

## HUMAN RIGHTS

### Overall grade boundaries

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

### General comments

#### The range and suitability of the work submitted

All of us who have evaluated extended essays about human rights agree that a great part of the works presented do not deal with this topic. We do not know the cause, but it is clear that this group of students have ignored the standards in the guide. It is difficult to find a good theoretical approach even in those works that pertain to the topic. Many believe that writing an extended essay about human rights simply consists of describing a violation of human rights, or an unfair or arbitrary situation, which is a big mistake.

#### Candidate performance against each criterion

##### **A: research question**

Too many students have failed because they chose a topic not related to human rights. Even though human rights matters are many and varied, a full understanding of the topic is required to formulate any research question. International relations, animal rights, humanitarian international law, ethics, philosophy, constitutional law, bioethics: none of these is an appropriate topic for an extended essay about human rights.

##### **B: introduction**

Some students got the introduction mixed up with the abstract, and few gave it a title. In general, they did not comply with the requirements of an extended essay.

##### **C: investigation**

It is disquieting the number of students who base their essay solely on internet sources, many of which are of dubious reliability. Few students used books on the theory and practice of human rights. The most frequent mistake is to limit the investigation to the facts dealt with by the topic of the extended essay, instead of looking for a bibliography on human rights in general.

**D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied**

Students tended to have a deeper knowledge of the question dealt with in the extended essay (the Rwanda genocide, for instance) than of the theory of human rights. When they do have a good theoretical background, they simply link the facts with the right being violated, without any deeper theoretical analysis of the situation. By doing this, the extended essay becomes superficial.

**E: reasoned argument**

Many essays were mostly stories, lacking a reasoned argument. Some included good examples, which enriched the reasoning.

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

Most of the failures in this criterion were due to the fact that students themselves are biased: students find it difficult to detach themselves from the extended essay and look at the situation objectively. This is either because they themselves suffered a violation of their human rights, have experienced the situation narrated in the essay, or because they became angry when they learned of the facts mentioned in the essay.

**G: use of language appropriate to the subject**

Putting aside those extended essays containing unfounded generalisations and unsupported assertions (only a minority), many of the extended essays lacked the correct terminology for human rights. For example, rights are “respected” or “violated”, “states” must “comply” with “contractual obligations in international treaties”, “states” are “parties” in “international treaties” because they have “ratified them or adhered to them”. “Persons enjoy” human rights that “states must guarantee”. Another common mistake is to omit information sources in the main body of the extended essay, adding them only in the bibliography. This creates “unsupported assertions” that could have been avoided with a footnote.

**H: conclusion**

They generally pertained to the question researched. Some included new questions.

**I: formal presentation**

With regards to quotes, most were limited to adding the author’s name in brackets, without footnotes detailing information on the quoted work. They also failed to produce the index: many students just wrote “body of the essay”, without subdivisions. Even in the cases where the index was correct, students did not use the titles in the body of the essay. Few students added resources or an appendix for illustration purposes, even in those cases where it would have been recommended, such as maps to locate the geographical areas mentioned in the essay.

**J: abstract**

Many students confused “abstract” with “précis”. As such, they did not establish correctly the research question, the scope of the essay, and the conclusion. They also mistook the abstract for the introduction.

**K: holistic judgment**

Low marks in this criterion. Few students showed creativity in their works while maintaining depth and a theoretical background. Generally speaking, essays including interviews lacked good theoretical background, reflecting only the point of view of those interviewed, without adequate further analysis.

**Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates**

The examiner team has several recommendations for the supervisors:

- Ensure that students read the subject requirements as soon as they have decided to base their extended essay on human rights. Students tend to believe that all matters can be turned into an extended essay about human rights. The topic has some flexible boundaries, true, but the essay will be considered outside of said boundaries if the requirements for the subject are not met, and this will be reflected directly in the mark achieved. If a supervisor has any doubts whether an extended essay pertains to human rights or not, they should consult with the IBO immediately.
- If the school does not teach human rights as a subject, warn the students about the need to get a good theoretical background as a self-taught candidate. Many extended essays that look good initially only achieve low marks if they reflect that the student is not familiar with basic principles of human rights.
- Clarify that an extended essay that does not contain theoretical background on human rights will fail. For example, the bibliography on an essay about children trafficking in “country X” should not just contain information on children trafficking in “country X”. It should include a paper on general human rights too, another on children’s rights in particular, and another on the country itself (geographical data, and information on the human rights treaties that may have been adhered to or ratified, and their policies towards these rights). In the main body of the extended essay it is necessary to link the details of the topic itself with the theory. The latter is what is found lacking in poor extended essays, limited to the narration of horrifying facts without further analysis.
- Stress the technical aspects of the extended essay (research, formal presentation, structure, the need for examples, quotes, references, etc.). Many a good idea has failed because these criteria were not followed. Extended essays should be analytical, not merely descriptive or narrative.
- If the student has experienced, or is somehow related to, the facts in the extended essay, stress the importance of the choice of material that will be included with the work. Students tend to collect too much information in these cases, and cannot

decide on the relevant material. **Demand well founded theoretical relations as well.** Most of the works I have assessed, where students were directly related to the topic, tended to be stories (very good ones, in some cases) with no relation to the theory. Other works showed points of view that were very biased.

- The theoretical background for the extended essay is not limited to universality or cultural relativism (which should be included in the bibliography if referred to). **In most cases, the theoretical background consists on identifying which human rights are present in the facts mentioned, to support the scope of said rights theoretically, and the reasons why some human rights should prevail over others.** Human rights history reflects these confrontations: right to life vs. right to health; freedom of speech vs. right to privacy; right to property vs. right to physical integrity; right to security vs. right to freedom; social rights vs. economic rights, etc.

## Further comments

It is exciting to know that the number of students choosing human rights as a subject has grown exponentially in the five years that I have been assessing extended essays. Nonetheless, it is important to state that my fellow examiners and I are worried about the quality of many of these essays. If the subject of human rights is not taught at the school, and there is no supervisor specifically trained to guide students in their research, we stress that students should choose another topic. It is fundamental that students have good supervision, information readily available, that they can discuss the topic with someone able to recognise usual novice mistakes and correct them on time, etc. As one of the examiners said, any matter can be related to human rights, but it is only so if the extended essay has been directed properly.