

GERMAN A1

This is a supplementary report following the May 2010 session and should be read in conjunction with the May 2009 extended essay report.

Overall grade boundaries

Grade:	E	D	C	B	A
Mark range:	0 - 7	8 - 15	16 - 22	23 - 28	29 - 36

The range and suitability of the work submitted

This year the selection of works - predominantly twentieth-century fiction and drama - displayed a remarkable lack of imagination. In fact, most works were taken from the PBL and in some cases were part of the candidate's reading list. This choice is not in the spirit of the IB regulations and not even to the advantage of the candidate as s/he will hardly be able to produce ideas independently. Examiners observed that schools served their candidates badly by guiding them towards tackling similar works and questions from a narrow range of texts which had clearly been studied in class.

It is, of course, desirable that candidates approach their EE with enthusiasm and motivation. This may, though, lead to a few pitfalls that can easily be avoided by the teacher's supervision (within 5 hours maximum). Some of these are:

- at least one of the texts must have originally been written in German
- the text(s) needs to be suitable for academic/literary analysis (not for psychological, sociological, historical or political scrutiny).

Candidate performance against each criterion

A: research question

The need for a clear RQ cannot be often enough repeated. Supervisors should make sure the question is not changed or altered between abstract, introduction and main part. The RQ should be guiding the essay and the investigation, therefore is of utmost importance that there is clarity and focus.

Some schools choose RQ, which put the focus of the essay into psychology or sociology or philosophy. Here undue influence of supervisors and their area of interest seem to be playing a role. IB guidelines are very clear about topics of EE in literature and how literature should not be used as a vehicle of other areas.

Most candidates were able to define their research question adequately, although there were still some topics that were framed in far too general terms. Significantly, these were invariably

not formulated as questions, which all too easily leads to a loss of focus. The best essays did not simply state the research question in the title but also made it part of the introduction.

B: introduction

This year most candidates did place their topic into context explaining relevance, however some digressed and used it as a personal manifesto. Placing the EE topic into academic context is an area of major weakness.

Unfortunately, some essays did not have an introduction or anything one could consider as one. Quite a number did not show the RQ, or at least not explicitly and many others did not really explain the significance of the RQ. Where the introduction was missing, the candidate lost 4 points. Supervisors need to be trained to read the Assessment Criteria more carefully to pass this on to candidates.

C: investigation

A focused RQ will result in a better plan how to get to an answer to that posed question. The table of content should give an answer how this investigation was planned. Examiners observed that many candidates did not comment on how they had planned their essay.

There seems to be two trends with using material; either candidates used only the primary text without consulting any secondary at all or using and summarizing the secondary sources without barely using the primary text. Both methods have their pitfalls. The first one results in an EE, which is more a personal opinion, than an academic analysis. The second one is a summary of secondary sources without personal analysis. Candidates need guidance on this.

Unfortunately, the IB has no clear advice about the use of Internet sources. Several EE in literature use Wikipedia, or quote search engines, which is insufficient support for an academic paper.

As most EE candidates seem to live in Europe it should be easy to obtain secondary and other relevant literature, apart from the interpretations available in the school library.

A fair number of candidates had produced an impressive bibliography, but had not cited from all of the works listed or acknowledged them in any other way. Some even did completely without secondary literature. This obviously leads to penalties and should have been addressed by the supervisor.

D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

Many EEs are elaborate summaries of content; sometimes with quotes at times without. Therefore, knowledge is usually demonstrated often accompanied by a summary of the author's life and work in general which is rarely applicable.

Understanding about the chosen topic is often lacking, as the work chosen is generically examined and all too often is not focused on answering the RQ. Again, examiners observed that a well-chosen RQ expressed as a question rather than a statement helped the candidate to avoid a descriptive and expository treatment of a text rather than a sensitive and perceptive

literary analysis: i.e. not too much character description and plot summary but an examination of how the text works.

E: reasoned argument

The EE should have a systemic answer to the RQ based on supported analysis (see criterion F)

Many EEs lack a systemic answer based on logic and clear analysis under F. This is one of the weakest areas, as some essays do not even attempt this criterion.

Most candidates found it very hard to develop a stringent argument, which lead to a point. Many got lost in reiterating the plot, interrupted merely by the odd quotation.

A common weakness lay in the inadequate use of supporting evidence from the primary text: ideas would be asserted but not properly backed up and substantiated by quotation and analysis. Only the best candidates were able to use close reading effectively to support an argument.

Over-reliance on secondary sources was another weakness, leading to arguments that were little more than a collage of ideas and opinions derived from published criticism.

F: application of analytical and evaluative skills appropriate to the subject

It seems unclear for many essays what constitutes analysis. A list of arguments without support sometimes even without quotes from the primary text is offered instead of analysis. A valid analysis is based on arguments that have a well-developed explanation and sufficient support and text quotes. Some essays remain stuck in description then they conclude without any analysis. Students need guidance here.

In addition, the analysis has to answer the RQ. Weaker EEs give some generic statements about the topic area or the work or the author but not an analytical answer to the RQ.

Overall, the analysis often lacked precision and personal opinion.

G: use of language appropriate to the subject

Most EEs were written clearly not always precisely. Some EEs struggled with correct register and syntax. The IB is not clear in the guidelines how much the lack of use of terminology should be weighted.

Overall though, improvement was noticeable to recent years.

H: conclusion

Most EEs had at least a partially consistent conclusion and the best were thoughtful and aware of unresolved questions. However, some conclusions merely stated the obvious, or confined themselves to a couple of casual sentences, or simply repeated points made in the

introduction rather than producing a new synthesis. There are some EEs where the conclusion is used for personal, emotional statements without any referral to the RQ.

I: formal presentation

Formal presentation has improved over the last years and most EEs gained at least satisfactory. However, several EEs, usually from the same schools, still have incomplete bibliographies, lack of paragraphing and lack of or incorrect referencing.

J: abstract

A very mixed bag; while some fulfil the clearly spelt out guidelines, many EEs do not have an abstract, use it as gathering of thoughts, do not mention any clear method nor a conclusion or misunderstand it as a “songs of praise” opportunity.. Many EEs seem to be not clear about the function of an abstract.

Weak Abstracts sometimes consisted simply of cut and paste sections from the introduction and conclusion.

K: holistic judgment

Very few candidates achieved maximum points for this criterion, which is where outstandingly engaged and original work is rewarded Initiative, creativity and insight are rarely to be found in a routine approach to the EE.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

- Supervisors (and candidates) need to read the EE guidelines carefully
- Prepare a checklist for points, which must be included in the introduction and abstract.
- Select a RQ, which is conducive to analysis of a specific aspect and phrase it as a question rather than a statement.
- Guidance should be given for a more specific table of content.
- Editing the EE for consistency between abstract, introduction, main part and conclusion. (Tell what the EE will do, do it and conclude what was done should all be the same)
- Editing the EE after completion - spelling errors are not necessary with computers!
- Honesty about the sources especially when Internet sources with the exact same topic were used and were not mentioned in the bibliography.
- And last but not least select works of literary quality that were not part of the 2 year IB course and were originally written in German