

## May 2016 subject reports

### English Ab initio

#### Overall grade boundaries

##### Standard level

<b>Grade:</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Mark range:</b>	0-14	15-29	30-44	45-58	59-69	70-82	83-100

#### Standard level internal assessment

##### Component grade boundaries

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

#### The range and suitability of the work submitted

The choice of visual stimuli was generally appropriate: they reflected English speaking cultures, contained the key elements of people, action and context and were clearly linked to the themes of the ab initio programme. Some cartoons, however, appeared to appeal to students younger than those in the IB diploma programme. A few schools offered candidates collages of photos linked by topic. This should be avoided since the description can become repetitive and disjointed. No words or text should accompany the visual stimulus.

The majority of schools successfully uploaded the visual stimuli and the recordings onto IBIS before the due date. It is no longer necessary to upload forms nor is it required for the candidates to introduce themselves at the beginning of the recording. Some teachers provided additional comments on the candidates' performance. This is optional but can be helpful to the moderator.

The quality of the sound varied from good to so poor that the message was almost incomprehensible. Some orals sounded as though they had been recorded during recess in the school corridor. The teacher should check the quality of the recording and ensure that the

whole oral has been recorded: several recordings stopped in mid-sentence after only a few minutes. Teachers are reminded that recordings may not be stopped and restarted during the oral examination.

Most recordings respected the 10 minute time limit on which the assessment is based. A few orals were too short and candidates consequently lost marks in criterion B because there was limited interaction. Many teachers had difficulty, however, in respecting the time allocated to each part of the individual oral. Some teachers, for example, allowed the candidates to speak at length (5 - 6 minutes) on the topic of the written assignment which consequently deprived these candidates of adequate time to participate in a general conversation on a variety of topics.

## Candidate performance against each criterion

### Criterion A: Productive skills

Pronunciation and intonation generally facilitated the understanding of the message. Many candidates were able to use a wide range of vocabulary both to describe the photo and to develop their answers in the general conversation. Recurring lexical errors included confusion between: fun / funny; interested / interesting; tired/tiring; listen/hear; remember/ remind; look/see; wear/ use; research /investigation; sofa/armchair; station / season.

Most candidates were able to use both basic grammatical structures and some more complex grammatical structures correctly. Strong candidates were able to use past and future tenses accurately and appropriately.

### Criterion B: Interactive and receptive skills

The importance of interaction is not well understood. Some candidates were not given the opportunity to interact in a spontaneous or natural conversation: the description of the visual stimulus lasted too long and the teacher asked few, if any, questions on the photo or the topic of the photo; the question on the written assignment resulted in a speech which had been learnt by heart; in the general conversation, “questions” such as “Talk to me about your family” do not lead to a conversation but to a monologue. Candidates who do not show sustained interaction will not reach the top mark bands in criterion B, message.

The focus of the questions both on the photo and in the general conversation should be on the target culture – in this case English speaking cultures – and not on the culture of the candidate.

If a candidate is not able to answer a question or lacks the necessary vocabulary to answer, the teacher may repeat the question, rephrase the question or ask another question.

Teachers should avoid whispering to the candidate or writing the answer. The mark is based on a global assessment: the candidate is not penalised for each error.

## Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

- Teachers should prepare in advance a range of questions on the visual stimuli and on the topics for the general conversation. They should prepare enough questions to ask each candidate different questions.
- Questions should take into account the linguistic level of each candidate. In order to help a strong candidate reach the higher mark bands, some questions should be asked in the past or future tenses or using more complex grammatical structures.
- Teachers should not ask questions on information that the candidate has already given.
- Teachers should not give the answer within the question itself since this deprives the candidate of the opportunity to show his / her knowledge (What season is it? Summer? Winter?)
- Teachers should not correct grammatical and lexical mistakes.

## Standard level Written Assignment

### Component grade boundaries

<b>Grade:</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Mark range:</b>	0-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	13-14	15-17	18-20

### The range and suitability of the work submitted

This examination session saw a sharp increase in the number of candidates in the English ab initio program. While some teachers understood the requirements of the written assignment, many did not. The quality of the language alone does not allow a candidate to achieve high marks in this component. Candidates who scored few marks did so because they wrote a written assignment following the guidelines for the task in the language B program and not in the ab initio program or because they wrote general essays on their chosen topic without following the required format or because they did not choose an English speaking country as the focus of their study.

