

November 2016 subject reports

English ab initio

Overall grade boundaries

Standard level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0-14	15-29	30-49	50-62	63-73	74-85	86-100

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

The range and suitability of the work submitted

The general observation that has been made this session (Nov 2016) is that a large proportion of the teachers need to revise the formal guidelines and oral instructions and make the necessary changes to how they are conducting the orals. In this session there were many inconsistencies which did not support the candidates or enable them to reach their full potential.

As a result of these inconsistencies with the formal guidelines and instructions the range and suitability of the work submitted was affected to a degree, in some instances more gravely than others, especially in the cases where the orals were too short and were mainly or only dedicated to descriptions of the visual stimulus. As a result, examiners often had little evidence to work with when deciding on the final marks for each criterion and there were many mid-level submissions which may have had the potential to be higher or possibly lower if the examiners had had a chance to hear the candidates respond in the other sections of the oral. It was a challenge to award appropriate marks to candidates who attempted to sustain the oral through their own ideas instead of depending on the visual image. Doing this had the effect of limiting the use of vocabulary and grammar and gave way to repetition of information.

These inconsistencies took the form of:

1. Visual Stimulus: Inappropriate images such as four different photos (with no illustration of action or activity) on one page instead of the recommended single image.

2. Timing: A considerable portion of the orals only consisted of long descriptions of the visual stimulus, leaving the other sections of the oral out or leaving only 1-2 minutes for the other sections of oral (question and response), which in turn left the examiners with very little evidence of the candidates' ability to comprehend questions through their responses and other aspects of the oral such as the range of vocabulary, grammar and their ability to sustain a conversation independently. Many recordings only lasted 5 to 7 minutes (and again were almost entirely dedicated to long descriptions). Teachers and candidates should be fully aware of the three distinct parts of the oral and candidates should be well aware of the oral structure and formal guidelines by the time they are presenting this internal exam. Some candidates never gave a description of the image but used it as a stimulus for their own topic of conversation, again revealing a lack of familiarity with the oral instructions and format and not completing all the required oral tasks.

3. Questioning Techniques: Teachers asking long, complicated and poorly formulated questions that have obviously not been practised beforehand and are often full of grammar errors actually make the question difficult to understand and are detrimental to the candidates' success. In some cases these poorly formulated questions confused the candidates who ended up losing marks for answering "incorrectly" according to the teacher's comments or needing the question repeated when it was in fact the teacher's fault. Some teachers also spoke for a long time instead of letting the candidate speak. Too many instructions were sometimes given during the actual oral (which the candidate's should be familiar with by this point and should not need to hear), taking up too much time from the oral instead of just flowing from section to section.

4. Teacher comments should always be written in the target language, which in this case in English.

5. Introductions: Almost all the candidates introduced themselves by name and number so this is something that has not been picked up on by schools yet and should be emphasized as something that needs to change for the next session.

6. Noise: The level of noise and interruptions has also been noted by many of the examiners. There were many recordings with loud noises in the actual room or in the surrounding area, cell phones ringing during the orals, people interrupting the orals by knocking on the door or entering during the oral and obvious stops and starts in the recordings which generally gives the impression that the internal assessment is not being taken seriously and the possibility of mal-practise. Note taking could be heard in many recordings. Not all recording devices are suitable for this activity and there were a few recordings that sounded like they were going in and out of a tunnel making it more difficult to understand.

Questioning Techniques: Although on the whole the questioning techniques used were proactive, supportive and conducive to the candidates' successful performance, there were a notable number of cases where the teacher did not ask open ended questions therefore only

eliciting one or two word answers. This did not create the appropriate environment for the candidates to sustain the oral independently, which in turn did not allow them to demonstrate a range of grammar or vocabulary. In quite a few cases questions elicited information that had already been given by the candidate which gave the feeling that the teacher was not really paying attention to what the candidate was saying. There was a general trend of recordings sounding scripted especially notable amongst weaker candidates.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Candidates generally reached a 5 - 6 range in criterion A, basic grammar was generally sound, and some more complex grammatical structures were used correctly and there was a sufficient range of vocabulary for candidates to make themselves understood and show their understanding.

