

May 2018 extended essay reports

Geography

Overall grade boundaries

Grade:	E	D	C	B	A
Mark range:	0-6	7-13	14-20	21-26	27-34

The range and suitability of the work submitted

The work was generally of a good standard with some great, creative innovative geographical essays; yet more candidates could have scored in the higher bands if their essays had been spatial enough. Some centres submitted essays that were only marginally geographical as students were not able to accurately map their results, and their research questions were not focused enough to be easily deciphered through spatial analysis methods.

Successful essays analysed spatial patterns in cities (for example, mapping socio-economic disparities, CBDs and spheres of influence studies), along coastlines (mangrove zonation patterns) or in particular ecosystems (tropical rain forest conservation in contrasting reserves) using maps produced with the data gathered; at the bottom end were the essays solely based on written literary sources (as opposed to data), or based on non-representative sample sizes (including the ones that followed a more IA-type structure based on studies that were too narrow to produce the type of original in-depth research necessary for this component). A number of essays were highly descriptive and therefore preventing better performance against Criterion C, the research questions of many of them were extremely broad in scope (national or even global scale) which then, penalized the work against criteria A and B. A good number of essays seemed to focus on a broad geographical theme or were based on case studies rather than focusing on a spatially driven argument.

Unnecessary marks were lost in overly descriptive essays, essays that did not involve a spatial element, poor quality sources, poor layout and use of graphic materials, lack of focus on research question and direct response to it and simplistic descriptive reflections.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: focus and method

The most successful essays were rooted in focused spatial questions, made good use of geographical theory and managed to represent their findings through series of maps, graphs and statistics; nevertheless, many essays contained research questions that were too broad or non-spatial and this had a knock-on effect throughout the criteria. In some cases, the topics were not fully-developed, creating a weak theoretical framework. Some candidates demonstrated unclear methodologies – it is necessary to remind students that the methodological framework for the essay should be clearly outlined so that “others can repeat” the research.

Criterion B: knowledge and understanding

Good knowledge and understanding was generally reflected and supported by a range of sources, references and integration of geographical models and theory such as bid-rent, gravity models or vegetation successions. In some cases, the essays demonstrated good knowledge and understanding, but their performance against this criterion was limited due to the scope of the research question. Some essays failed to use appropriate sources and generated no data that would allow them to map results; the sole use of literary sources led to descriptive outcomes of limited validity. In some cases, the theoretical context of the essay was weak, however in other cases, the good use of sources helped to provide a theoretical narrative. Candidates should be encouraged to refer, in depth, to appropriate theory in geography and ensure the appropriateness of their sources to geographical research; it is also important that the geographical background and theory used are directly linked to the research and do not stand alone in the introduction.

Criterion C: critical thinking

The most successful essays were local or regional studies based on representative sample sizes that managed to map their results using GIS; coherent essays that critically followed the arguments presented throughout and that included conclusions that came directly and accurately from the research findings.

At the same time criterion C was the one where large numbers of candidates found difficulties. A lack of spatial analysis and mapping techniques limited the spatial component of many essays, thereby restraining candidates' performance. In too many occasions, the analytical tools used were simple bar graphs, line graphs or pie charts that were not spatially located. Not many candidates explored the various data presentation/analysis techniques available to them; this section should include the spatial mapping of the object of research and followed by its examination using spatial analysis techniques (simple distance decay, change of variables over distance, comparing places, etc.).

Mapping conventions were also an issue as far too many candidates used inadequate, poor-quality maps that were sometimes illegible, with no scale, titles or even a key. A number of essays lacked evaluation and others used sample sizes that were not representative of the area of study (50 surveys in a population of several millions), nor reliable. Other essays did

not attempt to answer their actual research question but something slightly similar; this resulted in a lack of coherence in their arguments and sometimes unfocussed relation to the stated research question.

Criterion D: presentation

The presentation was good in many essays, that included well-laid out references, maps and images and followed the route to enquiry structure. Nevertheless, many candidates suffered from a lack of appropriate referencing -particularly of images- and had to be raised as possible academic misconduct exceptions. In many cases, citations were missing dates, resulting in unnecessary loss of marks. Students should be reminded of the minimum requirements stipulated by the IB in the document entitled *Effective citing and referencing* – these minimum requirements supersede the requirements of any individual referencing system. Far too many images were of poor quality and some included text that was too blurry to be read. There were also layout problems with poor structure, images in separate sections rather than in the body of the text and tables with data in the body of the text rather than in an appendix, or even random blank spaces across the essays and titles at the bottom of the pages. Many of the issues related to criterion D could have been easily overcome with thorough planning and double-checking of the final essays.

