

May 2014 subject reports

English ab initio

Overall grade boundaries

Standard level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 - 15	16 - 32	33 - 47	48 - 60	61 - 72	73 - 84	85 - 100

Standard level internal assessment

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 - 3	4 - 7	8 - 11	12 - 15	16 - 18	19 - 21	22 - 25

Recommendations for IB procedures, instructions and forms

The majority of candidates are able to participate in a spontaneous conversation on a diversity of topics. They have been encouraged to use the target language in the classroom and speak with enthusiasm about the topic of their written assignment. The requirements of the individual oral are more widely understood and followed by teachers but there is still progress to be made.

It appears that in some schools the 2 / 1AF feedback form is not given to the teachers some of whom continue to repeat from one examination session to the next the same mistakes in the handling of the oral. Both the feedback form and this report are intended to be support material for teachers and not only information for IB coordinators.

The electronic uploading of materials onto IBIS has advantages for teachers and examiners. Nevertheless it is important that:

- The deadlines for uploading all the materials (visual stimulus, form 2/1A, recording) are respected.
- The teacher checks that the photo to be uploaded corresponds to the one described in the candidate's presentation.
- The form 2/1A is fully completed. Some teachers did not fill out the comments box or

did not refer to the individual oral in their comments. These comments must refer explicitly to the marks given for the individual oral and not to the candidate's performance and results throughout the year. It is helpful to the examiner if the comments correspond to the criteria: productive skills and interactive and receptive skills.

- The teacher checks the quality of the recording before uploading. Some recordings were difficult to hear because of the position of the microphone. In other cases, the orals were recorded in a room where background noise (students, music...) and interruptions (telephone, knock at the door ...) could be heard. In order to best support the candidate, the individual oral must take place in a quiet room.

It is not necessary to upload the candidate's notes or to upload the photos which have not been chosen by the candidates for their presentation.

The range and suitability of the work submitted

Some teachers teach both the ab initio programme and the language B programme. While there are some similarities in the individual oral at both levels, there are also important differences. Teachers must ensure that they are familiar with the instructions and specificities of the ab initio level examination:

- The visual stimulus does not have a caption or title. No word or text may appear on or near the visual stimulus.
- The presentation of the image by the student is a description of the elements of the photo. It is not a presentation of the theme of the picture. The teacher must ask questions in the second part of the oral which are also focused on the elements of the picture not on the theme of the photo.
- At the beginning of the third part of the oral (after 5 mins), the teacher must ask at least 2 questions on the topic of the written assignment.
- The final part of the oral, the general conversation on a range of topics (at least two), must take place in order for the examiner to judge the ability of the candidate to engage in a spontaneous conversation (criterion B).

Control of timing

Teachers are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the timing requirements. The individual oral should last 10 minutes: some orals lasted only 6 minutes while other lasted 14 minutes. The timing allocated for each part of the oral must also be respected. It is to the candidate's disadvantage if there is no general conversation in the third part.

Suitability of visual stimuli

While most of the stimuli were appropriate, some photos were unsuitable and put the candidate at a disadvantage.

- A visual stimulus should have enough graphic content to allow the candidates to describe it for 1-2 minutes. Example: People (a family), engaged in doing something (walking) in a specific context (along a beach). The topic of the stimulus should

correspond to a topic of the programme. Images of robots, natural catastrophes, city dumps... are not suitable.

- It is helpful to the candidate if the stimulus is in colour.
- The photo must reflect the target culture or at least not exclude it.

Teacher's question technique

The aim of the individual oral is to allow the candidate to show the extent of his / her knowledge of topics on the programme and his / her ability to interact in a spontaneous conversation. To achieve this, teachers must ensure that each part of the oral takes place and that there is a wide diversity of topics covered. The topic of the visual stimulus should not, for example, be the same as that of the written assignment; the questions in the general conversation should not repeat the topics of the picture or of the written assignment. Questions should be prepared in advance by the teacher for each part of the oral in order to launch the conversation and stimulate conversation.

