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 November session has given examples of essays at varying levels of achievement. 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. As often proves to be the case, candidates who are familiar with the subject tend to do well and achieve the higher marks, whereas those candidates who seem to have submitted essays in Social and Cultural Anthropology without any experience in the discipline tend to produce weaker outcomes.

Some examples of successful essays included ethnographically grounded investigations on migration from the perspective of the material culture of a festivity; on youth, ethnic identity and language fluency in a multicultural context; on the relationship between political identity and the construction of collective memory in an educative institution, or on the medical discourse on anorexia. Also, other essays focused on theoretical discussions such as the debate on secularization, or the use of the concept of 'habitus' in anthropological productions. 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 anthropologically approached. 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.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: research question

Well focused and anthropologically framed research questions were key to the success of many essays. However, some candidates did not sufficiently focus the research question so as to receive full credit under this criterion.

Criterion B: introduction The most successful essays were able to frame the research question in an anthropological context, justifying its relevance and relating it to existing subject literature on the topic. Personal opinions or irrelevant arguments in some cases marred the essay's 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 procedures called the effectiveness of their planning into question. It is important that the anthropological methodology is properly applied in order to make data valid to support an argument. Many essays did not sufficiently place their data in context.

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.

The less successful essays tend to be merely descriptive expositions, sometimes making only superficial references to anthropological concepts or theory. Others, though a minority, provide no evidence of any acquaintance with the discipline.

Criterion E: reasoned argument

Many candidates were successful in developing a reasoned argument, while others presented straightforward, descriptive 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. Some candidates remained at a more descriptive level.

Criterion G: use of language appropriate to the subject

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 consistently.

Criterion H: conclusion

Successful essays produced conclusions consistent with their developed argument and posed unresolved or new questions. In some cases though, conclusion continue to merely repeat material from the development of the essay or introduce new ideas failing to understand this section as the opportunity to present "a new synthesis in the light of the discussion". Also, most of the social problem-oriented essays used the concluding section to present a list of prescriptions, which of course are not pertinent.

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 essay showed intellectual initiative and personal engagement with their chosen topics, and these were rewarded accordingly. When topics were not appropriate to anthropology or their approaches were marred by subjective judgments, or were simply extended descriptions, 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 during the research process. 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.)

- 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.