Criterion E: engagement

Although some essays included exemplary critical reflections and included substantial specific evidence about the process and its setbacks, only a few of them managed to score full marks in this criterion. While a few candidates wrote more than 500 words and were penalized for it (the examiner stops reading at the 500-word point, so any elements that address the criterion requirement after that point is unassessed), the main issue with this section was the one of descriptive reflections. In many cases, it was clear that the students were writing what they were told to (as a kind of standard template to tick the boxes) while a few students took the opportunity to criticise their supervisors and even the schools themselves for their own failures.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

- Supervisors and candidates need to become familiar with the new criteria and ensure that the Guidelines are followed
- Supervisors must insist on guiding candidates towards geographically appropriate topics, methods and titles
- Supervisors and candidates must make sure that the outcome of their essays can be mapped i.e. geography essays must have a clear spatial dimension. Make sure RQs are sharp, focused and spatial (they focus on a small geographical area). Encourage local studies. Encourage the use of GIS and statistical analysis. Encourage candidates to choose an extensive range of primary data collection techniques then ensure that they plan and execute them effectively. Discourage future-oriented / speculative essays
- Supervisors must give as much guidance about referencing as possible and ensure all images are referenced, even if the candidate drew them themselves.

- Supervisors and candidates must ensure that reflections are based on evidence. More time needs to be spent preparing candidates to complete the RPPF/Reflection forms to show personal engagement.

Further comments

Most centres followed the correct procedures, nevertheless the names of the candidates, their codes and even the supervisor names were present in some essays. Candidates and schools need to be reminded to anonymise essays - no student, teacher or school names. A very small number of candidates did not write reflections and few candidates did not include the research question or the title/topic on the cover page. Some essays included abstracts that had to be added to the word count (as they are not a requirement anymore) and resulted in avoidable loss of marks, as it took the essay over the 4000-word mark, which often meant that the examiner had to stop reading before the conclusion, rendering that aspect unassessable.

It is always necessary to emphasize the importance of spatial analysis and the understanding of the assessment criteria. It is accessible to all candidates to provide a good research question that can be mapped, then analyse it under current good geographical knowledge, include good layout and referencing and take some time to reflect genuinely. By doing this, candidates could hit the mid 20's marks with a limited amount of effort.

It is of extreme importance that students understand that criterion C includes:

- the analytical techniques used by the student i.e. the ones they actually produced, not the ones taken from other sources. In this sense, we should expect maps produced with the data gathered in the research, statistical tests, graphs and annotated photographs. Essays that do not include the use of such analytical techniques are likely to score poorly throughout as they will quite likely be over descriptive
- the coherence of the essays that critically follow the arguments presented throughout and that include conclusions that come directly and accurately from the research findings
- the mapping techniques and conventions as well as the labelling and the scales of the graphs and the accuracy of the statistical tests (whereas the quality of the images –scanning, legibility, etc. - are assessed in D).

Schools should discourage IA type EEs: they will score poorly

- in A, if the sources are not enough to fully answer the question and the geographical context (academic, locational) is not well developed,
- in B if those sources are not appropriate to fully answer the question,
- in C, if the sample size is not big enough to prove a valid argument (for example, at this level a few sample points along a river will not really prove much about the whole river characteristics, a couple of transects across a city with 10 sample points each might not be enough to prove that there is in fact an urban heat island or a sample of 50 people will not be deemed enough to prove the characteristics of a population of 500,000 people). In this sense, fieldwork is advisable when the area of study is of a size that will allow for a meaningful sample size; if not, primary data may be part of the analysis but will need to be supported with further data from secondary sources

The development of appropriate methodology and use of sources has a knock-on effect on different criteria but from different perspectives:

- in A, the methodology must be sufficiently clear for others to be able to repeat the work and the range and quality (selection) of sources must be enough to fully answer the question
- in B, we must look at the sources from the perspective of their application to support knowledge and understanding
- in C, we must look at how the sources have been used (application) in order to be able to prove the argument; again, if the sample size is too small the argument might be incomplete.

A well-presented essay must:

- have meaningful paragraphs
- not exceed word limit of 4000 words
- have references for all images and maps, even the hand drawn ones
- use an appropriate font style and size, and double spacing
- have clear images in terms of definition and/or scanning and if they have text, it must be big and clear enough to be read
- not have big blank spaces caused by a poor layout
- not have tables in the body of the text that are not central to the argument, as these belong in the appendix

Insufficient or incomplete references or bibliographies will be suspected of malpractice, this means that if there is one image or one map with no reference, missing references in the bibliography (but stated in text or foot notes) or lack of reference in the text when the ideas presented are obviously not the student's (geographical context and theory for example), it implies that the essay will have to be raised as a possible academic honesty exception for further investigation by the IB.