

Social and cultural anthropology

Overall grade boundaries

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

The range and suitability of the work submitted

This May 2016 session has provided examples of essays at varying levels of achievement. Many candidates produced successful essays, well grounded in anthropological theory, concepts, readings and sources; applying appropriate theories and methodologies. However, a significant number of essays submitted were not anthropologically grounded, nor did the students present an anthropological approach. Most of these weaker essays did not present evidence of a background in the discipline. The fact that supervisors themselves appear to be unaware of the expectations and nature of this task, continues to be a concern. Senior examiners involved in EE assessment in Social and Cultural Anthropology continue to stress the recommendation of not encouraging students to write an essay in the discipline if they have not studied it. Too often an essay which shows evidence of hard work and sincere effort receives significantly lower marks than might have been expected by both the candidate and supervisor. The lack of a specific anthropological focus hinders an essay's possibility of attaining high levels of achievement.

Though the above mentioned is a recurring difficulty, it is also worth mentioning that this session also witnessed the production of successful essays which are the result of student engagement and effective supervisor support. Such essays reveal insight into the selected topic and the skills necessary to produce a well-structured, focused and relevant investigation of a clearly stated research question.

The most successful essays presented well informed topics solidly grounded in anthropological theory and ethnographic readings. Timely issues were explored; globalization and modernity continue to produce interesting investigations, providing discussion on the local/global dynamics. These are the cases of an investigation on tourism and commodification processes, some focusing on the dynamics of migration, cultural identity within transnational communities. Again this year many students seem to have an interest in engaging with topics related to gender and feminist theory. Some examples include the analysis of gender and morality in changing contexts, gender relations at the workplace and media stereotypes, with varying levels of success. Other areas of anthropological interest that were explored included studies on the body and subjectivity – approached from different theoretical

perspectives. Classic topics of the discipline analysed in contemporary contexts also provided interesting productions, including studies on rites of passage, political rituals and revitalization movements.

The focus on popular culture or cultural consumption continues to be the interest of many students. These include hip hop music; social networks; media, fashion and women; sports and life stories of popular figures. Similarly, many candidates are concerned with social problems and they wrote about these – like some essays on sexual violence, human rights violations, ethnic inequalities. It is worth noting that current events trigger the interest and concern of a considerable number of candidates. While these are legitimate interests, and it is desirable that students engage with contemporary issues, the lack of an anthropological approach often mars the quality of these productions. Well focused and anthropologically grounded, these topics lead to excellent extended essays.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: research question

A precise, anthropologically framed, research question is of crucial importance to accomplish a successful investigation in the subject. A large proportion of candidates failed to present sufficiently focused research questions, they were descriptive, or too broad, or lacking any anthropological approach.

Criterion B: introduction

A number of essays lacked an anthropological context for their research questions. Successful essays framed the research question in an anthropological context, relating it to existing knowledge on the subject, and defining concepts within the literature. Many essays were able to locate their chosen topic in a valid academic field.

Criterion C: investigation

The more successful essays showed evidence of satisfactory planning and drew from appropriate sources, whether focusing on ethnographic materials or analysing a topic from a theoretical or comparative perspective. In less successful cases, poor organization with regard to research procedures commonly called the effectiveness of their planning into question. Many essays did not sufficiently place their data in context. The general lack of explicitly anthropological approaches and the lack of resort to anthropological sources limit the marks which could be awarded under this criterion.

Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

A few candidates showed that they had done a great deal of academic research relevant to their topic. In many cases, superficial academic knowledge was demonstrated. In only some cases, essays were based primarily on personal opinion, inappropriate sources, or very selective research that was not critical in nature.

