

## SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

This is a supplementary report following the May 2010 session and should be read in conjunction with the May 2009 extended essay report.

### 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

### The range and suitability of the work submitted

The suitability of the work was very variable, a significant proportion of essays lacked an explicit anthropological perspective or any clear evidence of social and cultural anthropology. These essays are usually awarded lower marks than those with a specific anthropological focus. It is particularly unfortunate to be unable to award higher marks for those EEs which are good and well-researched but simply do not fall within the remit of social and cultural anthropology.

In many cases, though perhaps fewer than in previous years, candidates did not refer to anthropological concepts, readings or sources, nor did they make reference to methodological issues of any kind. Many candidates seemed to assume that anthropological relevance inheres in a likely topic, and that it is not necessary to consult or to explicitly discuss anthropological sources, whether concerned with theory or with ethnography. Too many candidates consider that a superficial reference to “Anthropology” on a website provides enough expertise in the subject for an EE and consequently fail to make any significant reference to a proper anthropological reading.

However, in this session the number of essays submitted for Social and Cultural Anthropology was lower than in previous sessions. This can be interpreted as probably showing that schools -or schools’ coordinators- are reading the warnings in the Extended Essay Guide, or past warning from Chief examiners, about not encouraging candidates who are not enrolled in Social and Cultural Anthropology to write essays in the subject. This is a positive change since it is unrealistic to expect candidates, however promising, to produce a successful EE in a subject they have no specific knowledge of.

The most successful candidates presented topics solidly grounded in anthropological theory. Some of these essays showed how explicit anthropological approaches could be applied to both “traditional” anthropological issues and to timely ones, including issues suggested by settings familiar to candidates. Looking first at essays examining traditional anthropological topics, there was an essay treating continuity and change and the politics of cricket; a essay on how British colonial policy in India redefined caste principles; an essay on female genital cutting and culture change in a West African society; a study of reciprocity in the funerary exchanges among an Amazonian group, and a meticulously researched examination of the relationship between language and thought. Less traditional applications of anthropological

approaches included an essay on the question of defining national identity in an increasingly culturally pluralistic society; an essay examining informal social control in an isolated face-to-face society in Great Britain; an essay on the impact of agribusiness on the culture of family farms. These essays were successful not because they simply poured ethnographic content into established theoretical moulds, but because they showed initiative in demonstrating how topics of interest to candidates might be approached anthropologically. Also, these candidates were successful because they produced balanced, nuanced arguments, bringing critical perspectives to bear.

A number of essays were focused on “social problems” or popular culture. These essays often presented very little or nothing of an anthropological perspective and resulted in prescriptive and usually superficial conclusions. For example, various genres of music were looked at as “reflections” of society, or as tools of social or cultural change. For example, examining how fashion magazines reflect dominant-society stereotypes of African-American teens or examining the influence of Hip-hop culture in society. These choices of topic, however attractive for students, very rarely lead to anthropologically focused productions.

There were a number of essays misplaced under the subject. There were essays which might have been more appropriate for biology, history, politics, psychology and literary criticism. Clearly in such cases there was serious non-communication or miscommunication between candidates, supervisors, and I.B. coordinators.

## Candidate performance against each criterion

### **A: research question**

While there were fewer research questions judged to be inappropriate than in recent years, it was the case that most candidates did not sufficiently narrow the focus of research so as to receive full credit under this criterion. It was occasionally the case that the research question was stated in the abstract, but was not presented and addressed in the Introduction as required by the criterion.

### **B: introduction**

Good practice here included not only demonstrating the significance of the topic chosen, but relating the research question to existing knowledge on the topic, and defining leading concepts. Many candidates simply did not recognize the problematic nature of most anthropological concepts, such as “ethnicity,” “identity,” “gender roles,” “globalization”, etc., and did not define, or only partially defined, these concepts. Poorer essays might introduce personal opinions or introduce polemical arguments in the introduction.

### **C: investigation**

Since many essays did not present an anthropological point of departure, they could not be credited with having provided “a sufficient range of appropriate resources,” hence they did not do well here. Poor organization and lack of clarity with regard to research procedure commonly called the effectiveness of their planning into question.

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

If the theoretical and methodological approaches followed were not explicitly anthropological, and if the candidates could not present the “academic context” called for in the criterion, they could not do well here. Unfortunately, this was the case for many extended essays. All too frequently, candidates made superficial references to anthropological concepts before beginning largely descriptive expositions which did not reflect anthropological perspectives.

**E: reasoned argument**

While this criterion may not appear as closely tied to the requirements of the subject as the last one, it is intended that the requirement to present ideas in a “logical and coherent manner” meaning coherent within the context of anthropological discourse. As “logical” as the argument may seem, if the research question addressed is not appropriate, the essay cannot do well here, which was the case for a considerable number of cases.

