

May 2016 extended essay reports

Italian A

Overall grade boundaries

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

Range and suitability of the work submitted

Once again this year there were essays that demonstrated many candidates' commitment and enthusiasm. There were examples that demonstrated how much candidates enjoyed interpreting literary texts or other artistic creations, and exploring an aspect of the language or a social phenomenon.

It is evident that these essays sometimes represent the students' first real piece of research work, which will give them useful skills for their forthcoming studies.

However, it is also clear that the quantity and quality of work submitted can vary greatly from one essay to another.

We would like to focus on one of the significant trends we observed, namely that of candidates who produce their analysis with little or no access to existing work on the subject. These candidates make a huge effort to produce original and innovative work.

The main obstacles they come up against often stem from insufficient knowledge of the subject matter, the specific methods of analysis and the existing scientific context.

Candidates who embark on research work without having basic knowledge of the subject matter or the appropriate analysis method may receive lower grades for their efforts.

As in every year, we see literary analyses that are not always backed up by a sufficient knowledge of the essential basics of narrative and narrative structure. We could also mention attempts at literary criticism drawing on psychoanalysis. We are not suggesting that some fields should be completely avoided, but rather that candidates should not focus on a field of research or a particular methodology without a basic theoretical understanding of it. The teachers' role here is key: they can guide the learner on how to research information and define the context, as they will know in which context the essay belongs. Without this guidance candidates find themselves drowning in waves of information, which they generally find online, and they run the risk of using simplistic shortcuts, which abound on the Internet.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: Research question

This year the majority of candidates chose topics that were not too broad and could thus be dealt with satisfactorily. There were many "purely descriptive" topics and some candidates also attempted to approach fairly sophisticated and complex topics that required significant skill.

Criterion B: Introduction

Many candidates struggle to tell the introduction apart from the abstract, and sometimes from the conclusion. It is fairly common for all three parts of the essays to contain a number of sentences that are completely identical.

Moreover, in both for the introduction and the abstract, every year we have candidates who set out the personal reasons that motivated their choice of topic. However, this is generally irrelevant. The main objective should be to present the research question as explained in the guide (see page 50).

Criterion C: Investigation

Again we noted that candidates often tend not to search carefully enough for the texts or documents needed to support their comments and analysis. In some cases hardly any research is carried out and candidates either limit themselves to conveying their own impressions of the topic or they search the Internet in a cursory and insufficiently critical manner.

Criterion D: Knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

Very often candidates do not have a sufficiently clear idea of the "scientific context" that their research fits into. This is one particular area where teachers can guide learners so that they are able to familiarize themselves with the "broad axes of research in the studied field" (see guide). Occasionally, it would be very useful to simply indicate a few examples that demonstrate the complexity of the area in question so that students avoid taking too simplistic an approach and are thus better able to define their research pathway, which might be less complex but possibly more original.

Criterion E: Reasoned argument

For this criterion, which assesses the ability to formulate logical and coherent ideas on the studied topic, we found that essays fell into two broad groups. On one hand, there are those who set out to produce original thinking on a given topic that lends itself particularly well to this, such as presenting the results of a survey, or the analysis of a song, a series of poems or a novel. On the other hand, we find essays that are more descriptive and where the candidate's interpretative work is less significant. Essays in the former category have been awarded the higher grades. This is the reason why it may be more pragmatic to choose less descriptive topics, which, yet again, were quite common this year.

We noted that problems of consistency occasionally arise in the essays. In some cases this may be because the candidate has not fully pinned down the research question, or that they have changed it during the course of their work.

Criterion F: Application of analytical and evaluative skills

Candidates are not expected at this point in their studies to possess very high levels of competence in the field of their subjects of study. However, the essay can actually be the perfect time to start testing their analytical skills. This year, some candidates broached fairly complex subjects with good or even very good results.

Criterion G: Use of language appropriate to the subject:

With the exception of a small number of candidates, most of the students demonstrated good or very good language levels. Moreover, according to comments from teachers, this research and the writing work undertaken for the essay meant that students were able to vastly improve the quality of their language use.

Criterion H: Conclusion

As stated above, few candidates successfully formulated a strong conclusion. There are many examples of recycling elements of the introduction and/or summary. There is thus still work to be done on this aspect.

Criterion I: Formal presentation

Presentation is improving over time. And this is the case for the vast majority of candidates. The most significant weak point is quotations. There are still a few students who do not seem to understand the importance of quotation marks. However, this is a small number of students.

Criterion J: Abstract

The abstracts vary in quality but are nevertheless improving. We note that several candidates mention the personal motivations that led them to choose a certain topic, rather than using this section of the work to clearly set out "the research question, how the research was carried out, and the conclusion" they reached (see guide).

Criterion K: Holistic judgment

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

We can never stress the importance of supporting candidates in their online research work enough (see above). Teaching students to seek out and choose good sources will be key to their ongoing education.

Teachers also play a very important role in ensuring students understand the complexity of some of their chosen topics. This can go some way towards limiting the amount of superficial or simplistic work produced.

We are not expecting candidates at this level to produce scientific work of outstanding value. What we do expect from them above all is that they define a problem and demonstrate their ability to research, using existing information in a specific field and to find the information that best supports a hypothesis, if possible an original one on a defined and restricted topic.

In other words, we require candidates to demonstrate their ability to research and reflect. This still presupposes basic knowledge of the "scientific context" and of the specific methods of analysis relevant to the subject studied.

We are not in any way suggesting that students striving to soar beyond the different fields of knowledge should have their wings clipped. However, they should be asked to research their work sufficiently and in a critical manner. Again, insofar as is possible, students should not limit themselves to presenting their point of view, be it original or not, without supporting it with quotations from the texts that they analyzed or references to other works they consulted. Using quotations and references to the material consulted allows them to better demonstrate that their thinking is well-founded and that their point of view is valid.

We recommend that teachers continue to explain the difference between the abstract, the introduction and the conclusion.