

November 2013 subject reports

English ab initio

Overall grade boundaries

Standard level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 - 14	15 - 30	31 - 45	46 - 59	60 - 70	71 - 82	83 - 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 first internal assessment session in the southern hemisphere has been successfully completed. There are a few changes to past practice in the procedures for the individual oral and the majority of teachers integrated these appropriately into the conduct of the oral. Areas of the internal assessment which did not always follow requirements included the timing of the three parts of the oral, the choice of the visual stimulus and the topics of questions in part 2 and part 3 of the oral.

All schools posted their recordings, visual stimuli and forms 2/ABIA on IBIS by the due date. Almost all forms were correctly filled out with comments from the teacher to justify the mark. Although most recordings were audible, there was significant background noise on several (traffic, children, construction work...). Not only is this disruptive for the candidate but it makes the task of assessing the oral more difficult for the examiner. Recordings must take place in quiet examination circumstances. It is also essential to check the quality of the recording before submitting it.

The range and suitability of the work submitted

Candidates were clearly familiar with the expectations and steps of the individual oral. They introduced themselves in English. (Note: this refers only to name and candidate number. The candidate should not talk about family or personal interests). The majority of candidates described the chosen picture in some detail and participated energetically in the general

conversation. The questions on the written assignment gave all candidates the opportunity to talk confidently about a topic they knew well.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criteria A: Language

The strong points of the candidates' performance were the extensive vocabulary of many candidates and their grasp of simple and some complex grammatical structures. The weakest point was the pronunciation which was on occasion so poor that the message became incomprehensible.

Criterion B: Interaction

The candidates showed that they understood all or almost all of the questions and comments of the teacher and many answered in considerable detail. The questions on the written assignment were the occasion for several to talk with enthusiasm about a topic they were familiar with. Questions on the visual stimulus were generally less well dealt with.

Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

How to choose an appropriate visual stimulus

The visual stimulus should be in colour, a single picture not a collage, and it should depict a few people doing something in a recognizable context. The topic of the stimulus should be linked to one of the topics on the programme.

Recurrent problems in the choice of the visual stimulus

- The ab initio course is both about language acquisition and acquiring intercultural understanding. The target is the culture of the language being studied not the candidate's own culture. Visual stimuli must, therefore, reflect an Anglophone culture (US, UK, Australian, New Zealand, South African...)
- Some visual stimuli were suitable only for a very young audience and not young adults. Note: Photos from magazines are a good source of materials.
- The topic of the photo should **not** be the same as the topic of the written assignment.
- Some candidates were invited to select a visual stimulus as the recording started. Candidates must have 15 minutes preparation time in supervised conditions to make notes for their presentation.

The conduct of the oral

It is essential to respect the time allocated to each section of the exam. It is equally important to ask questions in parts 2 and 3 based on the relevant part of the programme (part 2: questions on the topic of the photo and in part 3: questions on the topic of the written assignment followed by questions on at least two other topics in the programme). The

questions in the general conversation should not be on topics which have already been discussed (linked to either the picture or the written assignment).

First part: The student describes the picture (1-2 minutes).

Second part: The teacher asks questions on the picture and the topic of the picture not on other topics in the course. The teacher should not ask questions on vocabulary but try to engage the student in a conversation. (2-3 minutes)

Third part: This begins with at least 2 questions on the written assignment. It is important not to let the candidate speak too long on the chosen topic since the teacher must also ask questions on at least two of the other topics on the programme. The candidate has to show breadth of knowledge. (4-5 minutes)

Further comments

The role of the teacher is key to the success of the candidates. Good questioning technique can help an average candidate achieve a very satisfactory mark:

- Questions should be prepared in advance and be short and clear.
- Teachers should ask some questions using future and past tenses and some slightly more difficult grammatical structures in order to help the stronger candidate show his/her linguistic ability.
- The answer to the question should not be contained in the questions itself.
- The questions should be open and not require a yes / no answer.
- The candidate should be given enough time to reply.
- There is not a "correct" interpretation of a picture. Questions to prove that the candidate is "wrong" in his interpretation of the stimulus (in which country the scene takes place; the relationship between the people on the photo...) do not encourage natural conversation.
- Teachers should not ask candidates to "Tell me about..." or "Describe your family". This leads to a monologue not to an active conversation and the tendency to recite an answer learnt by heart is great.
- In the classroom teachers should include activities to improve pronunciation and intonation and encourage candidates to use prepositions and adverbs of place in their description of the visual stimulus.

