

Physics: Interpreting the EE assessment criteria

Criterion A: Focus and method

(Strands: Topic, Research question, Methodology)

The title of the essay should:

- reflect the essence of the investigation
- by itself clearly describe the topic or aim of the essay
- not be too long
- be clarified, if necessary, early in the essay
- be different from the research question
- usually be presented as a statement.

Early in the essay the student should also outline the area of the research and the purpose and focus of the essay to clearly establish the context of the research question. It is usually appropriate to identify the physics principles relevant to the research question.

For example, a brief description of the motion of a cylindrical magnet falling inside a copper pipe will include the application of the laws of electromagnetic induction as well as Newton's laws of motion.

For this, the student should write a qualitative description of the forces acting on the falling magnet, and their possible variations along its path. Their description could usefully include diagram(s) and perhaps a sketch graph.

A formal development of the theory relevant to the research question follows later on in the essay.

The research question must be centred on physics as a science. It must not focus on peripheral issues, such as the history of physics or social implications of discoveries in physics.

The way in which students plan their investigation will depend on the approach they choose. They must demonstrate that their chosen methods and materials do address the research question.

If the essay is data-based, students' planning should include:

- the relevant physics theory based on reliable and appropriate literature research
- an appreciation of the uncertainties and limitations of techniques and apparatus for data collection.

Students must explain clearly the rationale for choosing their particular experimental methods. However, preliminary work should not be part of the core of the essay.

If their study is based on the research of secondary data, students need to ensure that the selection of sources is sufficiently wide and reliable.

Criterion B: Knowledge and understanding

(Strands: Context, Subject-specific terminology and concepts)

The essay must show clear evidence of understanding of the physics focused on in the essay.

It is not required to explain fundamental laws of physics or general knowledge that are applied in the investigation.

Sources relevant to the research question should be effectively referenced and incorporated into the body of the essay in a way that demonstrates the student's understanding.

A theoretical dimension must be part of any empirical investigation. For this purpose, students should develop their own model or use material from acknowledged sources in a relevant and appropriate way.

Students must demonstrate the ability to apply their method and selected sources effectively in support of their argument.

The relative weight given to literature sources will depend on the approach chosen by the student.

Students should make sure definitions are clearly stated if the material being discussed lies outside the IB physics course. Students must make sure that all steps in their reasoning are clearly understood. Students need to demonstrate that they fully understand what they are doing.

Physics terminology relevant to the research question should be used appropriately and explained to show understanding.

The essential quality of the language relates to exactness and precision, and typical expressions, such as “function of” or “proportional to”, carry specific meanings. A curve on a graph cannot be qualified as “exponential” or “quadratic” without prior proper analysis.

Any symbols used must be clearly and fully identified in the context of the situation and must be applied consistently throughout the essay. For example, writing “ t for time” would not be sufficient but writing “ t for time during which the magnetic force is applied” would be precise and helpful.

Appropriate and precise physics terminology includes units.

Only SI standards must be applied to numerical expressions associated with uncertainty and units.

The use of annotated diagrams for set-up, theory and analysis is an efficient and highly useful tool of communication in physics. It should be part of the student’s physics language and properly integrated.

Criterion C: Critical thinking

(Strands: Research, Analysis and Discussion and evaluation)

The research sources and collected data in an investigation must be essentially and consistently relevant to, and focused on, the research question.

Students should use mathematics as a tool without it replacing the relevant physics or becoming the goal itself. For example, in data analysis the student should show an understanding of the statistics and mathematical relationships produced automatically by software programs and pay attention to uncertainties and significant digits of quoted fit parameters.

Any automatic software curve-fitting and parameter estimation, eg polynomials of degree n , must be justified within a meaningful physics model or theory.

Statistics should not override physics. A purely empirical approach will not achieve the highest band of this criterion.

Students should be able to manipulate properly significant digits and uncertainties, especially uncertainty in the mean and in graphs. They should also understand propagation of errors, where appropriate.

Students need to demonstrate understanding of the intrinsic limitations of an investigation, and their implications for the conclusions reached. They should demonstrate how a given proposed limitation impacts the final results and conclusion, such as where experimental results are compared with standard values.

Students must evaluate the validity and reliability of data and information from sources. They should comment on the quality, balance and quantity of the sources and data used.

Throughout the essay, students should present a clear, coherent and focused argument based on the research question. Personal views should not simply be stated but must be supported by reasoned argument to persuade the reader of their validity.