Criterion B was generally spread over the 7 - 9 and 10 - 12 bands. For interactive and receptive skills, students generally demonstrated comprehension and were able to provide appropriate information. Participation was generally and effectively sustained in most cases.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

1. Formal Guidelines/Oral Structure Instructions: On the whole teachers are recommended to review the formal guidelines and instructions and follow them as well as making the candidates aware of the same. Candidates should fully understand the structure of the Internal Assessment and what they are expected to be able to do. Everyone needs to be fully aware of the requirements of part 3 of the oral. They should be able to describe the photo and talk about the topic in part 1. Students should be prepared to answer questions on the written assignment and questions are suggested in the teacher's guide so that students can practise.
2. Question Techniques: Teachers should ask more open ended questions that do not elicit information already given by the candidate. Teachers can teach students how to choose the verb tense they should use in their responses by framing their questions in the correct tense. Teachers should allow more thinking time for students before expecting an answer.
3. Inappropriate questions: teachers should try and ensure the questions they are asking are culturally appropriate to an English speaking culture and that they are relevant to the oral requirements.
4. Level Descriptors: Teachers need to review the level descriptors for the criteria as many marks did not correspond to the descriptors and were often far too harsh or far too generous and generally inconsistent as a result.
5. Audio: Schools should make sure that the correct conditions are created for uninterrupted IAs, thereby controlling interferences created by excessive noise levels by allocating off limits spaces for the orals to take place. Teachers should make sure that all cell phones are turned off.

Further comments

Teachers' attitudes were generally pro-active and helpful. Many asked clear and concise questions, allowing students to develop answers and make independent contributions where they were able.

Some examiners found it frustrating to wait for schools to resubmit their responses as a result of not following the IA structure or formal guidelines to then be sent the exact same unsuitable responses again.

IMPORTANT: Teachers should be aware that the practise of stopping and starting a recording during an oral is not permitted and that whispering to the candidate between questions is also not in accordance with the IA procedure and both could be considered a reason to suspect mal-practise.

Standard level Written Assignment

Component grade boundaries

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

The range and suitability of the work submitted

The level of language proficiency demonstrated by the candidates is generally adequate for the task of the written assignment. Poor results are due to an inadequate understanding by candidates and teachers of the task's requirements.

Teachers should consult the ab initio guide (English, French and Spanish versions are available on the Online Curriculum Centre) in which the requirements are clearly explained. They also have access to the subject reports published after each examination session (available on the OCC).

- The written assignment is not a general essay on a topic. It is a focused presentation of a specific cultural element based on a series of components. All parts of the task must be completed: the description (criterion A), the comparison (Criterion B) and the answers to the three reflective questions (Criteria C, D and E).
- The topic must be linked to those on the ab initio programme. Topics such as AIDS, obesity, unemployment are too difficult for this level of language.
- The topic must allow the candidate to make a cultural comparison. The weather, natural

disasters, global warming may affect culture but they are not cultural topics.

- The task is based on a comparison between 2 countries: one country which the candidate knows well and one English speaking country. A target language culture must be represented. Comparisons between Ecuador and China or Ecuador and Argentina, or Ecuador and Africa are inappropriate and zero marks are awarded for criteria A-E.
- In order to encourage candidates to use the required format, the candidates should use subtitles.
- The written assignment should not be confused with that for language B. At ab initio level, for example, there is no rationale.
- The written assignment consists of 200-350 words. Those candidates who write less than 300 words are unlikely to achieve high marks.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: Description

In this first section, the focus is only on the chosen topic in the target English speaking culture. Candidates must describe the chosen cultural topic and provide at least three facts. Opinions and generalisations about the topic are not awarded marks. A comparison with another country is not appropriate in this section and is not awarded marks.

Criterion B: Comparison

This comparison should be balanced between the English speaking country and the student's own country. To reach the highest mark band 2 differences or 2 similarities or 1 difference and 1 similarity should be clearly described. In a comparison the elements must be comparable. If the candidate, for example, mentions the time of meals in Canada, the candidate will refer to the times of meals in his/her own country and not to the food eaten.

A comparison may be made in 2 parallel paragraphs or in a single paragraph. In both cases in order to present the comparison clearly and logically the use of comparative terms should be encouraged (*in a similar way, likewise, on the contrary, both, as well...*)

Criteria C, D and E: reflective questions

Although the questions may be answered in any order it is preferable if they are answered in the order given and that the question is written in full above the answer.

Marks are not awarded for information which is repeated from the description or the comparison.

To achieve 3 marks, answers should be well developed.