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

While many candidates achieved satisfactory results in this new examination component, others encountered difficulties due to a misunderstanding of some of the formal requirements and of the criteria.

The range and suitability of the work submitted

The best written assignments were those for which the students had chosen a well focused and clearly articulated topic. Holidays, food, schools and celebrations were all popular topics which could be treated adequately within the word count. The titles associated with these topics were usually clearly expressed. 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. The bibliography was included and contained references to at least 2 source texts in English.

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 (Germany, South Korea, European countries...). Some candidates did not use the section headings and it was difficult and, indeed, at times impossible to recognize where one section ended and another began. Some candidates did not answer all three questions in section C but one, two or none. Many misunderstood the third question – their culture seen from the perspective of someone from an Anglophone culture. Candidates also 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. The teacher must give advice to the students about their choice of topic. The following requirements should be explained:

- The topic selected for the written assignment must be clearly linked to the prescribed ab initio topics.
- The topic must be based on Anglo-Saxon culture and the focus of the written assignment should be on that culture.
- The topic should be clearly stated in the title of the written assignment.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: Description

It is important that factual information, at least three facts, on the target culture be included in this section. The factual information should be based on the research carried out by the student. Justifying why this topic has been chosen (I am interested in this topic...) or why the topic is important (Eating junk food is bad for one's health...) is not considered factual information. Nor should this section be a general introduction to the topic. Information given about the student's own culture in this section or a comparison between the 2 cultures is not appropriate.

Criterion B: Comparison

The candidate is required to compare and contrast two cultures. For many candidates this section was the most detailed and the most successful. A comparison may be made in a single paragraph using comparative language (but, on the other hand, while, whereas, more than, both...) or in two parallel paragraphs which treat identical elements in both cultures. Some students continued the description from section A without actually comparing the elements. Others drew up lists (dishes, sports, restaurants) without explaining the comparisons.

Criterion C: Reflection

All three questions must be answered in this section. Some candidates answered none of the questions but provided a personal opinion or a general conclusion to their text. This received no marks. The stronger candidates did not include any information that had already been given in the two preceding parts (A Description and B Comparison) but developed their thoughts on the reasons for the differences and similarities between the cultures. Several candidates showed good intercultural understanding.

The third question: What might a person from the target culture(s) find different about your chosen topic in your culture(s)? The student is being asked to consider the chosen topic not in the context of the target culture but in the context of his / her own culture from an "outsider's" point of view.

Criterion D: Register

The 2 marks allocated for register were obtained by the majority of the candidates.

Criterion E: Language

Most candidates scored well here. A minority had not respected the word count. The word limit must be respected. Examiners will stop marking the written assignment on reaching 300 words. There is also a 2 mark penalty in Criterion E, Language if less than the minimum number of words or more than the maximum number of words has been written.

Note:

- For the purposes of the written assignment, a word is defined as having a space either side of it: It's a shame that = 4 words; It is most unfortunate that = 5 words
- Quotes, the headings of each part, the three questions (C Reflection) are not included in the word-count.

Criterion F: formal requirements

Some candidates lost marks because they did not include a bibliography or because it was not written in a standard format. Other candidates lost marks because they did not include at least 2 texts in the target language. References to web sites must be complete and include the date of consultation. When quoting from a source, a candidate may use the convention of either speech marks or footnote notes:

1 ...and confirmed according to J Fotheringham: "cycling is as popular in Great Britain as it is in France".