However, the individual oral should not only consist of a series of questions and answers. Nor should questions invite the candidate to give a monologue on a topic (Tell me about...). The teacher should engage the candidate in a conversation, based on the answers given by the candidate.

- Questions should be short and clearly formulated.
- Candidates should be given enough time to answer before the teacher repeats the question.
- The question should not have the answer contained within it: For example, What is your favourite sport – football, basketball?
- Questions should be open and allow the candidates the possibility of adding information.
- When the candidate is unable to answer, the teacher should reformulate the question or move on to another question.
- Asking questions in different tenses allows the candidates to show the breadth of their grammatical knowledge.

It is important not to ask for information which the candidate has already provided in the opening presentation. The candidate finds this destabilizing.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A

The mark for criterion A, productive skills, continues to be higher than that for criterion B, interactive and receptive skills. Although many candidates use a range of vocabulary and a variety of basic grammatical structures accurately, poor pronunciation makes the message difficult to understand in some cases. Candidates must be reminded of the importance of register. This is a formal examination: words such as guys, kids, oldies, yeah... are inappropriate.

Criterion B

The mark in this criterion often depends on the skill of the teacher's question technique. Many candidates spoke confidently and gave appropriate and, on occasion, detailed information. Candidates showed a good knowledge of the topics on the programme. Many of the conversations had an authentic ring to them. In some cases, however, the teacher's questions were too long or complicated and did not encourage the candidate to express his / her opinions.

Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

It is essential to respect the timing of the totality of the exam and of the three parts which compose it.

Clear transitions between each part of the exam ("Let us now talk about the written assignment"; "Let us now talk about something else"...) are helpful to the candidate.

The teacher should only interrupt the candidate's presentation when it lasts beyond the allotted 2 minutes.

The teacher should not correct the candidate's use of language.

The teacher should ensure that the topics covered in the picture, the written assignment and the general conversation are not repeated.

Techniques to practise and improve pronunciation should be integrated into class teaching time.

Standard level written assignment

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 - 4	5 - 7	8 - 10	11 - 13	14 - 15	16 - 17	18 - 20

Recommendations for IB procedures, instructions and forms

It is important to read this report in the light of the changes in the format and administration of the written assignment which will come into effect in May 2015. These are described in detail in the ab initio guide, 2015, available on the Online Curriculum Site (OCC). Below is a summary of these changes.

Changes in administration of the written assignment

- The written assignment is written at home / outside class time.
- This work is no longer written under supervised conditions.
- The student will, however, consult with the teacher on the choice of an appropriate topic.
- The teacher may give verbal advice on the first draft of the task.
- The text will be word-processed.
- Students may have access to electronic dictionaries and reference materials.

Changes in format

- The word count changes from 200-300 words to 200-350 words.
- The criteria have been amended. Notably in Criterion C, the total mark is no longer 6, awarded for a global response, but each question will be worth 3 marks. With 9 marks allocated to this section, this is clearly the most important section of the task and one where one might expect to find detailed answers
- Although in this session, there has been progress in the writing of the written task, not all teachers or all candidates understand the requirements of the task. The following comments refer to the May 2014 session but remain applicable to the 2015 session onwards.

The range and suitability of the work submitted

The structure of the assignment

Not all candidates included all required sections in their answers. Some wrote a single block of text for sections A – B. Others did not answer all three questions in section C. The written task must include the following sections which should be used as sub-titles in order to structure the text. The three questions in the section, Reflection, should be written in full.

- A title
- A description
- A comparison
- A reflection
- A bibliography: it contains references to at least 2 source texts in English.

The title should state the 2 countries being compared. One of these countries **must** be an Anglophone country. The topic, given in the title, must be linked to one of the topics in the ab initio programme and should be sharply focused.

The word count

A word is identified as having a space on either side. Quotes, titles of sections and the three questions in the section, Reflection, are not included in the word count. This year several texts were too short (fewer than 200 words) and gave superficial information on the chosen topic. Few candidates wrote more than the maximum number of words.

