

## May 2017 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 – 16	17 – 33	34 – 50	51 – 62	63 – 73	74 – 85	86 – 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 majority of candidates were able to describe the selected photograph and to answer straightforward questions on the topic represented in the photo, on the topic of the written assignment and on general topics. Many were able to do so in some detail.

While there has been a significant improvement in the way in which the individual oral is conducted, many candidates could not achieve the highest mark-bands because the teacher did not give them the opportunity to interact or to speak spontaneously. Indeed, some candidates launched into a monologue on the topic of the photo which lasted from 5 to 10 minutes.

Candidates have 15 minutes to prepare their presentation of the previously unseen photo. This presentation frequently appeared to have been learnt by heart or was read; it was clear that the candidate had prior knowledge of the photo and the topic. Some questions and answers in the general conversation also sounded rehearsed. Some candidates did not describe the photo at all but talked about the topic in general terms.

The length of the oral should be respected. Several orals were too short: 4 or 5 minutes rather than 9-10 minutes. This reduced time did not give the candidates the possibility of showing the breadth of their language skills.

Candidates in a number of schools introduced themselves or were introduced by the teacher (name, IB number, code and school) at the beginning of the recording. The recording should be anonymous.

The assessment form which teachers must complete with marks and comments on the candidate's performance is an opportunity to justify or explain the marks which have been awarded. It is a valuable part of the examiner's assessment. However, many teachers simply copied from the ab initio guide the description which corresponds to the mark band. Others repeated their comments in the optional additional information section rather than develop them. Others made the same comments about all their candidates and some teachers gave the same marks to all candidates.

The choice of photos was generally appropriate this session. Most were in colour and showed people engaged in an activity of relevance to the topics in the ab initio program. Nevertheless, several concerns remain. The following examples are **not** appropriate:

- the candidate had to describe more than one photo
- the candidate was given a photo which had a title or a caption
- the candidate was given a photo on the topic of his/her written assignment
- the candidate was given a photo not linked to the course themes and topics and / or not linked to the target culture
- the candidate was given a photo of a single object without people, action or context

## Candidate performance against each criterion

### Criterion A: Productive skills

#### Intonation and pronunciation:

When candidates read or have memorized the description of the photo and the topic, the "artificial" intonation and pronunciation make it frequently difficult to understand the message.

#### Vocabulary:

Although many candidates used a wide range of vocabulary, first language interference made some presentations difficult to follow. To allow the candidates to show their knowledge, the teacher has to ask questions in the 3<sup>rd</sup> part (general conversation) on a range of topics (at least two) not linked either to the photo or to the topic of the written assignment. In other words, the photo is based on one topic, the written assignment on a second topic and the general conversation must include 2 other topics. This is a total of 4 different topics. Candidates who are limited to speaking about one or two topics cannot reach high marks.

#### Basic and complex grammatical structures:

Although many candidates were able to use grammatically correct sentences, there remain many basic errors in simple dialogue (order of nouns and adjectives; absence of subject pronouns...). When the teacher asks questions, he / she should ensure that some questions are asked in the future and past tenses. In this way, the candidate can demonstrate the ability to use more complex language.

#### Criterion B: Interactive and receptive skills

If the candidate is asked very few questions – in some individual orals, no questions were asked at all- he/she cannot be awarded marks for comprehension and interaction. The candidate must participate in a spontaneous conversation to demonstrate the ability to both understand and convey an appropriate message.

## Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Teachers should:

- re-read the requirements of the individual oral before each session to remind themselves of requirements and to ensure that all three parts of the individual oral take place.
- share the instructions and the criteria in the ab initio guide with the candidates so that they understand the requirements and the structure of the individual oral.
- prepare in advance the questions on the photo, on the written assignment and on the general conversation. They should prepare enough questions so that the oral does not stop abruptly because, for example, the candidate has replied with short answers or has been unable to answer. Questions on the written assignment should not be the same for all candidates.
- teach candidates how to describe a photo and encourage them to use the target language in the classroom. For example, future candidates could prepare questions on a photo and on its topic or prepare questions for the general conversation which they then practise with a partner.

