

GEOGRAPHY

Overall grade boundaries

Grade:	E	D	C	B	A
Mark range:	0 - 7	8 - 15	16 - 22	23 - 28	29 - 36

The range and suitability of the work submitted

A wide range of topics was presented. Most essays were relevant to the subject but a number were more sociological than geographical. The best essays were sharply focused and provided the opportunity to research in depth, analyse data and present an argument. These essays provided a clear answer to the research question while the weaker essays were unable to adhere to the aims and objectives outlined in the introduction. The essays that adopted a spatial approach, which analyzed primary or secondary data and focused on a small area familiar to the author, were the most successful. Descriptive essays based entirely upon secondary material did not score highly and those that adopted a fieldwork report style were self-penalizing with regard to the new criteria.

Candidate performance against each criterion

A: research question

The research question was usually clearly stated in most essays though there were a number where this element was unclear or entirely missing. Supervisors should ensure that the research question is made very clear at the very start of the essay.

Problems often arose when the research question steered the essay towards speculative outcomes that could not be supported by evidence and such essays rarely scored highly.

B: introduction

Weaker essays did not place the investigation in a firm theoretical and spatial context and in such cases references to the worthiness of the study were often flimsy and personal, extending to no more than a profession of interest in the topic. The better essays provided a solid theoretical background that was well referenced and used a series of relevant maps to locate the investigation. The better essays clearly stated the aims of the investigation and used hypotheses as a means of formulating the main objectives. This usually gave a very clear focus to the essay, though some essays introduced too many hypotheses and as a result the investigation became too fragmented.

C: investigation

Most essays used a good range of sources though the weaker essays simply summarized other authors' opinions. The best ones utilised processed or raw data as well as secondary texts. Many essays used surveys or questionnaires to gather data. This is commendable but it is important to ensure that a sufficient number of respondents are involved and that the questions are relevant to the investigation. In several essays some of the questions were marginally or totally irrelevant. It is therefore a good idea to justify the questions being asked in any survey. Candidates were often unclear about sampling techniques and often what they claimed to be random sampling was more opportunity based. The stronger essays showed clear planning and demonstrated how it is vital at this stage to define the methodology of the investigation in terms of how the information is to be analyzed.

D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

This criterion relates to the candidates' ability to relate relevant theory to their own ideas and findings. The better essays did this successfully as well as locating the study more fully in an academic context. Essays based on issues, theories or models gave plenty of scope in this respect but those based on secondary sources, while demonstrating a range of knowledge, gave little opportunity for candidates to incorporate their own ideas.

E: reasoned argument

In general, a well-framed research question resulted in a well-formulated argument. The better essays presented a balanced discussion while the weaker ones descended into opinion and unsupported statements. The weaker essays often resorted to narrative or presented ideas without foundation in thoughtful analysis of the data. Well-formulated hypotheses often provided the best framework for the development of a reasoned argument.

F: application of analytical and evaluative skills appropriate to the subject

The better essays used statistical methods to analyze the data and used a variety of graphical techniques to present their findings. For a spatial subject there was an alarming lack of maps used to illustrate the findings; surprising, as this is one of the main ways to present geographical information. Statistical tests were frequently used to correlate data but significance tests were not always applied to the results, in many cases nullifying the findings. Many essays resorted to very simple analytical methods, usually linked with a questionnaire, where the results were presented in table form, then as a series of straightforward pie charts or bar charts, which were then simply described. Good essays evaluated the findings in terms of their validity and the reliability of the data. Photographs were frequently included but the potential to add annotations to these as an additional means of analysis was not always used.

G: use of language appropriate to the subject

Most essays scored well on this criterion. There were very few essays where the candidates were unable to communicate using the appropriate geographical terminology.

H: conclusion

Most essays managed to present a conclusion that referred back to the research question and the hypotheses where relevant and which outlined the main findings.

Those essays based on primary and secondary data were mostly able to provide effective evaluations of the methodology and the limitations of the investigation. The descriptive-narrative essays were unable to provide any effective evaluation.

Some essays treated the conclusion as a platform from which to voice their opinions on the main issue rather than as a critical evaluation of their findings.

I: formal presentation

The standard of presentation was generally high and frequently outstanding, though there were some problems common to a range of essays that could be easily remedied. Often, maps, charts and photographs relevant to the investigation were placed in the appendices instead of at relevant points in the body of the essay. Many maps, diagrams and photographs were not sourced. A few essays did not reference data used in the text and many used charts maps and photographs that were not referred to at all in the text. A number of essays reported word totals of over 4000 which seems to indicate that the guidelines and criteria had not been properly read.

J: abstract

Most candidates respected the 300-word limit. A surprising number of candidates omitted one of the essential elements of research question, scope and conclusion. Some essays stated that a conclusion was reached but did not say what it was. A number of essays, some of which were of high quality, treated the abstract as an introduction to the topic and included none of the required elements.

K: holistic judgment

Most essays, other than those that were purely narrative/descriptive, showed some of the required qualities while the best essays were outstanding in this respect. It was surprising that a significant number of supervisors declined to add a comment on the cover sheet. This is always to the detriment of the candidate as the supervisor is the most able person to judge the degree to which the candidate has shown personal intellectual initiative and insight.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

Supervisors should:

- Complete the supervisor's report on the cover sheet
- Make sure the abstract contains the required elements
- Familiarize the candidates with the assessment criteria
- Ensure that the essay is not just a fieldwork report
- Send only original essays and not photocopies
- Ensure that the research question has a geographical emphasis
- Ensure that candidates:
 - Use map conventions (scale, direction, key, title)
 - Source all photographs (even personal ones)
 - Do not try to predict future changes in geographical phenomena
 - Avoid subjective comments and unsubstantiated statements
 - Do not use bullet points
 - Place relevant graphical material in the body of the essay
 - Place the research question at the start of the introduction
 - Do not use maps/diagrams/charts downloaded from the Internet without modification
 - Use hand drawn maps, annotated diagrams and sketches where appropriate
 - Avoid obvious hypotheses – e.g. city X has a CBD

Further comments

Note: it is essential that candidates carry out an individual investigation. This means that raw data collected by groups on field excursions is not valid in the context of the essay. All raw data to be included in the essay must be collected by the candidate in person.