

English B 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

A recurrent problem over the years has been candidates who have been inadequately prepared and guided when starting the EEs. It seems that many supervisors and IB Coordinators are not sufficiently familiar with the details set out there.

A particular area where there often seems to be confusion is the categories in which English B EEs can be written. The Guide defines Categories 1, 2A and 2B, and 3, but there often seems to be an assumption that as long as the essay is written in English, and/or touches on some issue discussed in textbooks studied for English B, it is acceptable. Examiners were very concerned to see candidates lose marks because of inappropriate research questions, when this could have been avoided by informed guidance from their supervisor.

Another problem is interpreting the requirements for criterion E. The criterion **states, “This criterion assesses the student’s engagement with their research focus and the research process.”** Many, however, describe their engagement with the supervisor rather than with the process of planning, writing and assessing their difficulties/decisions.

The range and suitability of the work submitted

Many essays were well-written and suitable, and there was a varied range. The examiners felt, however, that the general quality of the work is in decline. The number of essays with inappropriate topics and research questions is increasing. The English B categories relate to English language, culture and/or literature. The overall aim is for the student to develop his/her understanding of English and Anglophone culture, therefore topics that are universal or general in their application are not suitable. The greatest problem is with broad Category 2 topics about social movements or global issues, and not using specific cultural artifacts that reflect the culture/language. Supervisors also seem unsure of what qualifies here.

There was an increase in Category 3 essays relying on plot summary. Candidates are also making more use of novels written for teenagers which is fine provided there is available and established literary criticism, but often the literary merit of such novels may be dubious.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: focus and method

Most students communicate the topic and research question adequately, but very few actually address the purpose and focus of the research. Also, candidates rarely justify the choice of category or how the question is related to the target language and culture. Too many Category 2b essays based on advertising were in fact essays about marketing techniques and not about the language. This approach is inappropriate.

Though the increased use of web-based sources at this time is understandable, the number of unreliable sources was also significant.

Criterion B: knowledge and understanding

The majority of essays included at least some relevant research in light of the stated research question. There was a tendency to include extensive description or narration to showcase knowledge and understanding of a topic (e.g. historical/biographical accounts). Less successful essays did not effectively incorporate the research material into the discussion connecting it to the concepts used to build the argument. Candidates do not have to include basic definitions for common terminology used in the subject but do need to define the parameters of the concepts they are using to show understanding.

Criterion C: critical thinking

The best essays were coherent, clearly structured and had a clear, relevant point to make concerning the topic. In addition, good essays included relevant and appropriate evidence from the research to support any assertions made.

In weaker essays, the argument tended to be superficial, not well focused or supported, or was merely self-evident. The argument of a fair number of essays was based on casual/anecdotal description or second-hand interpretations drawn from unreliable secondary sources. In some essays the analyses were limited to personal surveys conducted by the candidates without any academic rigour (e.g. the survey was administered by email to the candidate's friends/classmates/families) or relation to the target culture.

Criterion D: presentation

There has been generally pleasing improvement in presentation.

Reminders - essays should be double-spaced, with a readable font and font size. While not explicitly assessed, students must be aware of the minimum referencing requirements detailed in the document entitled *Effective citing and referencing* available on the PRC.

Criterion E: engagement

As stated above, students seem unclear about what to mention here. Reflections were mostly descriptive, of activities and meetings with the supervisor, particularly in the first two entries.

There was some limited analytical thinking demonstrated concerning skills development, but rarely any serious reflection on the consequences of decisions or strategies or evaluation of the process as a whole.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

Supervisors need to be more aware of the basic requirements of the English B extended essay as set out in the EE Guide, and to inform their students in good time as they start their research process, particularly in the choice of appropriate research questions, and the proper selection of the category in which the essay should fall.

The introduction needs to make clear not just how the essay is organized but the methods that will be used to build the argument and why that method will be an effective approach.

All factual information and any assertions within the argument need supporting evidence directly taken from the sources consulted.

Referencing must be consistent and follow the standard format for academic writing.

Students need more guidance in writing RPPF entries. The first two reflections need to focus on the planning of the essay and the research/writing process, including difficulties encountered. The final

reflection should focus on what has been learned in the process, on the consequences of the strategic decisions made and on the learning outcomes of the process/experience.