## 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

Although the suitability of the tasks varied from inappropriate to relevant, most tasks showed a clear improvement in the understanding of the requirements of the written assignment. A small number of candidates remained unaware that the task must be based on an English-speaking culture. A minority wrote general essays without a comparative cultural focus.

Appropriate topics for a comparative study included festivities and special days (Halloween, Christmas, New Year, All Saints Day, All Fools day, Independence Day) meals, typical foods, leisure activities and school systems. Cultural topics linked to ethnic groups are seldom appropriate: the languages and customs of such groups cannot usually be considered as reflecting the target English speaking culture. Inappropriate topics also included those which had no link with the themes or topics of the ab initio programme (euthanasia, gay rights, induction stove methods of cooking, worms...) and / or which were too vague and general in scope to be successfully treated in 350 words (the family, relationships...).

Most candidates used subtitles to structure the task: subtitles which correspond to those of criteria A, B, F and G and those which correspond to the three questions in Reflection (criteria C, D and E). Candidates who do not structure their work are disadvantaged when it is not clear to which part / criterion the text refers. For example, when examiners cannot identify where the description ends and the comparison begins or which question is being answered in the reflection section, the candidate is inevitably penalised for lack of clarity of message.

Few candidates uploaded the required documents: the written assignment, the bibliography and at least two resources in English. Many candidates consequently lost marks in criterion G.

## Candidate performance against each criterion

### Criterion A (2 marks) – Description

To achieve 2 marks, the candidate must provide 3 factual pieces of information on the chosen topic based on the target culture.

Most candidates failed to obtain the 2 marks in this criterion for one of the following reasons: they did not choose a country which represented the target culture; they did not provide a sufficient number of facts; they expressed opinions and vague generalities on the chosen topic ("Sport is good for you"); they compared the chosen topic in 2 countries (the content of criterion B); they gave irrelevant information about why they chose the subject; they wrote an introduction to an essay.

### Criterion B (3 marks) – Comparison

Candidates' performance in this section has improved. Many wrote two clear paragraphs, one on each culture and the use of comparative terms was at least attempted. However, some candidates repeat the content of section A, Description in the comparison. The same information is not awarded marks twice. Some candidates lost points due to incomprehensible language or lack of balance in their treatment of the cultures. This section was usually the longest despite the fact that the section, Reflection, is awarded more marks.

### Criteria C, D, E (3 marks each) - Reflection

Responses to the Reflection Questions are still an area for improvement. In many cases, it remained difficult to discern to which question the candidates intended to respond. Answers

were frequently brief and undeveloped. The formula for a developed answer (factual response + justification + reference to own culture) would help clarify responses and develop candidates' thinking skills. Many candidates continued to recycle material from the description and comparison sections in a barely reformulated fashion. Occasionally this part of the assignment, (Reflection criteria C, D and E), was treated as a conclusion to a general essay and did not contain answers to any of the three questions.

#### Criterion C (3 marks)

The first question was usually addressed in a single sentence in which candidates stated one similarity or one difference. Few gave a developed answer stating details, examples or reasons. Some tended to repeat information from the comparison section.

#### Criterion D (3 marks)

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.

#### Criterion E (3 marks)

Many candidates did not fully comprehend the question and some just copied what they had already written in the comparison section. They were not able to put themselves in the place of a person of the target culture and explain what would surprise them about their own culture.

#### Criterion F (4 marks)

Most candidates were able to convey a comprehensible if not always clear message. In parts A and B most candidates were able to communicate, but in criteria C, D and E, where the candidates must give reasons and express opinions, there was a marked decrease in accuracy and comprehensibility. Syntax and punctuation are areas for improvement. Vocabulary was mostly appropriate for the task.

#### Criterion G: formal requirements and register (2 marks)

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 at least 2 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, others were too long or too linguistically difficult for ab initio candidates. Others were outdated and no longer accurately reflected the target culture.

## Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates.