Appropriate topics were based on a comparison between comparable cultural elements, for example: festivities and special days (Carnival, Halloween, Christmas, New Year, All Saints Day, All Fools day, Independence Day) meals, typical foods, leisure activities, school systems. Inappropriate topics were those which were not based on an Anglophone country (for example, Québec, China, Korea, "Africa", "Islam"... ) or were topics not linked to those on the ab initio program (for example, abortion, divorce and religion) and too large in scope to be treated successfully in 350 words.

Many candidates seemed unaware that the main focus of the written assignment should be on an English speaking culture and wrote mainly about their own culture. Comparisons between

the cultures of indigenous peoples do not necessarily contribute to the candidate's knowledge of an English speaking culture.

Candidates should use the criteria headings as subtitles to structure the task. This ensures that all parts of the task are completed. In the section Reflection, criteria C, D and E, candidates should also write the questions above each answer. Note that titles, subtitles and the three questions are not included in the total number of words.

Few schools uploaded the required documents: the written assignment, the bibliography and at least two resources in English. Since this is part of the formal requirements, most candidates lost marks in criterion G.

## Candidate performance against each criterion

### Criterion A: Description

The majority of candidates did not understand the requirements in this section. At least 3 factual pieces of information about the topic in the target culture must be given. Candidates who scored 0 marks did so because they wrote generalities about the topic ("Sports keeps us healthy" for example), because they compared the topics in 2 countries (information to be given in Section B) or because they explained why they had chosen this topic ("I am interested in folk dance")

### Criterion B: Comparison

This section was generally well done and the majority of candidates provided detailed comparative information on their chosen topic. The stronger candidates used comparative terms and compared several aspects of the topic. Some candidates, however, who wrote extensively in this section, did so at the expense of detailed answers in Sections C, D and E. Candidates who scored lower marks in this section did so because the choice of topic did not lend itself to a brief factual comparison or because the comparison did not include an Anglophone culture or because the comparison was imbalanced and the focus was on the candidate's own culture rather than on an Anglophone one.

### Criteria C, D and E: Reflection

A significant number of candidates did not seem to realize that this section, with its focus on intercultural awareness, comprises the main part of the task. It is worth 9 marks. Many candidates lost marks under Reflection because they did not use the questions as subheadings. Many wrote a single block of text or two paragraphs for the three answers leaving the examiner to guess where one answer ended and another began

### Criterion C: question 1

Most candidates named one similarity or difference as the source of "surprise". Few, however, developed their answer by providing details, examples and reasons for their surprise. Many repeated information already given in the description or comparison

### Criterion D: question 2

Candidates must explain why differences or similarities in the chosen topic exist between the two cultures. Candidates are expected to develop their answer by providing several reasons for the differences and similarities. Those who continued to list similarities and differences instead of giving a reason for them scored few marks as did those who merely repeated information given in the preceding sections. Many gave superficial answers (“There are differences because they live in a different country.” “There are differences because they speak a different language.”).

### Criterion E: question 3

This question was frequently misunderstood by candidates who did not place themselves in the situation of an Anglophone looking at the candidate’s own culture. Many candidates repeated information already given. Answers were seldom developed.

### Criterion F: Language

The level of linguistic competence was generally adequate to convey the message clearly, particularly in sections A and B. Some candidates had difficulty, however, expressing their opinions in sections C, D and E. Few candidates used linking words.

### Criterion G: formal requirements and register

Register was almost always appropriate. On the other hand, many candidates lost a mark for formal requirements. The documents to be uploaded with the task include a bibliography of all the resources and the resources consulted in the target language. Many tasks did not include either resources or bibliography. Bibliographies, when included, were frequently incomplete (dates of access to the internet sites were missing; there were not 2 sources in English for example.). Some sources had little link with the chosen topic and others were too long or too linguistically difficult for ab initio candidates.

## Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Teachers should ensure that:

- The topic of the task is focused
- The topic is linked to the course program
- The candidate compares two countries, one of which represents an English speaking culture
- The resources are within the linguistic abilities of the candidate
- The resources are relevant to the topic
- Candidates have read the criteria and relevant extract about the written assignment in the ab initio guide and that they have understood the requirements for each part of the task

## Standard level paper one

### Component grade boundaries

<b>Grade:</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Mark range:</b>	0-5	6-11	12-16	17-21	22-26	27-31	32-40

### General comments

Although there were some high marks, the range of work presented generally revealed a lot of gaps in reading comprehension skills for both simple and more complex information and weaker candidates lacked the language and text-handling skills to engage with the tasks successfully or at all with a notable number of NR.

