

## SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

### 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

As has been true for some years, the majority of essays lacked an explicit anthropological perspective. This can lead to essays receiving significantly lower marks than those with a specific anthropological focus.

Despite warnings in the *Extended essay guide* itself, and past warning from Chief examiners, it remains clear that many schools continue to permit candidates not enrolled in Social and Cultural Anthropology to write essays in the subject. Further, from comments registered by their supervisors, it is often apparent that the latter are not always realistically evaluating their candidates' work.

The most successful candidates presented topics solidly grounded in anthropological theory. There was for example a strong essay critically applying feminist and postmodernist theory to understanding marriage in a particular ethnographic context; another essay examined linguistic classification and gender relations among low income inner-city residents; another insightfully examined the construction of ethnic identity and resistance to assimilation among the Roma of Serbia. As usual, there were a number of essays focused on "social problems," including human rights issues. There were several successful essays among these, for example, an essay comparing the underground economies of the urban poor in East Harlem, New York. Another well-designed comparative study explored tensions between structure and agency in two urban ethnographies. Most social problem-oriented essays, however, presented little or nothing of an anthropological perspective, as was generally the case of the essays. Most of these essays were marred by prescriptive and usually superficial conclusions.

Popular culture as usual drew the attention of some candidates, for example, various genres of music were looked at as "reflections" of society, or as tools of social or cultural change.

There were a number of essays misplaced under the subject. In these cases, candidates received no competent guidance or no guidance at all. There were essays which might have been more appropriate for biology, history, politics, psychology, and literary criticism.

## Candidate performance against each criterion

### **A: research question**

As has been the case for many years, most candidates did not fulfil the conditions for full credit here. In a large number of cases, though less than half, the research question or issue was not appropriate to the subject. More commonly, the question might be appropriate, but was too broadly or not clearly stated. A third condition for loss of credit was that, while the research question might be stated in the abstract, it was not presented in the Introduction, as required by the criterion. A few research questions were judged inappropriate because they stated value judgments.

### **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 a majority of 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.
- 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 counselled against allowing students to write essays in subjects in which they are not enrolled, yet 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, or pessimistic as to candidates' achievements, 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.