Teachers should ensure that:

- 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;
- the candidate compares two countries, one of which represents an English-speaking culture;
- the topic of the task is focused;
- the topic is linked to the course program;
- the resources are relevant to the topic and recent;
- the resources are within the linguistic abilities of the candidate;
- candidates are provided with models of bibliographical references including consultation dates and are reminded to upload their sources;
- candidates use the proper structure with appropriate subtitles: the introduction (Description) being the shortest, the body (Comparison) longer and the conclusion (Reflection) the longest;
- candidates are reminded that the content of their answers should not be recycled from previous sections of the task;
- candidates are able to use basic punctuation and simple comparative terms.

## Standard level paper one

### Component grade boundaries

<b>Grade:</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Mark range:</b>	0 – 7	8 – 14	15 – 21	22 – 26	27 – 30	31 – 35	36 – 40

### General comments

An obvious improvement has been made in Paper 1 since the last session which reveals that the IB schools participating in the previous session have taken the advice they were given seriously and made attempts to apply the advice and guidance given in the last feedback session.

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

There is still an obvious problematic trend when answering questions that require candidates to read for specific information, especially syntax, grammar and vocabulary based information.

Many of them had problems with the interpretation of questions. This was particularly noticeable when they had to find a specific word in the text and answered in long sentences. The True or False questions still caused a notable number of candidates to lose marks as many could only answer half of the question correctly with either an incomplete justification or the wrong part of the sentence fragment taken from the text, even though they were able to find the right place. Following instructions still seems to be an issue and in many cases the reason for not receiving marks for certain questions (i.e. when asked to find ONE word the candidate provides a whole sentence therefore providing a highly ambiguous answer.) On the whole, there is an issue with the understanding and following of instructions.

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

There appears to be a slightly higher level of experience with a wider variety of texts evidenced in the performance for this session. Generally, candidates had fewer problems when extracting simple information from the texts and they also did well in the matching exercises. They excelled in the tasks that required general understanding and they generally did well in tasks that required reading for the gist.

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

Text A:

Q 1 – 4 required a close reading of the short texts. Many candidates found this part of the exam challenging as they were unable to identify the exact information necessary to answer the questions correctly.

Q 5 seemed to present a challenge to many candidates who found it difficult to identify the correct information in the text to explain HOW to enroll on the course. There was a general mix of correct and incorrect answers here.

Q 6 A troublesome one as most candidates failed to give the right answer because they referred to just 'a member' which was an unclear answer.

Q 7 Here most candidates had problems mainly due to NOT following the instructions in the question which specifies that the answer should be ONE word only and many candidates answered with whole phrases from the text therefore providing ambiguous answers.

Text B:

Q 8 Candidates mostly chose the right answers.

Q 9 - 12 These types of question continue to be a challenge for a large portion of the candidates, again in part, as a result of NOT following the instructions. There was a varied range of incorrect answers where candidates mostly answered the true/false part correctly but often failed to justify their answers appropriately and often due to ignoring the clear instruction asking them to use words from the text. Whole sentences were often copied from the text making the answer

ambiguous at times. On other occasions, it was the reverse, where the correct justification was given but it did not correlate with the T or F selection made by the candidate which once again points to carelessness or lack of attention rather than the level of ability.

Q 13 – 16 Although many candidates had no problems here there was still a notable number who confused the information provided for FINALISTS and WINNERS, unable to differentiate correctly between the two.

Text C:

Q17- 20 – (matching activity) was well done by stronger candidates as was the referencing activity; weaker candidates failed to find the right answers leading to the conclusion that the general knowledge of syntax was not sufficient.

Q 21-23. Once again, stronger candidates did well here whilst weaker candidates proved Question 23 to be the most difficult in this series and draws attention to the need to work on specific grammar structures with greater intensity.

Q 25-27: (fill in the blank) the majority of candidates found these questions difficult. There seems to be an issue of not reading carefully and giving an obviously wrong answer out of carelessness – for example, the word 'bright' instead of 'dark' clothes.

Text D:

Q 28 - 31 were answered correctly by the stronger candidates but the comprehension questions which followed challenged weaker candidates. This could very well have been due to lack of time (taking into account that this is the last section of the paper) OR lack of vocabulary. It could also be a result of weak scanning skills.

