

May 2018 extended essay reports

Philosophy

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 submitted essays range from excellent performance, better than satisfactory, to less than satisfactory. The stronger essays had a clear, well-focused, and sufficiently narrow research question; the question was researched using a solid reference bank comprising relevant primary and secondary sources, which were integrated thoughtfully and carefully to support the developing argument; displaying an effective use of philosophical terminology, clarity, and conciseness of expression. The best essays were logically structured, with an analytically clear and coherent flow of ideas, conceptual distinctness, and an effective and sophisticated application of evaluative skills which were conducive to the development of a well-reasoned and cogent argument. The weaker essays were mostly narrative and descriptive in their approach; often they merely listed, in a perfunctory manner and with a limited clarity, a series of opinions collected from secondary sources. Underperforming essays often started with a research question which was too broad, vague, or not philosophically framed. On the other hand, some very successful research questions were: To what extent the Marxian alienation in *Economics and Philosophy Manuscript of 1844* is a sublation of Hegelian and Feuerbachian alienation theories, To what extent is art a reflection or an extension of nature in relation to H-G. Gadamer's essay "The Speechless Image"?, Is Seyla Benhabib's reconciliation of the generalized and concrete other valid?

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: focus and method

Although in most of the cases a relevant philosophical topic or theme was identified, only the best essays could formulate a focused philosophical research question to be treated thoroughly within the word count. Not all candidates were able to demonstrate the identification and use of appropriate/relevant resource material. A significant group of essays showed an over-reliance on secondary sources. This approach generates essays that are mainly descriptive, and without a well-defined focus or personal argument.

Criterion B: knowledge and understanding

The essays showed a satisfactory level of knowledge in general, but only the better essays presented clearly how the research question was framed within the context of existing knowledge that is directly related to it. This is the first step into the exploration of the research question. The use of specific philosophical terminology was usually at least a satisfactory level. In many cases, the level of language used was good to excellent. In essays that were philosophically relevant, the standard was fairly high. Problems with language and a lack of a proper philosophical vocabulary were apparent in a number of cases. Some essays took on a biographical and/or anecdotal style.

Criterion C: critical thinking

This was, by far, the most challenging of the criteria. Candidates were usually able to incorporate acceptable levels of research and some analysis but were unable to enter convincingly into an evaluation and discussion of their arguments. When the research question has been established, the proper planning of an essay should involve interrogating source material in light of the research question. The question should be explored through an examination of themes and/or texts. In order to enter into evaluation and discussion of the arguments it is essential to follow the research question as a question. Many essays developed ways in which the questions were transformed into topics for general exposition, e.g. by means of general presentations of schools or positions (utilitarianism, deontology, rationalism, empiricism) or issues in general (knowledge, sources of religion or ethics, methods of euthanasia, cruelty in animal treatment). In the stronger essays, the argument was well-structured (coherent and consistent), with a clear and progressive line of development resulting in a well-nuanced and convincing conclusion. They showed detailed philosophical analysis, discussion and evaluation; in some of these cases, counter arguments were well-presented and investigated.

Criterion D: presentation

In almost all cases, candidates submitted work that satisfied the presentation requirements in general. For the most part, candidates were able to present clear, organized essays which utilized standard formats for the construction of the paper. The better essays provided a section and subsection structure to their essays, with informative headings. They also contained a table of contents that included a clear articulation of the main parts of the argument in answer to the research question. The weaker essays just offered general and empty titles (such as introduction, development and conclusion) without reference to the specifics of the investigation.

Criterion E: engagement

Not all students were able to engage fully with the RPPF requirements. There was a clear tendency simply to report, for example, how difficult it was to organize work or complete reading. Many candidates simply stated that they discussed their essays with their supervisors but did not indicate how they incorporated suggestions. In these cases, the entries were descriptive and narrative just telling what happened without clearer reflection on the learning skills involved in both researching in general and specifically in philosophy. Only

some candidates reflected according to the expectations in relation to what they had done on both in terms of research and philosophical enquiry. A very concise example of good practice seen is as follows:

First reflection session: working with Kant's *Groundwork* and starting from the question whether deontology is applicable to modern social issues; last meeting: reflection on how the research showed a way to solve a contradiction between two main lines of argument analysed.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

The guidance for the supervision of future candidates might be synthesized in the central idea of applying carefully the guidance given in the Extended Essay guide. According to the examiner reports, the central and common difficulties presented by the essays are explained clearly in the guide. This document provides clear guidance including aims, objectives, and the requirements for schools and supervisors. Supervisors and candidates should have full knowledge of it, and act on its recommendations. Within this context the role of the assessment criteria (general and subject-specific interpretations) must be underlined. Assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning and the assessment criteria can also be used formatively during the course of classroom time. A comprehensive assessment plan is viewed as being integral with teaching, learning and, in this case, doing philosophical research. Therefore, the criteria and their interpretation for philosophy as presented in the guide have to be not only read, but employed as a guide throughout the whole process of researching and writing.

The essay should be the result of a student developing their exploration and own line of reasoning concerning the research question. The *formulation* of the research question is crucial; it synthesizes the philosophical understanding which articulates the research and is the backbone of consistent and convincing critical thinking. It is equally essential that when exploring the research question candidates demonstrate: a) *analytical skills*, which are shown by means of an in-depth and extensive critical philosophical treatment and discussion of themes, basic concepts and arguments; and b) *evaluative skills*, which are exhibited when ideas, arguments and perspectives are assessed from a consistently held and well-justified perspective with clear evidence and strong support.

Accordingly, candidates must appreciate the importance of the RPPF and ought to be coached on how each of the three meetings ought to be reported. The meetings should be an opportunity to assess the development of their research and philosophical skills in the light of the assessment criteria, since these criteria, as said, provide guidance in relation to the work to be done.