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

If the candidate does not consistently follow an anthropological approach, there can be little application of appropriate analytical skills, which was the case in the majority of essays reviewed. Criteria D and F appeared to be the most poorly served in these essays.

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

As some examiners pointed out, candidates often inserted anthropological terms, phrases, or authors' names in their introductions, usually in a superficial way, and then failed to use them to build an analytical framework. Concepts were often used as if they were self-evident or unproblematic and did not require definition, or were simply not properly used, often without proper citations.

**H: conclusion**

Successful essays avoided both simply repeating material from the introduction and introducing new material, but rather showed how the analysis bore directly on the research question, or presented, in the words of the criterion, “a new synthesis in the light of the discussion.” Many concluding sections among these essays simply ticked off the main features of the data presented, and/or the main findings of the analysis carried out. Also, most of the social problem-oriented essays used the concluding section to present a list of prescriptions, often superficial, and also often containing value judgments.

**I: formal presentation**

While some of the generally poorer essays did fairly well here, a number of essays presented deficient elements such as missing page numbers, poorly or inconsistently organized bibliographies, or vague tables of contents (a good number of essays gave the major section

of the essay the label of “body,” ignoring the usefulness to the reader of subheadings). Probably the weakest aspect of formal presentation was use or misuse of referencing in the text. Too often as a result it was not possible to clearly relate items in bibliographies to the text. There was also the serious question occasionally raised by improper citation style: not carefully using quotation marks and not noting and properly citing paraphrased material.

### **J: abstract**

Most candidates seemed to appreciate the function of an abstract in an essay; there were a number who simply used the abstract to present a justification of their topic and/or a topical outline. Perhaps the requirement for the abstract most poorly served was that of briefly describing the research procedure followed.

### **K: holistic judgment**

The purpose of marking according to this criterion is not to require students to make a brilliant contribution to anthropology, but rather to reward students for doing independent work and for showing imagination consistent with anthropological inquiry, even if their knowledge of ethnography and theory are clearly limited. On the other hand, if their topics were not appropriate to anthropology or their approaches were marred by subjective judgments, as frequently happened, candidates could not expect to do well here.

## **Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates**

Guiding the candidate in choosing a topic appropriate to the subject and in focusing the scope of the research question may be the most difficult, and perhaps the most important, part of the supervisor’s role. Independence and initiative on the candidate’s part may be admirable, but the supervisor has the responsibility to guide students through an understanding of the criteria which will be applied, and to draw for them the consequences of, for example, insisting on following their passions for rock music, fashion, football, tattooing, or other contemporary topics, *unless* they can demonstrate they are willing and able to subject these to anthropological scrutiny. Supervisors’ comments are usually very helpful in understanding the process by which the candidate has come to decide the topic on which to work and provide valuable insight into the process of study and development of a student through the course of the EE.

Finding resources is a chronic problem. Many candidates list only internet sources in their bibliographies, and usually the citations omit authors’ names and even titles, and dates accessed. The internet is obviously a great convenience, but candidates too often lack the perspective to evaluate resources, which of course vary tremendously in quality. Supervision should include insuring the candidates have some acquaintance with appropriate indices, and supervisors should have at least some general knowledge of the literature of the field.

Examiners, Chief examiners, and some IB Coordinators have for years counseled against allowing students to write essays in subjects in which they are not enrolled. Though this last session has shown some improvement in this sense, the practice continues, and examiners may still read supervisors’ commendations of candidates who show maturity and determination in addressing a topic proper to a subject they haven’t studied. While this may

very well be a character-building exercise, allowing candidates to do this saddles them with a disadvantage they are not likely to overcome.

It was mentioned previously that poorer essays often made only superficial references to anthropology, often only in the introduction. These “polite nods” toward anthropology may be a result of the candidates having been advised to “add some anthropology” to the essay (or at least they may have understood their advisors to have said this). The obvious conclusion here is that supervisors should strongly urge students to make contact with anthropological literature relevant to their topic before launching into data gathering. It is also a good idea to ask students to frame more than one research question, and possibly, to also select alternate topics, if their initial literature research does not yield promising results.

While most of this report and the above recommendations may seem negative, there certainly were some bright spots. Several schools consistently showed strong results. Candidates from these schools consistently placed their research questions within an anthropological frame of reference, and typically maintained a critical approach both to their own research, and toward the work they cited. It was obvious in these cases that the essays reflected the conscientious supervision of well-prepared teachers, for which there is no substitute if the EE assignment is to have value.