Criterion C

The answer is worth 3 marks and should be a well-developed answer which contains examples or explanations for the « surprise ».

Criterion D

Candidates are expected to give at least one reason why the differences or similarities exist. A well-developed answer will provide several reasons. Many candidates misunderstand this question and list further differences or similarities without explaining their cause.

Criterion E

This question / answer is frequently omitted. The candidate is being asked to reflect on the experience of someone from the target culture visiting his /her culture.

Criterion F: language

Most candidates are able to convey the message. However, this session has seen a considerable increase in the use of Google translate and a consequent fall in marks for language. Students must be taught the dangers of this tool.

Criterion G

Few candidates provided consultation dates for internet sites and few had the sources in English uploaded. There must be at least 2 sources in English listed in the bibliography.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Students should be encouraged to compare and contrast elements of their culture with that of the target culture throughout the course. Mini research topics which encourage independent study should be integrated into the course. Students should be taught to write a bibliography in a standard format.

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

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0-5	6-10	11-20	21-24	25-29	30-33	34-40

General comments

The range and suitability of the work was varied but on the whole the candidates were well prepared for tasks that required general understanding and a considerable portion were prepared for the tasks that required more detail. The tasks were:

Providing appropriate evidence to justify a response.

Discriminating the exact meaning of a question and demonstrating that understanding by identifying specifically relevant information.

Finding synonyms or effective alternative expressions for items of vocabulary in a text.

Reading for specific meaning.

Expressing the meaning of a text in phrases or sentences.

Identifying the object or subject corresponding to pronouns.

Including subjects and objects (particularly correct pronouns) in responses.

Reading questions with care and following question instructions, particularly when identifying the correct part of the text from which answers should be drawn or when one word answers are required.

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

Candidates found it difficult to justify their answers even though they often succeeded in finding the right place in the text, the right line or fragment. The questions consisting of two parts (i.e. Q12, Q14, Q16 -19, Q36 and 37) appeared to be particularly challenging where various candidates gave incomplete answers or half correct answers.

When required to find a particular word in the text, a substantial number of candidates failed to do so. Many candidates often wrote the correct word but within a sentence therefore creating an ambiguous answer which the examiner cannot presume to guess at as these questions very clearly specify the need for a one word answer. The failure to understand this reveals some

weakness on behalf of the candidates in their understanding and/or following of instructions and lack of attention to the question requirements. Others gave a random word or a word that was somewhat related in meaning and also found in the text but not from the same lines the question clearly instructs to take the answer from. Yet again, this was a common problem throughout all the ranges of marks, not taking the information from the specified lines in the text as instructed at the beginning of the question section. This meant that often the answers actually provided correct information that did answer the question in some way but the candidates did not take their answers from the specified lines and this emphasizes the need for some skill building in this area.

There were many NRs for both the above types of questions.

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

Most candidates performed well in extracting simple information and candidates either got most or all of the multiple choice questions correct or none at all. Candidates who performed better showed greater familiarity with the types of tasks they faced and demonstrated effective reading strategies. This was clearly demonstrated firstly through the obvious care with which they read the questions which was then shown through their ability to understand and follow precise instructions such as giving a one word answer or using specific lines in the text for answer extraction. This was also clearly reflected in their answers to questions 12-19, 26, and 31-37.

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

Text A

Q1.

Some candidates had problems identifying what *Hetty Feather* was, failing to understand the concept “original”.

Q2.

Many candidates did not read the question properly and answered with the place instead of the date (confusing where and when) and many also provided irrelevant information in conjunction with the date. Some did not recognise what the focus of the question was when the event happened.

Q3.

Many candidates provided irrelevant information which created ambiguous answers and led to them not being awarded marks.

Q4- 7, Q11, Q20-24

Candidates tended to either did generally well or give totally wrong answers in all of the multiple choice sections. Stronger candidates were able to pick up marks here.

8 - 10

A considerable number of candidates had problems mainly due to insufficient grammar knowledge as they either referred to completely wrong words, gave more than one word or left the spaces provided blank

Text B:

Q 12 -13, 16- 19, 36 - 37

Some candidates did really well in this section showing their ability to justify correct answers with appropriate evidence from the indicated parts of the text. However, there were just as many candidates who gave either one or two pieces of incorrect information most likely as a result of not having read the text with enough care. A strange phenomena was also observed in various exams where the entire correct answer for a question appeared in the answer space for the following question even though it obviously made no sense. This happened in enough examples for it to raise concern with some examiners who feel that it could have been evidence for a possible mal practice.