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

Many of the answers for more complex information were ambiguous, especially in the case of true and false questions which required justification using evidence from the texts and although they may have succeeded in finding the right place in the text, the right line or fragment which contained a part of or all of the correct answer, they often excluded the relevant information or included excess and irrelevant information that blurred the clarity of the answer.

On the whole, a notable number of candidates found multiple choice questions challenging as well as reading for particular information and failed to choose the right answer, especially questions that tested for specific grammar, vocabulary or syntax, especially pronoun synonym interpretation questions.

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

Most candidates performed well in extracting simple information from the texts as well as the matching exercises questions 1-4 whilst finding the same type of exercise in questions 31-35 more challenging and most were able to identify the text type in question 29.

Candidates who performed better showed greater familiarity with the types of tasks they faced and demonstrated effective reading strategies. This was clearly reflected in their answers to questions 8-17 and 18-27.

The candidates performed well in the tasks that required general understanding and they generally did well in tasks that required reading for the gist even though the texts could have been a challenge for this level of English.

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

Text A:

Q 1 - 4

Candidates generally did well in these matching questions.

Q 5 - 7

Candidates mostly referred to the right lines in the text except those who did not understand the text at all. Weaker candidates had difficulty interpreting question 5, giving specific people rather than types of people. Weaker candidates had difficulty with question 7, the term “goals” in the question seems not to have been understood, leading candidates to use the expression from the text containing the term rather than deduct their own answer.

Text B:

Q 8 - 11

Many candidates chose the right T/F option, but failed to justify their answers correctly with relevant evidence from the text. For example, in question 8, many seem to have assumed that because one member of a family was involved in the rescue, the answer was true. Question 10 caused weaker candidates difficulties, many assuming that the focus of the question in 10 was the place, “Fish Island”, and not that the teenagers had spent the night there. This confusion led candidates to give irrelevant responses in their justification.

In general, the justifications were often inaccurate or irrelevant.

Q 12 - 13

Candidates mostly answered the questions correctly.

Q 14 - 17

Candidates on the whole found this section challenging, revealing a gap in some basic grammar structure knowledge; a notable number of candidates did not manage to do the task at all as it seems they did not understand the text OR the task. Stronger candidates demonstrated the grammar knowledge necessary to pass this section. Weaker candidates had considerable difficulties identifying the pronouns/vocabulary referred to in questions 14 to 17, indicating weak text-comprehension skills.

Text C:

Q 18 - 20

Most of the candidates failed to find the required words and some candidates failed to understand the task OR did not read the instructions carefully, giving more than one word.

**Q 21**

Most candidates failed to choose here the right answer.

**Q 22**

In general, candidates had difficulty identifying the most relevant piece of information to answer the question although most seem to have identified the relevant phrases in the text which they then attempted to communicate by including various possible answers such as “more traffic congestion . . . more cars on the road . . . the worse traffic gets, all of which were incomplete versions of the correct answer.

**Q 23**

Many candidates had difficulty finding the most appropriate justification for their answer and weaker candidates were unable to identify True or False correctly.

**Q 24 - 27**

Candidates generally either got all of the words right or failed to get any right. Weaker candidates had difficulties identifying the correct answers indicating both limited vocabulary and poor text-comprehension skills. Stronger candidates were able to pick up marks here.

**Q 28**

Most of the candidates failed to choose the right answer.

**Q 29**

Most of the candidates did not recognise the text type.

**Q 30**

Candidates generally got half the answer correct by choosing the right sentences in the task.

**Q 31 - 35**

Although many candidates did well in this task, a notable number of candidates still found this section challenging.

## Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Candidates should be better prepared to engage with text-handling exercise, developing their skills for identifying and matching synonyms and pronoun references. Candidates should also have more practice finding relevant pieces of information in order to justify true/false choices.

Candidates should practise on various types of texts from course books, newspapers, magazines, the Internet (e.g. <http://www.bbc.com/culture>), etc.



Candidates should be familiar with the reading comprehension techniques, i.e. scanning or reading for the gist, contextualization in order to identify unfamiliar vocabulary.

Candidates should be given reading comprehension tasks using a variety of text types regularly which will allow them to practice various reading comprehension techniques, i.e. gap filling, T/F, answer justification, paraphrasing, multiple choice, etc.

