

# Geography 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

This session there was a full range of essays from the very weak (often on non-geographical topics) to excellent pieces of research. Many essays did not have any spatial emphasis (i.e. the object of study can be mapped, and patterns can be determined) and some developed limited methodology and were descriptive in nature. It is really important for students and supervisors to understand that including a locational map does not make an essay spatial; all essays will hopefully relate to a specific place - this is locational, the locational context. The spatial dimension implies much more than just locational, it means maps made with the data gathered, statistical tests and any other spatial analysis technique that involves the spread and interpretation of variables over an area (using primary or secondary data). An essay located in Auckland is not necessarily spatial; an essay that discusses the earthquake damage across several neighbourhoods of Auckland, is spatial indeed. One of the most common mistakes in the geography EE is assuming that the essay is spatial because it is located in a particular place.

The best essays this session were spatial and included a meaningful sample size of data that was statistically significant to represent the entire object of study. Examples of successful essays are; a study of the influence of the quality of public transport in contrasting districts of Warsaw, graffiti and patterns of deprivation in Warwick, the impact of migration on fertility rates across the Poniente region of Almería and the **impact of tourism on Belize's portion of the Mesoamerican reef**.

This session there were a number of essays revolving around COVID-19 but very few of them dealt with the spatial spread of the pandemic so they had a limited spatial dimension.

Some essays were based on questions that were not entirely geographical and based on democratic and economic reforms for given countries in political fields; such essays had no discernible spatial element and there was no research that was apparent but rather consisted of a series of unsubstantiated personal statements which attracted very few marks when assessed against the EE criteria. At the other end of the spectrum there were excellent essays that contained good primary or secondary research and clear, spatial analysis of results.

It was very clear that some candidates had a deep understanding of the processes concerned with their research and their essay had a strong spatial emphasis; nevertheless, again, a number of essays were very descriptive and this often restricted performance against criterion C. Additionally many research questions were extremely broad in scope as such they would have achieved lower marks for criterion A, which often has repercussions for criteria B and C.

There were also some essays that read more like a fieldwork report with small sample sizes and lack of in-depth geographical (academic) context. Such essays struggled against the requirements of criterion A as the sources were insufficient to fully answer the question, while the geographical context (academic, locational) was not adequately developed. The same essays struggled against criterion B as the application of sources was not effective in answering the question, and against criterion C as the sample size was not big enough to prove a valid argument.

Again, this session there was a dominance of urban topics ranging from Central Business District studies and considerations of crime across town districts to squatting in urban centres, urban floods and examinations of the core-frame model. There were also studies on coral reefs, tourist resorts, or gender disparities. The most successful essays collected enough data (primary, secondary or both), relevant to the

object of study, presented a literature review about the topic and analysed spatial patterns; nevertheless, there were many essays focused on sustainability and other acceptable topics, yet with no real spatial component.

A number of essays were literature reviews about the research carried on by others but not actual original research. This seemed to be a recurring issue where students underestimate the value of original research. Referring to **somebody else's studies, literature or graphs** is acceptable and encouraged to demonstrate the topic but should not be the bulk of the essay. Please refer to the document entitled *Managing Sciences and Geography Extended Essays without lab work or fieldwork* which is available on the PRC.

## Candidate performance against each criterion

### Criterion A: focus and method

The best essays were grounded in well-focused spatial questions that helped to shape the investigation and allowed to determine patterns. The better essays clearly communicated their methodology, included primary or secondary data and some thought about the sampling process, sample size and the reliability of the data. Good essays often started with a literature review about the topic in order to communicate a theoretical and academic background that articulated the research and could be referred to during the analysis; the best candidates also developed thorough locational contexts in their introductions. Where the question was too broad, the essay tended to degenerate into a rather unfocused descriptive response with total dependency on written sources (as opposed to data).

Many candidates did not fully develop their theoretical frameworks or their topics and a number of essays presented weak methodologies which prevented a response to the research question in 4000 words, or failed to communicate the methodologies in such a manner that the work could be repeated by others. In some essays the method chosen was not appropriate to answer the research question and lead to inconclusive results.