Q14.

Many candidates included the information "to help his family" either as their main response or as an alternative to their answer, causing them to lose marks. This implies their inability to differentiate between the different time frames in the text.

Q15 and Q34.

When required to find a particular word in the text, a substantial number of candidates failed to do so. Many candidates often wrote the correct word but within a sentence therefore creating an ambiguous answer which the examiner cannot presume to guess at as these questions very clearly specify the need for a ONE word answer. The failure to understand this latter point reveals some weakness on behalf of the candidates in their understanding and/or following of instructions and the need to pay closer attention to the questions. Others gave a random word or a word that was somewhat related in meaning and also found in the text but NOT from the same lines the question clearly instructs to take the answer from.

Text D:

Q 25

Most candidates managed to answer the question correctly.

Question 26.

Only stronger candidates were able to identify that the question required a "why" explanation. Most candidates were only able to provide half of an answer which did not include the reason the question specifically asks for.

Q 31 – 33, Q35

Most candidates incorporated the correct answer within extra and unnecessary information which however, in most cases, did not create ambiguity or detract from the clarity of the correct answer and usually full marks were awarded

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Candidates should practise on various types of texts from course books, newspapers, magazines, the Internet (e.g. <http://www.bbc.com/culture>), etc. and be given reading comprehension tasks regularly which will allow them to practice various reading comprehension techniques such as gap filling, answer justification, paraphrasing, multiple choice questions, scanning or reading for the gist, eliciting the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary and verb tenses through contextualization and deduction techniques etc. Candidates should have more preparation in the area of finding and identifying synonyms and paraphrasing and should further develop their skills for reading for specific meaning, particularly when it comes to identifying key words in questions and the relevant part of the text where they can guide themselves to find answers.

Candidates should be better familiarised with the examination format and formal requirements. Mark schemes from previous examinations could be used to enable students to recognise what is expected of them and how best to fulfil the examination requirements. For example, candidates should be made aware that they will be required to produce a justification for an answer in certain questions and that failure to do so means no mark will be awarded even if they have given a partially correct answer; or that answers that require ONE word will not be awarded marks if more than one word appears in the answer space. It is very important to communicate to candidates that if they are required to provide two answers and they provide more, that only the first two answers will be considered even if one is incorrect and the third one is correct.

There is a definite need to practise reading and interpreting questions and identifying what information they are asking the candidate for and where.

Standard level paper two

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-17	18-19	20-22	23-25

General comments

Paper 2, written production, shows a notable improvement in the overall performance by candidates both in the delivery of the message (development and relevance) and language skills (grammatical accuracy, breadth of vocabulary, register). The majority of candidates completed the examination within the required time and showed knowledge of the requirements of the tasks in both sections.

A significant minority of candidates answered all or most questions in the examination rather than answering one question in each section. This approach seldom leads to a successful result: the topics are partially understood, the message is undeveloped and the grammatical errors numerous. Candidates should carefully select one question in each section and produce a fully developed answer which has been carefully reread to eliminate the more obvious grammatical mistakes.

The question booklet allows the candidate to write a page of text under the question. While quantity does not replace quality, candidates should not feel limited by this answer space. Many essays stopped abruptly on the last line of the page leaving aspects of the question not identified and/or undeveloped.

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

Grammatical accuracy in basic structures is a challenge for many candidates. First language interference was evident in the omission of subject pronouns, the lexical choice and the recurrent noun and adjective agreements. The weakest candidates wrote their texts largely in their first language.

The message was frequently unclear or ambiguous because of grammatical mistakes: possessive adjectives and personal pronouns, for example, were often misused and it was unclear who or what was being referred to.

Question 3 and part of question 5 required knowledge of the past tenses. Only very good candidates were able to form and use the past tenses effectively in both regular and irregular verbs.

An interview is a recurrent text type in the examination. Candidates who choose this type of question should know how to formulate a question.

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

Most candidates understood the requirements of section A and provided the 5 elements of the reply. A majority of candidates received 3 marks for message in this section. The language was generally adequate to convey the message. The majority of candidates used the appropriate characteristics for the text type.

Answers in section B were, for the most part, developed: most candidates identified all the information to be given and many developed the answer by providing several examples and gave additional details.