2 ...and confirmed because cycling is as popular in Great Britain as it is in France¹.

Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

Advise the students on their choice of topic. Ensure that:

- The topic is sharply focused
- Linked to the topics on the programme
- The title of the work is clear
- The title is culturally appropriate
- The task is manageable in the number of words available (200 -300)
- The students can find appropriate resources, both linguistically accessible to an ab initio learner and linked to the chosen topic
- Students know how to reference quotes and write a bibliography
- Students know the requirements for each criterion. Make sure that they have a copy of them
- Students copy out the title of each section and the 3 questions. These are not included in the word count
- Students should be reminded not to repeat in section C Reflection what has been stated earlier
- Teach the candidates:
 - Comparative terms
 - Linking words to give clarity to the text
 - How to give an opinion
- Teachers are reminded that:
 - The topics selected by students for the written assignment can overlap but each title must be different
- The sources in English only should be sent with the written assignment. Please send

¹ footnote

only those sources which the candidate has actually used in his work.

Standard level paper one

Component grade boundaries

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

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

In this session the results were somewhat polarized: many candidates achieved high marks but a disappointing numbers of others achieved fewer than 10 marks. Those candidates, who achieved less well, had a tendency to quote long extracts from the text rather than give a focused answer. They gave several possible answers for a single question. Unless all the possible suggestions are correct, this results in no marks being awarded. They gave the same answer to several questions (all questions require a different answer). They wrote illegibly. They had a limited vocabulary range. On occasion, grammatical errors made the answer incomprehensible. The weakest candidates did not understand the most straightforward questions. It also appeared that a minority of candidates did not finish the examination in time.

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

The best candidates gave short, concise answers and when appropriate single word answers (question 9: Who thinks that the cost is not too high? Answer: Marie). These candidates had a good knowledge of vocabulary (questions 23 -26, fill in the blanks, for example) and / or used reading strategies and context to deduce meaning. They were able to answer correctly both parts of the true / false questions with justification (questions 31 -34) and to consistently produce comprehensible answers even if these were not always grammatically accurate.

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

The first set of questions (1-5) is a matching exercise which tests interrogative pronouns (how many; what; how old; why; how much; who...). A surprising number of candidates found this a difficult activity. The weakest candidates did not understand the interrogative pronoun Who in questions 8 -10.

Many of the questions require an attentive reading of the text, for example, in question 7, What does "that way" refer to? Several candidates gave the answer supervision when the correct answer was no supervision / without supervision / we won't supervise you.

Questions 14 -18 to whom or to what do the words refer. This activity was generally understood by all but the weakest candidates. However, candidates must read the text attentively and give accurate but complete answers. In question 16, for example, it was boring does not refer to learning (which did not inspire her) but to this type of learning.

When asked to match beginnings and ends of sentences (questions 19 – 22) candidates should be reminded to use their knowledge of grammatical structures to help limit the number of possible answers.

The questions 23 – 26 (fill in the blank) proved surprisingly difficult for many candidates. Only the strongest candidates could distinguish between trips and the verb travel.

In the true / false questions with justification, many candidates did not focus their answer sufficiently and quoted several sentences. Others read the statements too rapidly (Most people is not 20% of the population (question 32) or they chose the correct justification but ticked the incorrect true / false answer. In question 33 for example, a majority of candidates wrote the correct justification costs are low to correspond to the statement: water is cheap but they ticked the answer as false.

Question 37 (What will the consequence be of not using recycled water?) discriminated well between the strong candidates. The answer has to be comprehensible and must be in the negative: There will not be enough / not enough for everyone's needs

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Candidates should:

- Practise reading techniques and strategies
- Practise identifying text types and communicative purpose
- Expand their vocabulary linked to the ab initio topics
- Practise regularly the activities which they find challenging: fill in the blank; matching the beginnings and ends of sentences; true / false statements with a justification
- Write legibly

Standard level paper two

Component grade boundaries

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

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

There are no significant changes to the content of this component of the examination. The minimum number of words has been reduced and the candidates have one hour to complete both tasks. The nature of the tasks, however, remains the same: the topic of each question is linked to the ab initio syllabus; the candidates must include in their answer the characteristics of the text type stated in the question; they must provide all the information listed in the bullet point list of details in section A and included within each question in section B.