Note that from 2015 onwards, the maximum number of words has been increased to 350 words. If candidates write more than the maximum number of words, the examiner is instructed to only take into account the first 350 words.

Candidate performance against each criterion

As in previous sessions, good written assignments were those with a well-focused topic. Holidays, food, schools and celebrations were popular topics which were treated adequately within the word count. The structure of the task gave clarity to the text: candidates wrote the headings of each section and wrote out the three questions in section C.

Candidates who did not achieve high marks had frequently chosen a topic which was too wide in scope (environment / youth and leisure...), too difficult, or too vague. The weakest candidates only presented their own country and culture or drew a comparison between their country and a non Anglo-Saxon one (South Korea, Japan...). These candidates were penalized in criteria A and B.

Description

The candidate must bear in mind that the emphasis is on the target Anglophone country. In the first section of the task, Description, the focus is only on that target country. The candidate should provide factual information (at least 3 facts) based on research of the chosen topic. The candidate should not give a general introduction to the topic (Sport is good for health), make a comparison with another country or provide a reason for choosing the topic. Many candidates lost marks in this section because they provided no factual information.

Comparison

A comparison may be made in two parallel paragraphs or in a single paragraph. In both cases the use of comparative expressions (as many as; less than; on the other hand.. etc) should be used. The focus should be equally placed on the target country and the country of comparison.

This was the section where the candidates scored highly and many provided detailed and relevant information.

Reflection

Candidates must answer all three questions. Some candidates “chose” one or two questions. Many misunderstood the third question – their own culture seen from the perspective of someone from an Anglophone or “other” culture.

It is essential that candidates do not simply repeat information which has already been given in the previous sections (Description and Comparison). Marks will not be awarded twice for the same information.

Register

Register is worth 2 marks and most candidates received both marks. Some candidates lost one mark for using informal vocabulary: kids, OK... From 2015, in the new criteria, register is included in the formal requirements.

Language

Most candidates were able to express their ideas clearly, if not always grammatically accurately. Some candidates did not use linking words or comparative expressions. All candidates had most difficulty expressing themselves clearly in the section C, Reflection.

Formal requirements / Bibliography

Candidates lost marks when there was no bibliography, one in which there were not 2 references in the target language or a bibliography not set out in a standardized way.

Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

Teachers must:

- Complete the form accompanying the written task in English.
- Send only those sources in English which the candidate has actually used in his work.
- Help the students to find appropriate resources, both linguistically accessible to an ab initio learner and linked to the chosen topic.
- Not correct the work of the candidate. Verbal advice only may be given on the first draft (2015+).
- Explain to the students the requirements for each criterion and ensure that all students have a copy of them.
- Remind students not to repeat in section C, Reflection, what has been stated in earlier sections.

Teach students how to reference quotes and write a bibliography and ensure that:

- In the bibliography candidates should indicate the title and the exact reference to the internet site. The date of consultation should also be given.
- Explain to candidates that all quotes must be correctly referenced (inverted commas or footnotes). Unidentified copying will be considered as plagiarism. The ab initio guide clearly states the IB position:

“All work submitted to the IB for moderation or assessment must be authenticated by a teacher, and must not include any known instances of suspected or confirmed malpractice. Each student must verify that the work is his or her authentic work and constitutes the final version of this work. Once a student has officially submitted the final version of the work to a teacher (or the Diploma Programme coordinator) for assessment it cannot be retracted.” (ab initio guide)”

Advise the candidates on their choice of topic and ensure that:

- The topic is sharply focused.
- The topic is linked to a topic on the programme.
- The title of the task is clear. NB the topics selected by students for the written assignment can overlap but each title must be different.
- The comparison is culturally appropriate (Anglophone country).
- The task is manageable in the number of words available (200 -300) (200-350 words from 2015).

Practise written tasks in the classroom with an emphasis on learning:

- Comparative terms.
- Linking words to give clarity to the text.
- How to express an opinion.