Paragraphing helped to structure the texts. Many candidates used linking words which allowed them to reach the top mark within a markband although not all candidates used them successfully.

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

Section A Question 1

Few candidates had difficulty in providing the required 5 pieces of information, however, weak candidates had difficulty in expressing their age comprehensibly and used inappropriate prepositions for the date or time. A minority of candidates lost a mark for criterion C, format, since they omitted to give a title to the advertisement. A title must be visually distinct, for example, written in capital letters or centered on the line.

Question 2

A few candidates did not realize that they had to provide both the date and the time of dinner and, as in question 1, many candidates had difficulty in expressing time and date in a comprehensible way. *On Monday* was not accepted as a date. *This Monday, next Monday, Monday the 7th* were accepted. Many candidates gave a long list of the food that their friend would eat. This was not penalized but a mark was only given for information about what he / she would not eat. Chocolate cake (with strawberries) appears to have universal appeal.

Although all forms of greetings were accepted, candidates should be aware of the appropriate format and register. The use of *wanna, guys, heh mister* are, for example, not appropriate.

A few candidates misunderstood the context and wrote an email addressed to their friends and not to the restaurant. No marks were awarded for message in this case.

Section B Question 3

This was the most popular question in section B and it was clear from the answers that the candidates had enjoyed and been inspired by their CAS experience.

The format, criterion C, is worth 2 marks. In this question candidates are required to write a report. This text type requires a title or a greeting to the CAS supervisor and one other characteristic from the following: a date, a brief introduction, subtitles, a conclusion.

After identifying the text type the candidate must identify the content of the report. In this question (as in all questions in section B) there are three parts:

- Explain what you did
- Explain what you learned
- Make one suggestion to improve the activity.

In order to reach the top 2 markbands for message, (5-6 and 7-8) the candidate must identify and develop all three ideas. An answer can identify the information (one detail), develop the information (2 details) or develop the information well (3 details). To reach the top band all 3 ideas have to be identified in the report and 2 have to be well developed. Many candidates did not sufficiently develop their answers.

Explain what you learned: both practical skills and personal attributes were accepted. Some candidates did not give a suggestion possibly because they did not fully understand the question. When an element is missing the maximum mark is the 3—4 mark band.

The strongest candidates used linking words: *therefore, moreover; on the other hand; in conclusion; firstly.*

The weakest candidates did not have the vocabulary to describe their CAS experience and first language interference obscured the message.

Question 4

This was the least popular question but one in which candidates received high marks for message.

The required text type is a brochure. The required characteristics of a brochure include a title and one of the following: subtitles, lists with numbers or bullet points, columns.

The brochure consists of 3 parts:

- The old town
- Entertainment
- Outdoor activities

As in question 3, to reach the highest markband (7-8) all 3 elements have to be identified and at least 2 have to be well developed (3 or more details).

Although entertainment was accepted in its broadest meaning, the difference between outdoor activities and entertainment was frequently unclear. Some candidates omitted the section on entertainment and their mark was consequently limited to the 3-4 band for message.

Question 5

The required text type is an interview. Almost all candidates who chose this question used a question and answer format and gave a title. Other appropriate characteristics of an interview are a date, a brief introduction and conclusion and the name of the interviewer.

The three interview questions are expressed in the question itself:

- Why did he / she decide to study the IB.
- What are the advantages of the programme.
- What are the challenges.

One or two candidates chose to ignore these questions and ask and answer their own. This is dangerous practice! Each question required a well-developed answer which did not repeat information given in a preceding answer.

Many candidates did not understand the word “challenge”. Few candidates knew how to formulate a grammatically correct question.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Candidates should practice analyzing essay questions in class: what is the text type; who is the message for; what is the required content of the message?

Candidates should be given the criteria and these should be discussed in class. Candidates should understand the difference between an identified answer, a developed answer and a well-developed answer.

Candidates should choose a question, which they fully understand. To omit the section on entertainment (question 4) or the question / answer on challenge (question 5), for example, is to limit the mark for message to the 3-4 band.

Vocabulary linked to the topics on the ab initio programme needs to be reinforced and expanded through regular lexical based activities in the classroom.

Areas for improvement include:

- word order
- subject pronouns
- modal verbs
- prepositions
- tenses
- demonstrative adjectives (this/these: that/those)
- the interrogative