Q 32 Candidates mostly gave the right answer even though they often just copied whole phrases from the text.

Q 33 Some candidates gave the right answer here. A few ignored the instructions and gave the word 'uncommon', which could not be accepted.

Q 34 and 35. Candidates often took their answers from sections of the text without following the instructions which indicated which lines to look at. Q 34 - Most of the candidates finished the sentence correctly. Those who did not, showed a lack of understanding of either the task or the text.

Q 35 Candidates mostly gave the right answers even though sometimes whole sentences from the text were given. Some candidates just simply ignored the instruction here and gave their own answers based on general knowledge.



## Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

There is an obvious need to work on **READING** and **FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS** with greater care. Many errors were made not necessarily as a result of the English language level of the candidates but as a result of them **NOT** doing what they were asked to do and therefore failing to answer questions with the correct information out of carelessness. The recommendation here would be to practise as much as possible reading and **UNDERSTANDING** exam instructions to then be able to follow them successfully. This will boost candidates' confidence as many will find they **DO** have the ability to answer certain questions correctly **IF** they follow the instructions and look for the information being **ASKED** for.

There is a general weakness in the area of contextualized grammar and vocabulary questions and greater emphasis should be made on these types of exercises. By teaching candidates that they do not necessarily have to know the right answer but can make an educated guess by analyzing the context will also raise levels of confidence and create the necessary conditions for greater success with these types of questions.

With questions that require evidence in the form of justifications (true and false questions), more emphasis needs to be placed on **WHAT** defines a justification and to **DOUBLE CHECK** that the evidence actually supports the True or False answer they have decided on and when it doesn't.

Students should be exposed to a variety of authentic text types on diverse topics in the ab initio program from the first year of the course with an emphasis on how to write focused and pertinent answers to questions.

## Standard level paper two

### Component grade boundaries

<b>Grade:</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Mark range:</b>	0 – 5	6 – 10	11 – 14	15 – 16	17 – 19	20 – 21	22 – 25

### General comments

The level of written production continues to improve. Communication ranged from “limited” to “accurate and effective” and the majority of candidates were able to provide a relevant and generally comprehensible message using the characteristics of the specified text type.

Candidates from schools new to the IB diploma program and those from schools with previous experience demonstrated a good general understanding of the expectations of Paper 2. A

minority of candidates answered more than one question in each section and a few answered all 5 questions. Some candidates wrote texts which were too short (fewer than 100 words in section B). Although candidates are not penalized for writing less than the minimum number of words, they lose marks if the message is not sufficiently detailed or developed.

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

Criterion A: language (basic grammatical structures and a varied range of vocabulary)

In both sections, criterion A, Language was the area in which candidates experienced the most difficulty and language inaccuracies did on occasion obscure communication. While stronger candidates were capable of using complex grammatical structures and a range of vocabulary, others placed adjectives after nouns, added plural agreements on adjectives and omitted subject pronouns with verbs. First language interference was also evident in the choice of vocabulary. Frequent lexical errors included: *to realize, ubicare, assist, attend, a local, alimentation, coliseum, actually*.

Criterion B: message

In both sections, some candidates lost marks in criterion B because of a superficial reading of the question, because they did not understand all the elements of the question or because they did not realize that all the information mentioned in the rubric had to be provided.

In an examination, the choice of tasks in sections A and B should not be based solely on interest in the subject. It should be a strategic one based on fully understanding the elements of the task and on having the necessary grammatical and lexical knowledge of the topic to respond appropriately.

While some candidates developed their responses with examples and details, few used a range of cohesive devices.

Criterion C: format

Several candidates did not provide the characteristics of the required text type and consequently lost 3 marks (1 mark in section A and 2 marks in section B).

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

The majority of the candidates chose 2 tasks, conveyed a generally relevant message and demonstrated some knowledge of the characteristics of the required text type. The structure of the tasks was frequently clear with more candidates punctuating sentences effectively and using paragraphs to structure their ideas.

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

### Section A

Although question 2 was a more popular choice than question 1, the results for both are very similar. In both questions, candidates are asked to provide 5 pieces of information.