Standard level paper one

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 - 6	7 - 12	13 - 17	18 - 22	23 - 28	29 - 33	34 - 40

The areas of the programme and examination which appeared difficult for the candidates

There is now enough material from previous examination sessions to help the candidates prepare well for this component of the examination. Although some question types remain inherently challenging (for example, true / false questions with justification: matching the beginnings and ends of sentences...) the candidates now clearly understand the requirements of these question types. All candidates finished within the allocated time.

The strongest candidates give short, concise answers and, when appropriate, single word answers. Those candidates, who achieve less well, frequently quote long extracts from the text, give several possible answers for a single question, write illegibly and have a limited vocabulary.

The strengths and weaknesses of the candidates in the treatment of individual questions

Text A

Question 1: Most candidates incorrectly chose answer F because they did not understand used to in the sentence: where people used to build the huge sailing boats.

Questions 2-5: The answers must be focused. It is not necessary to quote the whole sentence. On the contrary, lengthy answers are generally not considered correct since the candidate is not showing that he/she has understood the focus of the question. For example:

Question 2: In which season did the Cox family visit the New Forest? The answer is a single word: winter.

Question 3: Which words in the text tell us that the Cox family first explored the New Forest in the evening? Answer: (It was already) quite dark.

Question 4: The question asks about the Cox family in particular not about visitors in general.

Question 8: The meaning of break (C, a short holiday) was challenging for many candidates despite the context: We went for a winter break.

Text B

Candidates had few difficulties with this text.

Text C

Questions 24 – 26: In this activity, candidates are not being asked to interpret the text but are being asked to identify the exact word(s) in the text that are being referred to. Grammar is being tested in context. For example, in question 26, opportunities (line 19) refers to get a job. Several students gave the answer employment a word which is not in the text.

Text D

Question 27: Surprisingly, the word first seemed unknown to many candidates. Some candidates gave long answers to this question or gave two answers in the hope of quoting the correct answer. The required answer was Denmark.

Question 33: This requires a close reading of the text (lines 16 -18). Many candidates gave answer statement A. The correct answers are B and C.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Continue to practise reading comprehension with the growing bank of past examination papers. Teachers might also find it useful to use Text A, in English language B, standard level, Paper 1, to give students further practice.

Activities such as deducing meaning from context, identifying the words in the text which are being referred to and true / false statements with justification should be practised regularly.

Advise the students:

- To write clearly. If the examiner cannot clearly identify the letter or read the words, the answer is considered wrong.
- To read the instructions carefully in order to identify where in the text the required information is to be drawn from. Answers which come from a section of the text not specified in the instructions are automatically wrong.
- To distinguish between those questions which ask Which word / which words /which sentence tells us that...

Standard level paper two

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 - 4	5 - 9	10 - 13	14 - 16	17 - 18	19 - 21	22 - 25

The areas of the programme and examination which appeared difficult for the candidates

Although the challenges in Paper 2, the written component, are greater for the candidates than in Paper 1, it is, nevertheless, very pleasing to note that they continue to make good progress in written language skills. Candidates have also shown in this session a good understanding of some of the techniques required to successfully fulfil this examination component: a consequence of a growing bank of examinations to practise on and of hard work in the classroom.

Paper 2 consists of two sections, A and B. The candidates were very well-prepared for section A, possibly because it is easier to give more practice time in the classroom to the short task than to the longer one. Some of the difficulties in section B stemmed from an inappropriate choice of topic (one which did not correspond to the candidate's lexical knowledge) and from a partial understanding of the information required to fully answer the question.

The areas of the programme and examination in which candidates appeared well prepared

Section A

All candidates understood the requirements of section A, the short written task, and they chose in equal numbers question 1 (a notice about a lost mobile) and question 2 (a message for a brother about a movie).

Criterion A: Language

The language was generally accurate and errors seldom obscured communication. Most candidates received 2 or 3 marks in this criterion. Most candidates had an adequate vocabulary range appropriate to the chosen topic (telephone or movie). The weakest candidates did not know the relevant vocabulary (the parts of the school in question 1, for example, where coliseum was frequently used), they omitted subject pronouns in front of verbs, they confused possessive adjectives (my, your, his...) and made plural agreements with nouns and adjectives.