A good number of candidates were successful in integrating clear and explicit evidence of specific and relevant anthropological readings into their discussions. Many were able to demonstrate some knowledge of anthropological concepts and relevant theory, in some cases also discussing

methodological issues. Some EEs were very descriptive and/or based entirely on journalistic or non-academic resources which limited the student's ability to place the material in a suitable academic context. In these cases, students were usually not able to evaluate their sources and simply took as given whatever was stated in the online articles they sometimes just cut and pasted from. Many showed knowledge in their topic, but not in the discipline of anthropology.

Criterion E: reasoned argument

The most successful candidates were able to present a persuasive and solid argument supporting their essays with sound data, anthropological concepts and theories. A number of essays demonstrated appropriate use of resources to construct well-organized, coherent arguments, while many presented straightforward or narrative accounts. Many were able to present an argument, supported by some data.

Criterion F: application of analytical and evaluative skills

The most successful candidates managed to move beyond mere description, offering anthropologically sound generalizations, explanations of the data and discussion of underlying patterns of an anthropological nature. Along with criteria D and G, criterion F requires a sound anthropological approach. A significant number of essays received low grades in this criterion.

Criterion G: use of language appropriate to the subject:

The most successful candidates were able to effectively use terminology specific to the discipline. However, some candidates inserted anthropological terms, phrases, or authors in their introductions, usually in a superficial way, and then failed to use them to build an analytical framework. The use of concepts as if they were self-evident or unproblematic and did not require definition, continues to be a problem.

Criterion H: conclusion

Most candidates attempted a conclusion that was relevant to their essay though many conclusions are not able to present new, unresolved questions, but merely summarized the preceding argument. A few essays treated the conclusion as an extension of the analysis, inappropriately introducing new material. Also, most of the social problem-oriented essays used the concluding section to present a list of prescriptions, which of course are not pertinent.

Successful essays 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."

Criterion I: formal presentation

The majority of essays did fairly well against this criterion. A minority of essays were deficient in one or more elements, such as missing page numbers, vague tables of contents or none at all. The most common shortcomings concerned inappropriate and/or inconsistent citation styles, and poorly organized bibliographies. The IB does not prescribe a particular documentation style, but candidates are expected to be consistent in applying one. Regardless of the reference style adopted by the school, it is expected that the minimum information given include: name of author, date of publication, title of source and page numbers as applicable.

Criterion J: abstract

Almost all candidates provided an abstract. Many of these contained the three elements listed in the criterion. In less successful cases, the candidate presented concluding remarks and sometimes the research question, but did not outline the method of investigation.

Criterion K: holistic judgement

Many candidates showed a passion and depth of insight for the topics they studied. The extent to which this was well supported with academic research varied. If their topics were not appropriate to anthropology or their approaches were marred by subjective judgments – as happened in some cases – credits for this criterion remained in the lower end.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

- The most important task of the supervisor concerns guiding the candidate. It is of great importance that supervisors make sure that candidates are able to link their essays to the discipline. Supervisors need to ensure that candidates are prepared to write an essay in the subject, selecting topics appropriate to the discipline, and using ethnography and anthropological concepts and theory as a part of the investigation and analysis.
- The research question is crucial to a successful essay. Sometimes, candidates are inclined to address personal concerns or interests in their essays, while this could often lead to a strong commitment to the project on the candidate's part, all too often it also leads to descriptive, uncritical, and non-anthropological exposition. Candidates will need support from supervisors early in the process to connect their substantive interests to appropriate analytical tools. Candidates whose choice of topic was appropriate to the subject, and are familiar with social and cultural anthropology as a discipline, tend to produce successful essays.
- Frequent reference to the assessment criteria by both the supervisor and the candidate will help keep a sharper focus on the project.
- The internet is obviously a great convenience, but candidates too often lack the perspective to evaluate resources, which of course vary tremendously in quality. Supervisors must guide students in discriminating among abundant sources.

Supervisor comments are usually very helpful in understanding the process by which the candidate has come to decide on the topic. These comments provide valuable insight into the process of study and development of a candidate through the course of the EE. This is particularly helpful when assessing criterion K.