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

The candidates who achieved high marks provided all the necessary information, communicated the message clearly and effectively and used the characteristics of the required text type. The candidates who did not use the conventions of the text type or /and did not provide all the required information, either from lack of attention to detail or because they did not understand the question, lost marks. Many candidates wrote texts which were too short in both sections: 50 and 100 words are indicated as the minimum, not a maximum number of words. In order to reach the highest mark bands, stronger candidates should provide examples and details in their answer.

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

Criterion A language

In section A despite the fact that several candidates had a limited vocabulary range, most had the language skills (knowledge of simple grammatical structures) to convey the message adequately. Among the more common mistakes: verbs are frequently used without subject pronouns and possessive adjectives are very frequently incorrect. On occasion, this makes the meaning of the text unclear. (Thank you for their welcome). Register is generally appropriate although one candidate wrote the email in text (u can come...) which is not acceptable in an examination. Wanna is to be avoided. Basic grammatical structures were generally clear if not always accurate but the use of more complex grammatical structures frequently obscured the message.

Criterion B message

The tasks were generally fulfilled in so far as candidates understood the question and replied giving relevant information. However, many candidates wrote less than the minimum number of words. In order to reach the highest bands in this criterion, according to the ab initio guide: All ideas have been developed well. This implies that the answer should contain examples and details. The criterion also states: There is an effective, logical structure. This implies the use of paragraphs and a coherent development of ideas. The criterion also requires a successful use of a range of simple and some more complex cohesive devices. Paragraphs were seldom used and very few candidates used even simple cohesive devices.

A large majority of candidates chose question 1 in section A and question 3 in section B.

Question 1

Many candidates who chose this question did not know the vocabulary linked to the topic of music. The word member (band member) was unknown to all. In the five details to be provided, many candidates did not know the verb to earn (how much you earn) and several did not understand the interrogative how often (how often you play for the public) The text type is a message which requires a short, clear title.

Question 2

Candidates generally gave all required information although a minority misunderstood the context (you are renting an apartment...) and applied to rent one. The text type is an advertisement which requires a title.

Section B

Question 3

The topic is contextualized in an English correspondent's family. Several candidates spoke about holidays in Mexico or in Ecuador. The required elements of the task are: to thank; to invite: to describe what you enjoyed most (more than one example for a strong candidate); to describe what the family would see and do when they came to your country. Few candidates used paragraphs or linking words to give coherency to their text. The required text type is an email which requires opening and closing greetings and a signature.

Question 4

Few candidates chose this question and almost all misunderstood or did not take into account the reference to an International Day. They described instead a school celebration or a sports day. Several candidates did not explain why this day is important for the students and parents or simply repeated the fact (This day is important) without giving a reason. The required text type is a leaflet which requires a title and either lists or sub-titles.

Question 5

This question was chosen by several students. However, many did not provide all the information required: the length of the school day was omitted by most. No candidate made a reference to the target audience: the class in an English speaking country. The text type is a blog entry which needs a title and a conclusion.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Candidates should make a strategic choice of question. Do they understand all the words? Do they know the vocabulary specific to the topic? Do they know the characteristics of the required text type?

Students should analyze the question in section B and highlight or number the details to be given to ensure that they do not forget to include all the required information in their text. All candidates should be encouraged to write at least the minimum number of words. Strong candidates should be encouraged to add details and examples.

Candidates should be taught to structure their texts using paragraphs and linking words. Strategies for vocabulary acquisition linked to the ab initio topics should be reinforced.