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

General comments

The range and suitability of the work submitted

Many candidates were successful in framing their arguments by referring to anthropological concepts, readings or sources and applying appropriate methodologies. Framing a precise research question which lends itself to investigation in the subject is of paramount importance to accomplish this. This positive trend can be interpreted as probably showing that schools - or schools' coordinators - are noting past advice from subject reports, about discouraging candidates who are not enrolled in Social and Cultural Anthropology as a Diploma subject to write essays in the subject.

The most successful candidates presented well informed topics, solidly grounded in anthropological theory. Some examples of successful essays dealt with relevant political issues such as the analysis - from an interactionist perspective - of group identity in a postcolonial state; the analysis of the Burundian conflict between property inheritance, land reform and gender issues from agency and cohesion approaches or the examination of political rituals from a Geertzian approach.

Contemporary issues were explored, such as ethnographically grounded investigations on beauty stereotypes and plastic surgeries, or the study of the reconfiguration of kin connections with new reproductive technologies or the analysis of transnational migrant workers. Also, informed and reflective essays were presented on ethnocentrism in everyday life; the ethical issues regarding the ethnographic encounter or a critical examination of environmentalist theories. 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.

The least successful candidates were those who did not refer to anthropological concepts, readings or sources, nor make reference to methodological issues of any kind. Some 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. A mere reference to "culture" or "social problems" seems to be considered relevant enough to produce an extended essay in Social and Cultural Anthropology. In some other cases, moral judgments, subjective biases or unexamined notions undermined the quality of the essay from the very beginning as in an essay addressing 'the evils of consumption' or a prescriptive essay about how sports can help to curb addictions.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: research question

Many candidates were able to produce well focused and anthropologically framed research questions. However, some candidates did not sufficiently focus the research question 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.

Criterion B: introduction

The most successful essays were able to frame the research question in an anthropological context, relating it to existing knowledge on the topic, and defining leading concepts. Less successful essays tended to introduce personal opinions or irrelevant arguments in the introduction.

Criterion C: investigation

Many candidates showed evidence of satisfactory planning and consulted appropriate sources, whether focusing on ethnographic materials or analyzing a topic from a theoretical or comparative perspective. In less successful cases, poor organization and lack of clarity with regard to research procedure called the effectiveness of their planning into question. Many essays did not sufficiently place their data in context. Awareness of the extent to which the observer´s position shapes the data continues to be a challenging point.

Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

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 candidates made superficial references to anthropological concepts before beginning largely descriptive expositions which did not reflect anthropological perspectives.

Criterion E: reasoned argument

Many candidates were successful in developing a reasoned argument, while others presented straightforward or narrative accounts. The most successful candidates were able to present a persuasive and solid argument supporting their essays with sound data, anthropological concepts and theories.

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 a clear discussion of underlying patterns of an anthropological nature. Many candidates remained at a more descriptive level with varying degrees of complexity.

Criterion G: use of language appropriate to the visual arts

Many candidates were able to effectively use terminology specific to the discipline. However, some candidates 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. It is a problem when

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concepts are used as if they were self-evident or unproblematic and do not require definition.

Criterion 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.

Criterion I: formal presentation

Only a minority of essays were deficient in one or more elements, such as missing page numbers, poorly or inconsistently organized bibliographies, or vague tables of contents.

Criterion J: abstract

Most candidates were able to produce a short text with the required elements.

Criterion K: holistic judgement

Many candidates were rewarded for doing independent work and showing imagination consistent with anthropological inquiry. When their topics were not appropriate to anthropology or their approaches were marred by subjective judgments, 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. The supervisor has the responsibility to guide candidates through an understanding of the criteria which will be applied, and helping them to focus on a topic which can be subject to anthropological scrutiny; hence, the recommendation of not encouraging candidates to write essays in subjects in which they are not enrolled or have no experience.

- Frequent reference to the assessment criteria by both the supervisor and the candidate will help keep a sharper focus on the project. Successful candidates consistently placed their research questions within an anthropological frame of reference, and typically maintained a critical approach both to their own research, and towards 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.

- 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 through the course of the EE. This is particularly true when assessing criterion K.

- Many candidates list only internet sources in their bibliographies, and usually the citations omit authors´ names and even titles, and dates accessed which is an IB requirement (please see "Acknowledging the work or ideas of another person" in the Diploma Programme Coordinator Notes. The internet is obviously a great convenience, but candidates too often lack the perspective to

evaluate these resources, which of course vary tremendously in quality. Supervisors should have some general knowledge in the field to guide them with their bibliographies, advising candidates on how to access appropriate resources and document sources.

- It is important to ensure that candidates conducting fieldwork research are aware of the nature of ethical practice in the Diploma Programme. The ethical guidelines are available on the EE page of the OCC.