of candidates whose EEs were registered in Theatre still focused on literary analyses of plays or of the lyrics in musicals (exploring metaphors/themes, for instance), rather than how the play text might be brought to life on stage.

The RQ may, of course, straddle two subject areas (History & Theatre, Psychology & Theatre, or any of the arts & Theatre, for example), but the focus was not always "firmly rooted in the subject" the essay was registered in. Several focused on topics more appropriate to an investigation in Music, Film, or Psychology, for example by applying music theory to the score of a musical, applying theatre theory to the analysis of a film, investigating film adaptations of novels, writing analyses of cartoons, exploring the impact of specific theatre traditions on television shows, and examining the ever-popular question of the psychological impact of Method acting on actors- which more often than not, exclusively cited the experiences of cinema and television actors.

Candidates who were most successful posed a question which invited discussion, and actively sought an answer by not only consulting appropriate university- or theatre-sponsored websites, but by interviewing or corresponding with practitioners, visiting museums, participating in physical theatre, mask- or puppet-making workshops, or critically evaluating live theatre performances, or who actually conducted original practical research/ tried out theories/ became involved in the work of a practitioner or troupe.

The quality of research and of argument varied widely, however; many essays were satisfactory, with a large number relying heavily – or exclusively – on unreliable, anonymous, general information websites or blogs. A large percentage of candidates failed to include any "critical evaluation of research," and many found it difficult to support a reasoned argument,

after having consulted extraordinarily superficial "research," and citing a very limited range of sources.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: focus and method

While topics were generally outlined, focus was not always maintained. Several slid off-topic into literary or film criticism. Often these analyses were commendable, but irrelevant to an investigation in Theatre. Most RQs were valid for EEs in Theatre, and able to be addressed within the word limit. Many candidates referenced a solid range of high-quality, reliable sources appropriate to Theatre and to their topic, but an alarmingly large number of candidates employed a very weak research methodology, relying solely on the uncritical use of electronic sources – such as Schmoop, Cliff Notes, Wikipedia, blogs, and/or brief, anonymously-posted video clips – or on very general books on Theatre, providing little evidence of a careful and planned selection of sources. Many candidates showed initiative in contacting interviewees with relevant expertise- but many of these seemed to suffer from the misapprehension that they were required to do so.

A large number of students appeared to believe that empirical research is required, referring to the practical explorations they “were required to carry out.” All too often empirical research was also based on limited understanding. On the other hand, without any reference to how an actor, director or scenographer practically applies/-d analysis or theory to bring a piece to life in workshops, rehearsals or on stage -- or to the theatrical theories, concepts and/or techniques used in a project, then even the most thoroughly-researched, most articulate and convincingly-argued essay lost marks.

Criterion B: knowledge and understanding

Often candidate effectively applied sources - including empirical research - to demonstrate knowledge and support their argument. While knowledge was generally clear, candidates' understanding was frequently less evident. Too often arguments contained little substance, with candidates offering bland general truisms, and making observations that were not grounded in, or supported by, reliable, appropriate research. For the most part, there was an adequate and correct use of appropriate Theatre terminology.

Criterion C: critical thinking

Many essays effectively applied research to support original analyses/argument as a whole; discussion often provided some evidence of critical engagement with the topic. Quotes were often woven seamlessly into candidates' arguments. On the other hand, too many candidates referenced a limited range of appropriate relevant sources. These did sometimes convey knowledge, but analyses were not always grounded in research. While images were almost invariably attributed, often they failed to illustrate or support a relevant argument. Assertions were often supported by evidence, quotes, examples and/or references to research, but too often this was not the case. Summative conclusions were not always entirely consistent with evidence presented. Sources were only rarely critically examined.

Criterion D: presentation

Most candidates provided well-structured responses to the RQ; presentation generally met requirements. A large number, however, offered report-like presentations of under-attributed information rather than an argument driven by the RQ. Too many EEs had a compartmentalized structure, making no attempt to link the separate sections to make a coherent argument. Too often discussion slipped into an informal, conversational and/or colloquial register. There were also numerous problems with the lay out and consistency of referencing.

Criterion E: engagement

Strong personal engagement was often demonstrated, particularly in latter reflections. On the other hand, candidates did not always reflect on research processes, identify discoveries and challenges, consider Supervisor's feedback, or reflect on skills developed.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

Supervisors should give students more guidance on:

- more carefully focusing RQs on topics relevant to Theatre, especially when posing a cross-disciplinary topic
- outlining a logical argument (which could, of course, then become the table of contents), to allow for a more coherent, structured (and convincing) presentation of ideas
- give candidates the skills needed to track down a range of sources. Many seemed not to know how to filter out information irrelevant to the RQ, or how to cite sources correctly.