

Visual arts extended essay



Contents

Extended essay

3

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

The essays covered, as usual, a wide range of topics, most of which were appropriate to the visual arts. The stronger essays had a well-focused and clearly stated research question with a relevant purpose. In these essays the research question was approached using a range of conscientiously selected primary and secondary sources, which were thoughtfully and carefully integrated into the discussion to support the argument. The best essays demonstrated an effective use of subject-specific terminology and a sound application of evaluative skills and conceptual understanding which led to the advancement of a well-reasoned and cogent argument. The weaker essays were mostly narrative and descriptive in nature. In most of these weaker essays the research question was too broad and vague which often resulted in essays losing focus easily. Some topics like graffiti, fashion, and art therapy generally did not meet the criteria at the higher levels with students focusing more on the artist's life or tangential issues rather than the artworks.

The best work was done by students who were fully engaged with their primary sources so that their research included their own supported opinions to the research material as well as engagement with secondary sources.

While not something assessed by the criteria, there were still many examples of missing references for summarized or paraphrased sources, quotes and images. Schools must ensure that students are fully aware of the minimum referencing requirements as detailed in the document entitled *Effective citing and referencing* available on the PRC.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: focus and method

The best essays formulated an appropriately focused visual arts research question to be treated thoroughly within the wordcount using a reasoned method for gathering pertinent information. However, the academic relevance of the investigation was too often not clearly explained and was only vaguely alluded to.

The weaker essays posed research questions which were awkwardly worded or that were more descriptive than analytical. Some did not lead to a debatable argument and/or implied a foregone conclusion. Many of these weaker essays had research questions that

were impossible to deal with effectively in 4000 words which then meant the rest of the essay suffered too. Some students followed methods which were not always the most appropriate. Students did not always provide evidence and/or explain why they had selected their sources and/or methodology.

Criterion B: knowledge and understanding

The strongest submissions reflected broad background knowledge which informed and illuminated a focused argument. Essays generally exhibited good knowledge of the topic. However, some essays were taken up with background contextual information which sometimes covered half of the body of the essay adding little to the argument. In most cases the level of subject specific language used ranged from good to excellent. However, this ability was not always focused on responding to the research question and included, for example, formal analysis of artworks that appeared disconnected from the argument.

The weakest papers were able to describe little beyond a narrative structure and included research that might demonstrate some knowledge of the topic but little understanding.

Criterion C: critical thinking

This continues to be the most challenging of the criteria for candidates. In the stronger essays, the argument was coherent, and consistently addressed the research question; with a clear and progressive line of development resulting in a well refined and convincing conclusion. These essays showed detailed analysis, discussion, and evaluation with well-presented arguments, supported both by primary and secondary investigation addressing the research question.

Weaker essays offered only narrative and descriptive approaches to the question where the research was not discussed in relation to the research question. This was more apparent in many cases in the Spanish cohort.

Some candidates still do not understand the difference between description and analysis and tend to be too descriptive when discussing artworks. It is important that students can critically evaluate how valid and relevant sources are for the investigation, and the difference between research and opinion.

More essays this session have critically evaluated the methods selected; however, this did not happen often.

Criterion D: presentation

In general essays were well presented. The best essays provided an organized structure with informative headings. These contained a table of contents that included a clear articulation of the different parts of the argument in response to the research question. The weaker essays just offered generic titles such as introduction, body, and conclusion without reference to the specifics of the investigation.

In the visual arts it is especially important to include appropriate and well-placed images that should be of a reasonable size and image-resolution, accompanied by appropriate captions. This did not always happen as sometimes images were presented at an inappropriately small scale and resolution.

Criterion E: engagement

Not all students were able to engage adequately with the RPPF requirements, even those who had otherwise done well overall in their essays. There continues to be a tendency simply to report, for example, how difficult it was to manage time or find sources. In these cases, the entries were descriptive and narrative just telling what happened. Only some candidates reflected according to the expectations in relation to what they had done both in terms of research and conceptual understanding.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

Supervisors and candidates need to have full knowledge of the Guide and act on its recommendations. Assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning and the assessment criteria can also be used formatively during the investigation and writing process.

The design of the research question is particularly important, and supervisors need to guide candidates in formulating a research question that enables them to demonstrate disciplinary understanding and critical thinking. It is probably at the initial stages of the process when supervisors need to support students the most. At this stage, supervisors must emphasize that the essay is not just about researching and collecting correct information, but about demonstrating the students' own understanding and critical thinking skills.

The research should follow a reference style and include all the items required in the *Effective citing and referencing* document.

Candidates need to have a methodology prior to starting their investigation which should have room for modification.

The Introduction should include all the requirements stated in the Guide. Research methods need to be clearly explained. Many candidates forget to define the focus, range and purpose of their research.

The candidates must be made aware that if only a bibliography is provided at the end without any references being mentioned in the essay, this will cause academic honesty concerns.

Supervisors need to remind the students to review whether the research question as stated has been answered satisfactorily in the conclusion and that no new aspects have been included.

It would be especially useful if supervisors devote time to the development of metacognitive skills of their students. Candidates must not underestimate the importance of the RPPF, the limited descriptive entries in the form seem to indicate that the student was not aware of the significance of the reflections in terms of the marks for this criterion.