

Psychology

Overall grade boundaries

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

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: research question

Many of the selected research questions were well composed and gave rise to sustained and interesting essays. Regrettably there were also several examples where insufficient, or inappropriate thought appeared to have been given to the wording of the questions. The individual question should interest the candidate to the extent that he or she becomes immersed in the topic area and discovers the many different facets that contribute to arguments that it has generated. Without these qualities it is difficult for the candidate to sustain enthusiasm over the course of time that the essay research and subsequent writing will demand. Initial effort on the selection and composition of the question will pay dividends as the candidate's work progresses.

Criterion B: introduction

Some candidates seemed unaware that this section should not be a cursory preamble to the extended essay. Rather it should represent a conscientious attempt to put the research essay into the context of past research that has been published in the topic area. Where little or no research was claimed to exist then this section suffered adversely in ways that impacted gravely on successive sections. This was in marked contrast to other essays where the context of relevant past research was comprehensively reviewed. This then allowed the writer to explain why and how the current essay was intended to contribute to a more informative account of current problems that have arisen and how these could be addressed.

Criterion C: investigation

Candidates found this section more to their liking, not least because a more structured approach was required. There was an effort to demonstrate planning and that appropriate sources had been consulted. In some cases there was a tendency to rely on non-academic sources from the internet or from popular magazines. Often these sources lacked the academic rigour that was needed at this level and included unsubstantiated assertions made by their author.

There are still occasions when candidates take it upon themselves to use the extended essay as a reason to conduct experiments, surveys or observations. This type of primary investigative work is not appropriate for a psychology extended essay.

Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

Adequate knowledge of the chosen topic was sometimes presented but without the accompanying level of understanding. It was as though a candidate had thought that as long as knowledge was written down in the essay this would be sufficient to meet the demand of this criterion. Candidates do need to show that they understand what they have written. This requirement can usually be met by discussing how the knowledge displayed is related to the context of the topic within psychology.

Criterion E: reasoned argument

Reasoned argument followed on closely from the previous section; its quality depended upon knowledge and understanding but with the additional feature that identified argument detected within the topic. Argument can already exist in the context of the topic, or it can be an argument initiated by the candidate. Arguments can be simmering gently under the cover of good manners and yet once they 'come out' their effect can enlighten a host of valuable insights.

Since an argument demands at least two sides there should be a reasonable attempt to show an understanding of the different views that can be taken, yet this aspect was sadly lacking in some instances. An individual candidate may well favour one perspective rather than others but such a position can be strengthened by understanding of alternative perspectives.

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

It was notable that weaker essays frequently failed to present either sufficient evidence of analysis or evaluation, or both of these essential characteristics of a higher scoring essay. Instead these essays offered lengthy descriptive writing in which no signs of analysis or evaluation could be detected. It is important that candidates are able to exercise analytical and evaluative skills and to use these skills in their essays. Yet in some essays there was little or no mention of fundamental criticisms of studies such as;

- Was the methodology employed appropriate?
- Was the sampling method the most effective type?
- Were the appropriate age, gender or ethnic groups selected?
- Were the correct ethical procedures implemented?
- Did the researchers question their own specific biases by using reactivity?

Criterion G: use of language appropriate to the subject

In order to demonstrate clear knowledge and understanding of the essay topic the candidate needs to use appropriate terminology and ways of expressing these aspects. While the majority of candidates did possess these skills, there were others who found it difficult to communicate their ideas. This was particularly the case in the previous two sections (E and F) mentioned in this report.

Criterion H: conclusion

Having set a research question, it was necessary for the candidate to indicate the extent to which the question has been answered. Weaker essays made little attempt to base the conclusion on material or argument contained within the essay. Good conclusions ensure the links between the research question, the knowledge and evidence produced in the essay, and strength of argument derived from this material. It is a cumulative process from which the reader should be able to follow development of the argument and understand how this relates to its specific context within psychology.

Criterion I: formal presentation

The requirements for this section are clearly described in the guide, yet several of these were omitted by candidates. The essay is a formal document that needs to be presented in a standard format as indicated by the IB.

Criterion J: abstract

Regrettably the purpose and required details of an abstract were also not always understood by candidates. The three elements required were a clear statement of the research question, how the research was undertaken and the conclusion of the essay. The combination of elements cannot be offered until the whole essay is complete. The abstract should be written after the essay has been completed and it should be expressed by using the past tense. This was not always evident since the word 'will' was often used.

Criterion K: holistic judgement

Higher marks were awarded for candidates who displayed qualities such as intellectual initiative, depth of understanding and insight. While some candidates did precisely this, others tended to lack a response to the challenge of taking an intellectual initiative or showing insight into a problem that was identified from their research activities. Yet it is these very qualities that Higher Education Institutions and employers seek in their future students or employees, and are encouraged by the International Baccalaureate.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

Many students performed very well and both they and their supervisors deserve congratulations on their achievements. Psychology is a dynamic study that responds to the changing needs and developments of human societies. Even at pre-university level there are opportunities to undertake investigations that may not be so accessible on later occasions. These may well involve intellectual initiatives, creative thinking and deep insights into

seemingly intractable problems. The discipline and opportunities offered by completing an EE in psychology may enable a student to exercise his or her potential in this area.