PHILOSOPHY

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

The submitted essays varied with regards to levels attained. The submissions range from excellent performance, better than satisfactory, to clearly less than satisfactory or in some cases very poor. The most successful candidates avoided over ambitious research questions and focused on a relatively accessible area of philosophy. Furthermore, the excellent essays were clearly focused research questions, showing insightful and philosophically relevant personal investigation. There were many examples of excellent and good essays which are the result of effective work following the development of personal interest and initiative within the framework as provided by the guide. Some examples of the stronger research questions are:

Hindu ethics: a deontological form of Aristotelian virtue ethics?

To what extent is global redistribution of wealth an issue of economic justice?

The blurred line between altruism and egoism: an analysis of the notion of selfishness.

Bettering the world's arts system: the antiquities trade, encyclopedic museums and the ethics of identity.

In this last case an imaginative choice produced an original topic. The research question, the ethics of identity which lies behind the antiquities debate, is very well spotted as a philosophical issue and resulted in the construction of a personal philosophical argument, which was cogent and economical in expression. The essay is persuasively argued; clearly structured; showed independent thinking; insight and flair. It employed philosophical methodology and demonstrated awareness of positions in political and social philosophy. This essay is a very good example of a productive combination of personal initiative and commitment, philosophical approach applied to a non-standard philosophical issue at this level, effort and determination in the research process, and adequate supervision.

Examiners provided information also concerning difficulties which were encountered in the lower levels, but many of which were present in different ways in other levels too.

One main conviction was shared by examiners: the essays attaining the lower levels were clearly insufficiently supervised. In these cases, the research question was unclear, and so there was a lack of focus from the outset. The problems when choosing the research question in these cases were the selection of broad topics, and the lack of a clearly stated hypothesis which would lead onto reasoned argument. Basic concepts and academic context

were also lacking in most of the weaker essays.

Candidates who underperformed generally selected a topic which was too broad or which was not suitable for this discipline. Some essays were not focused on philosophy but mainly on pop culture, psychology, or sociology. Other essays were based on general topics with broad research questions.

There were cases where many marks were lost for failure to format and structure the essays properly. The requirements for the abstract are clear, yet some simply did not follow them. Some essays lacked an identifiable introduction and/or conclusion.

There were essays which compared and contrasted positions as opposed to arguments. For example a comparison of existentialism and objectivism, or of determinism and free-will would forego looking at the arguments and would focus on the positions and their associated premises. This would limit the evaluation of argument and analysis, and would become factual reiteration rather than investigation. Some evaluations assessed which position was better, but rarely did this approach lend itself to justified argument and critical scrutiny. This approach has the potential to generate essays that demonstrate little understanding of the topic, and only managing to reachshallow conclusions. This affected students particularly on criteria E, F and H.

Problems in dealing with philosophical information were encountered during the marking of essays: some students did not work with primary texts. They wrote about Hume or Kant without referring to their texts, and referred only to secondary texts. The most problematic were papers making exegetical claims (e.g."Kant claims X and Y") without either a quotation or a precise textual reference as evidence. Sometimes primary texts were consulted but these were often too difficult and did not get solid textual analysis by the student (e.g. Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*). Others worked only with primary texts, but did not consult secondary texts, leading many times to misguided or fundamentally flawed interpretations and exegesis. This affected many students on criteria C, D and sometimes I.

There were problems with referencing: many essays did not quote page numbers, nor philosophers' works. Some candidates were not consistent with their preferred referencing style.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: research question

Many of the research questions were clearly and precisely stated. Well focused questions were open to sustained philosophical analysis. Candidates should ensure that they focus their research question as much as they can, because where this did not occur was where generally weaker essays are seen. The repercussions of a broad research question have a negative effect throughout the other assessment criteria when it comes to marking the essay.

Criterion B: introduction

The strong essays offered an introduction adhering to the requirements as outlined in the guide. The introduction should succinctly explain the philosophical significance of the topic, and how the research question fits into a philosophical context. It should refer to the specific research question or to the argument that is going to be developed.

Criterion C: investigation

Most work submitted showed at least some planning. There were two important difficulties: the tendency to exclusively rely on internet resources, and the over-reliance on secondary sources. This approach generates essays that are too general, mainly descriptive, and without a well-defined focus or personal argument. The problem is not the use of these kinds of resources as such, but the lack of achievement of the expected objectives.

Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

A significant proportion of essays identified relevant philosophical issues. The stronger essays demonstrated a distinct identification and in-depth exposition of the philosophical issues. In weaker essays the approach was superficial with little philosophical insight or awareness.

Criterion E: reasoned argument

In the stronger essays, the arguments were well-developed, sustained and convincing. In these cases, they properly addressed the research question. In the weaker essays, the argument was either not philosophically relevant, or it was without justification of the main statements.

Criterion F: application of analytical and evaluative skills

A significant number of the essays showed a detailed philosophical analysis and evaluation of themes, and some of them were in-depth and extensive in their treatment. Some presented a shallow analysis of the sources or examples used. Others achieved a commendable balance between presenting their own ideas and making use of texts and articles. In the stronger essays, counter arguments were well-presented and investigated, while a lack of counter arguments was one of the shortfalls for the weaker candidates.

Criterion G: use of language

The use of language in the three languages showed at least a satisfactory level. In many cases, the level of language used was good and even excellent. In essays that were philosophically relevant, the standard was fairly high. Problems with language and lack of a proper philosophical vocabulary were apparent in a considerable number of cases though. Some essays displayed a biographical and/or anecdotal style.

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Criterion H: conclusion

Nearly all candidates made an attempt at a conclusion based on their arguments. However, some of the candidates merely reiterated the aims and summaries of their essays without identifying areas for further investigation or making any overall evaluative statements.

Criterion I: formal presentation

Many candidates presented and referenced their essays well. A significant group of them were excellent in this respect. However, there were a number of essays that did not comply with the formal requirements. Some, but not all essays had bibliographies. Some essays did not have any references or footnotes to the items in the bibliography.

Criterion J: abstract

A good proportion of the essays presented adequate abstracts. However, some essays did not present a satisfactory abstract. The distinction between abstract, conclusion or introduction was not always understood.

Criterion K: holistic judgment

In most cases essays showed some degree of personal engagement. Some essays showed a high degree of initiative. A significant number of essays presented the expected qualities such as depth of understanding, insight and inventiveness.

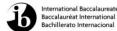# Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

According to the examiner reports, the central and common difficulties presented by the essays, encountered in recent sessions are already considered in the guide. This document provides clear guidelines including aims, objectives, and the requirements for schools and supervisors. Supervisors and candidates should have full knowledge of it, and act on its recommendations. Examiners pointed out that in some cases the supervision was practically absent and/or candidates were not aware of the requirements. The criteria and their interpretation for philosophy have to be not only read, but employed as a guide throughout the whole process of researching and writing.

Essays have to construct a personal philosophical argument. The presentation of information about the issue analyzed should be concise, relevant and clearly orientated to sustain the argument. The presentation of information not explicitly related to the sustained argument should be avoided.

Extended essays in philosophy must be clearly philosophical; they should not be exclusively based on approaches from other subjects, unless these can be philosophically framed.

The focus of the investigation must be narrowed down as much as possible and must be stated in a concise and sharply defined leading research question, which should be purposefully treated within the word limit. The research question can be formulated as a question or as a statement.

Whilst not wanting to stifle student initiative and enthusiasm, some examiners recommend

that students who have no prior experience in philosophy should be advised against submitting an extended essay in this subject.

Tables of contents should indicate specific issues, which are relevant to the presented argument. Subdividing the essay into specific sections tends to tighten up the structure and helps to maintain clarity throughout.

When the essay is about a topic or aspect of a philosopher's ideas, the research must be based on primary resources. Essays should avoid exclusive reliance on the repetition of secondary sources.

Students should be encouraged to be courageous enough to make their own assessments and use their own appropriate and relevant examples.

Supervisors should: give students the marking criteria as a matter of course, give strict guidelines on the format of the abstract and stress its function and purpose, draw attention to the disadvantages of a descriptive approach to the topic and emphasize the importance of personal critical thinking, recommend primary texts of an adequate level for the student, and write (via the supervisor report) some background on how the research was undertaken in order to facilitate the examiner interpretation of criterion K for the candidate in question.

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