#### Question 1

Although most candidates identified the 5 details of information to be provided, language occasionally obscured the message. For example, the use of prepositions caused some ambiguity: *The food is prepared by / the food is prepared for*. Some candidates did not know the meaning of “a dish”. All references to food were accepted as long as the reference was in English. Some candidates did not understand the information: “say why the International Food Fair will be enjoyable”. First language interference in vocabulary included *alimentation / food; to assist / to attend; coliseum / school hall*.

Format: to achieve 1 mark, the candidate had to provide a visually distinct title for the poster. This may be indicated, for example, by using capital letters or leaving a space between the title and the text. The title had to be relevant to the event advertised.

#### Question 2

This question proved to be slightly more challenging than question 1.

A minority of candidates did not name the activity. Some candidates misunderstood the context – an event to say goodbye to a friend - and talked instead about an event to celebrate the end of term. Others gave the date or the day of the event and not, as required, the time. The information to be given about “what to wear and what to bring” was frequently misunderstood or partially misunderstood.

Format: to achieve 1 mark the candidate had to identify the text type (an invitation) with a greeting (to the friend who is leaving or to classmates) or with a relevant title or signature.

### Section B

Question 3 was the least popular choice of task (a film review) and question 5, (the new shopping centre), was the most popular. It frequently appeared that candidates chose the question influenced by their personal interest in the topic rather than making a more pragmatic choice based on a full understanding of all elements of the question and knowing the characteristics of the text type.

#### Question 3

The film review had to include a description or introduction to the film, give information about where and when the events in the film took place and give the reasons for enjoying or not the film. Many candidates provided a detailed synopsis of the film but omitted all other information. Some candidates thought that “when” and “where” referred to the film itself (release date and

nationality) rather than to the plot of the film. Few candidates used topic specific vocabulary (*plot, actors, dialogue, special effects ...*).

Format: few candidates used more than a title to indicate a film review published in a magazine. In order to achieve 2 marks, the candidate had to use two of the following characteristics: a title, a date, the name of the reviewer, a rating (numerical, star based...) of the film.

#### Question 4

The enthusiasm of candidates for the CAS programme and its benefits is admirable. Unfortunately, many did not read with sufficient attention the subject and lost marks in criterion B for missing or irrelevant information. The blog was not about the CAS programme in general but about a specific service: working with disabled children. Many candidates did not mention this service in their blog. Others omitted to state the aims of the service or where and when the service took place.

Format: in order to achieve 2 marks for the text type of a blog, the candidate had to use two of the following characteristics: time, date, user name, title, reference to audience (at the beginning of the text or in the course of the blog).

#### Question 5

This question was the most popular and the majority of candidates provided all the required information with some detail and development of ideas. Some candidates did not say how to get to the shopping centre and others did not mention what they had bought at the shopping centre. Some candidates did not understand the use of the past tense in “what you just bought” and gave information about a future purchase. The rubric asks for reasons (in the plural) for recommending the shopping centre. It is expected, therefore, that this answer be developed. However, the reasons for recommending a visit to the shopping centre were frequently implicit and when the text was not well-structured, they were difficult to identify.

Format: in order to achieve 2 marks for the text type of an email, the candidate had to use two of the following characteristics: a greeting, a concluding formula, the name of the sender.

## Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

- Candidates should practise in class analyzing rubrics of questions from past examinations. What information is required? Which elements must be developed? Candidates should be encouraged to use the question rubric as their plan. The required list of details should be underlined, highlighted or numbered to ensure that all information is provided.
- Candidates should also analyse the rubrics of past questions in order to reflect on the structure of their answer. The structure should be clear and logical. Writing short sentences, paragraphing and cohesive devices should be practised regularly in class.
- Candidates should practise writing different text types, paying attention to openings, closings and layout.
- Candidates must be reminded to write legibly. Examiners can only award marks for

comprehensible text. Some candidates wrote with a soft tipped pen which resulted in “blurred” handwriting. While a rereading of the text is to be encouraged, if amendments and additions are extensive, it is preferable to rewrite the text. Some candidates added information above their text, in the margins or linked to the text with arrows. This frequently made the text very difficult to follow.