## Standard level paper two

### Component grade boundaries

<b>Grade:</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Mark range:</b>	0-4	5-8	9-12	13-15	16-18	19-21	22-25

### General comments

Candidates appeared well prepared for this examination component. Most candidates understood that they had to choose one question in section A and one question in section B. Most candidates correctly identified both the context of the chosen task and the required text type and they provided all or most of the required information. This information, was not, however, always sufficiently developed in section B; many candidates wrote less than the minimum number of words.

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

In section A candidates chose in equal numbers questions 1 and 2 and the majority provided the five required details. However, communication of this information depends on language accuracy and for many candidates “language inaccuracies often obscured communication” (criterion A).

In section B a majority of candidates chose question 3, followed by question 5 and question 4. Basic grammatical structures were frequently used inaccurately and in a minority of cases the message was consequently incomprehensible. First language interference was evident in both vocabulary and grammatical structures.

Tasks were not always clearly structured: few candidates used paragraphs and linking words were frequently used inappropriately.

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

Most candidates provided all the required information. The strongest candidates gave detailed information and developed their answer by providing several examples, further details or reasons. Text types, with the exception of the speech (question 3), were clearly identified and most candidates scored 2 marks for format (criterion C).

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

### Section A

#### Question 1

Several candidates referred to a country which is not English speaking. Some candidates gave a single answer for the last two details. (“I chose this photo because it shows a typical scene of people dancing.”)

Format: to be considered a blog, there had to be a title, a reference to a blog or a general greeting to the class.

#### Question 2

Although most candidates provided all required information, a few gave only one reason for both details: “why you are sending a present” and “why you chose this present.” Acceptable answers to “when you will visit him/her” included a reference to a day, a month, a date or an event. When the answer was not clear, no mark was awarded (“I will visit last month”).

Format: To be considered a note, there had to be a greeting to a grandparent, a closing comment or signature.

### Section B

#### Question 3

The majority of candidates chose this task. In order to reach the highest mark band for message three reasons for doing sport in school had to be well developed with examples and details. Some candidates did not provide reasons for doing sports in school but explained instead how to lead a healthy lifestyle (diet, sleep). Many candidates did not know the characteristics of a speech and others did not have the lexical or grammatical knowledge to express an opinion.

Format: To be considered a speech, there had to be an opening and closing greeting (hello/ good afternoon/ teachers, parents, students/ I am going to talk about the importance of sport in school. / Thank you for listening.)

## Question 4

Few candidates chose this task. To reach the top mark bands for message, the candidate had to describe three activities, make a reference to their importance to mark the World Environment Day and had to encourage parents and students to participate in the event. The stronger candidates developed their answers with examples and details (time, place, benefits of each activity.)

Format: to be considered a brochure, there had to be a title and either columns, lists or subtitles.

## Question 5

The candidates who chose this question used the three questions from the question itself to structure their text. They developed their answers by providing details and examples. Many candidates also wrote effective introductions in which they introduced the student to be interviewed. Most candidates provided a short conclusion to the interview.

The principal difficulty for most candidates was how to formulate a grammatically correct question. (What difficulties did you have? What surprised you? What are your hopes for the future? )

Format: to be considered an interview, there had to be a title and either a question and answer format, or the name of the journalist.

## Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

The choice of a question in sections A and B is a strategic one. On the day of the examination this choice should not depend on the candidate's preference or interest in the topic but on his knowledge of the lexical and grammatical structures which will allow him / her to write an effective (clear) and well developed message.

Candidates should analyse the question before making a choice. Do they have the vocabulary necessary to deal with the topic? Have they understood all the elements of the question? Do they know the characteristics of the required text type? Only if the answer to these 3 questions is "yes", should the candidate choose that question.

Language accuracy (in both basic and more complex structures) must be emphasized. Areas where basic structures are frequently inaccurate include:

- word order (adjective – noun); absence of subject pronouns; adjective – noun agreements; modal verbs; prepositions; present simple / present continuous; demonstrative adjectives (this/these: that/those); the interrogative
- First language interference frequently makes the message unclear. These errors include: to tell / to say; to make / to do; actually / nowadays; funny / fun; special / especially; to realize / to create

Students should understand the criteria and know that to achieve a mark in the 7-8 mark band for message (section B) all ideas have to be well developed. Activities in the classroom should,

therefore, help the candidates to acquire a range of vocabulary which will allow them to develop their answers.