### Criterion B: knowledge and understanding

Many essays founded on theories or models showed clear knowledge and understanding of the topic studied; essays that were summaries of written sources (as opposed to data) had fewer opportunities to show their own thinking. In some essays, basic terms in the research question were not clearly defined, the candidates assumed that the reader would know these. Some of them also presented heavy dependency on unreliable web articles rather than academic sources which can also be accessed online.

An important limitation of many weaker essays was related to the sources used, sometimes because these were not enough, or sometimes because of the poor choice of methodologies. A number of essays did not use appropriate terminology and demonstrated a weak understanding of geographical concepts.

### Criterion C: critical thinking

This session, essays which incorporated a variety of analytical techniques (thematic maps, graphs, statistical tests, and/or surveys) and significant sample sizes in their data, often scored the highest; student-created indexes often scored well too. The best pieces of research were able to include statistical analysis appropriate to the methods they had adopted. Moreover, their maps were effective and demonstrated spatial analysis. However, many candidates described results rather than explain them. In the worst cases the discussion appeared to be an opportunity to air unsubstantiated claims and their evaluation of the own work tended to reveal self-satisfaction with the results rather than critical appraisal of them. Some essays showed a level of argumentation extremely superficial including the ones that were

only narrative or descriptive. Where essays were a literature review comprising the **student's** opinion of **somebody else's research** then the ability to score well on critical thinking was very limited.

#### Criterion D: presentation

The best essays demonstrated excellent layout and formatting skills and awareness of the basics of graphing; however, in many cases, maps and images were hard to read and too general to facilitate the reading of the argument. Many essays had formatting issues that included poorly planned blank spaces halfway through a chapter because of poor layout skills in the inclusion of graphic materials. A smaller number of essays did not include their research question and topic on the cover page. Students must review the work as it will be submitted for assessment, and as such should review the presentation of the essay once it has been converted to PDF. Some other problems found were as follows:

- Graphs and maps with poor labelling or even lacking a title.
- Interviews, raw data or tables with data in the body of the text instead of an appendix.
- Blurry images or images that could not be read.

#### Criterion E: engagement

The best reflections gave very specific evidence about the learning process (specific skills the student gained, software they used, sources they consulted, etc). Many of the reflections were descriptive and read like a diary of the process the candidate had been through. In a few examples, there was an understanding of the research process and an analysis of strengths and weaknesses. Students who were specific in their entries with detailed examples of personal connection, obstacles and/or achievements scored the highest here. Candidates must identify issues and bring specific evidence about the process showing how they moved these forwards to score higher marks.

### Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

- Candidates need clearer advice on what is a geographical topic and how to phrase a question so that it focuses on a particular spatial issue.
- Research based on the findings of others does not make a good essay. Students must process their own data (primary or secondary) and analyse them spatially in order to come to their own conclusions.
- Ensure that the guidelines are followed – such as including the research question and topic on the cover page as well as the word count.
- Encourage research questions are sharp, focused and spatial (i.e. they can be addressed in 4000 words).
- Encourage the use of a range of primary and/or secondary data collection techniques. Candidates need guidance in selecting appropriate methodology and sampling techniques.
- Candidates should be encouraged to use maps which are relevant and include the basic mapping conventions (scale, direction, title, source). Diagrams, maps and illustrations must be of an adequate size and quality that allows the reader to recognize the information.
- Encourage the use of GIS (or any other mapping tool) and statistical analysis. Consideration needs to be given to appropriate analytical techniques for the methodology chosen. There needs to be

a better understanding of statistical techniques. Encourage using analytical techniques and significance tests.

- Remind the candidates to include in the conclusion the evaluation of the methods used and the limitations if possible.
- Encourage the candidates to include evidence that shows a journey through the process in the RPPF rather than being a description of it. Candidates need to have greater guidance about the expectations of the reflection process.
- Ensure that all the work is anonymised.
- Make sure the work is checked once transformed into PDF in order to avoid layout issues.
- A good proportion of the essays included reference to the global pandemic as a limiting factor for data collection. It is necessary to remind all centres that secondary data collection is perfectly acceptable for EEs in geography and even advisable if this increases the reliability of the sample.