Criterion B: Message

In both questions the great majority of the candidates provided all relevant information (5 details). In those rare scripts where information was missing, it appeared to be due to an oversight or in the case of question 2, a confusion between where / when. The candidates conveyed the message effectively and the strongest candidates did so with a tone of authenticity. Many answers were detailed: in question 1, the description of the telephone and the reasons why it was important to find it and in question 2, the reasons why the friend wanted to see the movie.

Some weaker candidates misunderstood the perspective of the questions: in question 1, they wrote the notice from a general perspective (“a student has lost his mobile telephone”) and in question 2, they misunderstood who was being invited to the movie.

Criterion C: Format

The formats of the tasks were respected by the large majority of candidates. The notice required a title and the message required an opening or closing greeting or name. Not all titles or greetings, however, were appropriate for the tasks. Candidates were not penalized for this and few candidates lost a mark for format.

The strengths and weaknesses of the candidates in the treatment of individual questions

Section B

This section was not as well done as section A.

Criterion A

Language skills were not as strong in this section as in section A. Many candidates did not have the necessary vocabulary to present the topic they had chosen. The candidate is offered the choice of three tasks. In an examination the candidate must make a strategic choice of question and not one based on his/her personal interests.

Criterion B

Criterion B states: All ideas have been developed well. The examination instructions say: Write at least 100 words. In other words, a 100 words is the minimum necessary to complete the task. In order to fulfil the requirement of “well developed ideas” it is very likely that the candidate will have to write more than the minimum number of words.

Criterion B states: There is an effective, logical structure. This means the text is written in paragraphs or in sections.

Criterion B states: There is a successful use of a range of simple and some complex cohesive devices. Few candidates used even basic linking words.

Criterion C

The candidate must identify the text type required in the answer and use the basic characteristics of that text type.

Question 3

The great majority of the candidates chose question 3 on the topic of an important national festival. However, many candidates did not have the vocabulary necessary to describe or comment on the chosen festival. Basic words linked to the topic (parades, exhibitions, to prepare, to participate, for example,) were unknown to many candidates. They either used invented English words or simply used the word in their first language in inverted commas. This is not acceptable. How can one talk about the day of the dead when one does not know the words dead, death, cemetery...?

There are three points of information required in the answer: a description of what is being celebrated; activities where everyone can participate; traditional activities on that day. The better candidates wrote three sections which corresponded to these three aspects. All celebrations were accepted as were all references to participation. Participation could be from the point of view of the tourist (watch a parade) or from that of a family living in the country (food preparation...) or from the point of view of a school organizing a festival. However, many candidates ignored one or more of the required aspects and could not, therefore, reach under the criterion, Message, the mark band 5-6 All ideas have been identified. Candidates who chose to write about Carnival, for example, did not give any explanation about why this celebration exists.

Questions 4 and 5

Few candidates chose question 4 or 5. Those who did so produced convincing texts. In question 4, the structure of the answer is provided in the question itself: what influence did the school have on your choice of career? Why are you successful? What are your plans for the future? These three questions form the basis of the answer. The best candidates gave a title to the interview, introduced the writer at the beginning of the interview (a previous student from the school), asked and answered the three questions and concluded the interview by thanking the writer for answering the questions.

In question 5, the candidate was expected to produce three distinct sections or parts of a brochure to correspond to the three topics: weather, geography and transport. One candidate did not choose an English speaking country.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Candidates should:

- Choose the question which corresponds to their linguistic and lexical knowledge.
- Read the question carefully to understand all the information required in the answer.
- Have enough time to reread the text to check verb forms and tenses.

Among the more common mistakes:

- Punctuation:
Sentences should start with a capital letter and end with a full stop.
- Texts should be divided into paragraphs.
- Question and exclamation marks are only found at the end of the sentence.
- All verbs need a subject – noun or pronoun.
- Past tenses were frequently misused.
- The use of the definite article was frequently incorrect.
- Dates were incorrectly written.