Straightforward descriptive or narrative accounts that lack analysis do not usually advance an argument and should be avoided.

The level of insight and depth of understanding are most likely to be demonstrated as a consequence of detailed research, reflection that is thorough and well informed and reasoned argument that consistently and effectively addresses the research question.

A well-organized and well-presented essay will enhance the clarity of an argument.

The conclusion(s) should be consistent and develop clearly out of the argument. It should not introduce new evidence or extraneous matter. It should be personal to the student and present a new synthesis in light of the discussion.

The analysis and conclusion(s) should reveal the impact on the investigation of the limitations inherent in theoretical models, in the experimental data collected and in the experimental design. When the original research question is not fully answered, students may briefly suggest how these unanswered aspects might be further investigated.

Criterion D: Presentation

(Strands: Structure, Layout)

This criterion relates to the extent to which the essay conforms to current academic standards regarding the way in which research papers should be presented. It also relates to how well these elements support the reading, understanding and evaluation of the essay.

Students must provide a section and subsection structure to their essays, with appropriate informative headings.

In experimental investigations, a scientific annotated diagram can efficiently introduce key elements of the set-up. Only relevant details of key equipment should be given and exhaustive lists of equipment avoided. A summary of the essential procedural steps in a scientific paper style is expected rather than a cookbook recipe approach.

Any graphs, figures or tables generated by students or taken from literature sources included in the essay must be carefully selected and labelled. They should only be used if they are directly relevant to the research question, contribute towards the understanding of the argument and are of a good graphic quality. Clarity in tables and graphs is important and students should not use unnecessary over-formatting that may detract from communication.

A representative sample of raw data collected in large amounts by the student must be included in the core of the essay in a data table including uncertainties and units. The rest of the raw data should be in the appendix where they should be carefully labelled. Tables of processed data in the core of the essay should be designed to clearly display the information in the most appropriate form.

Graphs drawn from the analysed data should be selected to highlight only the most pertinent aspects related to the argument. Too many graphs and data tables will detract from the overall quality of the communication and interrupt the development of the argument.

Only processed data, graphs, diagrams or images that are central to the argument of the essay should be included in the body of the essay, as close as possible to its first reference in the text.

Data tables should enhance a written explanation; they should not themselves include significant bodies of text. If they do, then these words will be included in the word count.

The use of a summary table and the combination of multiple graphs into one graph (family of curves) will avoid unnecessary repetitions. Equations referred to in the text should be numbered.

Any material that is not original must be carefully acknowledged, with specific attention paid to the acknowledgment and referencing of quotes and ideas. This acknowledgment and referencing is applicable to audiovisual material, text, graphs and data published in print and electronic sources. If the referencing does not meet the minimum standard as indicated in the guide (name of author, date of publication, title of source and page numbers as applicable), and is not consistently applied, work will be considered as a case of possible academic misconduct.

A bibliography is essential and has to be presented in a standard format. Title page, table of contents, page numbers, etc must contribute to the quality of presentation.

The essay must not exceed 4,000 words of narrative. Students should be aware that examiners will not read beyond the 4,000-word limit, nor assess any material presented thereafter.

Criterion E: Engagement

(Strands: Reflections on planning and progress)

This criterion assesses the student's engagement with their research focus and the research process. It will be applied by the examiner at the end of the assessment of the essay, and is based solely on the candidate's reflections as detailed on the [RPPE](#), with the supervisory comments and extended essay itself as context.

Students are expected to provide reflections on the decision-making and planning process undertaken in completing the essay. Students must demonstrate how they arrived at a topic as well as the methods and approach used. This criterion assesses the extent to which a student has evidenced the rationale for decisions made throughout the planning process and the skills and understandings developed.

For example, students may reflect on:

- the approach and strategies they chose, and their relative success
- the [Approaches to learning](#) skills they have developed and their effect on the student as a learner
- how their conceptual understandings have developed or changed as a result of their research
- challenges they faced in their research and how they overcame these
- questions that emerged as a result of their research
- what they would do differently if they were to undertake the research again.

Effective reflection highlights the journey the student has engaged in through the EE process. Students must show evidence of critical and reflective thinking that goes beyond simply describing the procedures that have been followed.

The reflections must provide the examiner with an insight into **student** thinking, creativity and originality within the research process. The **student** voice must be clearly present and demonstrate the learning that has taken place.