

## WORLD STUDIES

### 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 range of work submitted is very large indeed. The best essays are worthy of publication in academic journals while the weakest show candidates not discharging their obligation to the Diploma core. The range is largely explained by two factors. The first is the effectiveness of schools and supervisors in conveying the nature of the task: at best, candidates are well briefed on the nature of a research essay and they rise to the task with enthusiasm; at worst the World Studies extended essay is a dumping ground for those who cannot decide on a particular subject. The second is the seriousness with which the task is approached by candidates: at best candidates see it as an opportunity for academic growth and present evidence of their learning over a long period with increasing sophistication; at worst students recycle descriptive report-style work based on journalistic sources.

As an examiner, the motivation of students is something about which I can do little. However the effectiveness of schools and supervisors in explaining the task will be a recurring theme of this report. Many schools are simply letting students down by not supervising them properly. Loss of marks on the rubric requirement is often the fault of the supervisor and examiners are distressed and frustrated that they are in effect marking the school rather than the candidate. As an example, nearly half of all World Studies extended essays contain no reference to the IB academic subjects on which the study is based. This makes it difficult to judge interdisciplinarity, which is the whole reason the World Studies extended essay was introduced.

### Candidate performance against each criterion

#### Criterion A: research question

A frustration this year was that examiners had to spend time finding the research question in some essays. The formulations on the cover sheet, the title page, in the abstract and in the introduction were not always the same. As often is the case the research question was too

broad for consideration in 4,000 words. One can admire the ambition of young learners in tackling big issues, but the role of the supervisor is to help refine the research question to something manageable in the context of the Diploma. Not all supervisors are even explaining Criterion A to candidates. This would allow them to formulate the question in a more appropriate way.

### Criterion B: introduction

Writing an introduction for a World Studies extended essay is challenging. We expect to see an issue of global concern with a local case study or manifestation, explicit mention of the IB subjects which will provide the academic approaches to the issue, justification for and significance of the study and where possible some academic context. Supervision is again essential at the outset or on submission to get this right. As mentioned earlier, nearly half of all essays contain no reference to IB academic subjects. Even more disturbingly some candidates base their study in subjects like education and law which are not IB subjects and which are specifically mentioned as inappropriate in the guide. Examiners would wish to be able to award two marks to all candidates for this and criterion A, consideration of both rubric criteria, and better supervision could ensure this.

### Criterion C: investigation

The best essays made use of a range of sources including primary and secondary, and also texts written for the IB so that concepts and theories appropriate to Diploma subjects could be applied. The weakest essays relied heavily on stitching together quotations from journalists working in broadcast news media. Having an IB academic structure of two or more subjects focused investigations, the lack of such a structure led often to descriptive material and precluded the chance to use higher order skills. In some schools, expertise had been offered by the librarian or extended essay co-ordinator, allowing the candidate to develop fine investigative skills.

### Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

If subject-based understanding was well launched in the early stages of the essay, there was plenty of opportunity to use the local case study to demonstrate knowledge, sometimes unique in nature. It is always helpful if a candidate is studying at least one of the subjects on which the essay is based and preferably both. Candidates choosing subjects on the basis of interest rather than learning tended to struggle with this criterion.

### Criterion E: reasoned argument

A surprising number of essays lacked reasoned argument. The coupling of claims with supporting evidence is essential to building up a reasoned argument and is a skill that might be expected in Diploma candidates. Some of the weaker essays were written in one long paragraph titled “Body,” making it difficult for examiners to follow the sequence of reasoning. A structure of chapters and headings can be very helpful. However, at best candidates made their arguments so compelling that it was impossible to put down the essay until reading was completed.

### Criterion F: application of analytical and evaluative skills

In the case of this, the most challenging of the criteria, other criteria have to be satisfied properly. The research question needs to be focused, the introduction needs to set an academic context, and criteria C, D and E need to be tackled concisely to leave room for the application of analytical and evaluative skills. One way to do this is to approach sources critically, though in an ideal essay there would be cross-pollination of analytical methods and concepts between different IB subjects. Increasingly, good candidates are opting to put an evaluative section before or after the conclusion. This works, but not as well as the small minority who manage to weave analytical and evaluative material right through the essay.

### Criterion G: use of language appropriate to the subject

Those candidates who did not identify the IB academic subjects used began at a disadvantage. Ideally candidates should identify not only the subjects but the concepts or theories or assumptions taken from their subjects in the introduction. Syllabus guides are increasingly organized to be helpful with this with sections on key concepts or guiding questions stated early in the guide. Supervisors should make these available to candidates at an early stage. This is also where taking at least one of the subjects is an advantage. Generally the use of the language of identified subjects was done well.

### Criterion H: conclusion

This is also a rubric criterion. Common pitfalls were writing a summary of what had gone before without evaluative content, introducing new material in the conclusion which altered the balance of what had gone before, and excessively brief conclusions. The conclusion is an opportunity to show the results of the integration of two subjects and to refer to new and unique outcomes.

### Criterion I: formal presentation

The best essays were structured and referenced like graduate level papers. The weakest contained no references and little internal structure. Referencing is a particular problem. Any claim, view or evidence that is not the author's own needs a source and so long as the method used is consistent throughout the essay, examiners will reward it. Footnotes or endnotes should be linked to a bibliography which allows the reader to follow up sources. There is a tendency to include only the author's surname in brackets in the text: this vague referencing is not satisfactory. A small minority of essays lacked page numbers, a contents page and a statement of the word count. The point of formal presentation is to make the essay accessible to a third party. These omissions hinder accessibility.

### Criterion J: abstract

As with criteria A and B, students who achieve less than two marks have perhaps not been well supervised. It is a mechanical task to insert the research question and conclusion and remain within 300 words. The scope or research methodology is more difficult. Many students produce a summary of content, which, while valuable is not exactly what is required. Some indication should be given as to how the study was approached, including mention of primary research, or research method, or types of sources and how they were treated. For such a clear set of tasks, it remains surprising how many students produce a preamble, policy statement or personal justification rather than the three required ingredients.

### Criterion K: holistic judgement

Supervisors' comments are of great value to examiners on this criterion. A small minority of supervisors still leave the comments section blank, which is a lost opportunity. It is fine for supervisors to support their candidates, explain difficulties overcome and make overt reference to the viva voce.

## Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

Supervision needs improvement. Single subject supervisors may feel a sense of reluctance to take on the World Studies extended essay, but surely the point of the Diploma is to avoid the silo mentality of single subjects for the benefits of the Diploma group award. We expect this in students so why not in teachers? World Studies extended essays, when well done, capture something unique and special, "IB-ness." Teachers should aspire to supervise these essays and schools should not view it as the place to go if all else fails.

Supervisors should ensure a focused and if necessary narrow research question which points towards interdisciplinarity.

Two or more disciplines should be specified on the cover sheet and their conceptual contributions considered in the introduction.

Supervisors should encourage students to engage in primary research if appropriate.

Supervisors should encourage students to write interdisciplinary essays which cross IB groups. A preponderance of essays are focused in group 3 at present.

Supervisors should remind candidates of the researcher reflection space (RRS). A small minority of essays included them and it was very noticeable that these were better than average essays. The RRS is very helpful to the examiner of criterion K and seems to influence the overall approach for the better.

Arising from this, supervisors should encourage students to “stand back” from their research and comment on the success or failure of the integrative approach and on the reliability of the sources used. This could be done in an evaluative section towards the end of in the conclusion.