

May 2016 extended essay reports

Film

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

There was a relatively wide range of work presented but of concern is the number of candidates with marks in the D/E boundary. Most of the essays were predictable responses to very commonplace topics. However, there were essays that reflected thorough knowledge and engagement with topics that were chosen with great care and thought. The best essays reflected intellectual flair enlivened by substantial research, mature analysis and a real understanding of the subject language required for a Film Extended Essay.

A significant minority of the topics chosen were not sufficiently concerned with film. The candidates used film as a starting point to discuss other topics. In some cases topics classed as Film essays would have been more suitably classed as English Literature, Social Anthropology or History. This most frequently occurred when a candidate had not undertaken the Film course and when neither the student nor their supervisor were aware of what properly constituted an appropriate topic or appropriate research for film as a subject.

Where suitable topics were chosen the most prominent weakness was the inclusion of far too much superficial description or narrative summary. Many essays were written with the enthusiastic engagement of a film fan but lacked academic substance. Using appropriate film terminology and focusing upon how film constructs meaning proved problematic for some candidates. The weakest of the essays ignored the fact that film has its own language, grammar and techniques that need to be appropriately addressed.

As in previous sessions, the best essays focussed upon careful research with fully referenced sources, integrating the research with coherent analysis and discussion and drawing conclusions based upon clear evidence.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: research question

The strongest essays worked from a basis of a solid research question that could be addressed within the limitations of a 4000 word essay. Choosing an appropriate title often proved to be problematic for some candidates. Titles were often too elaborate and candidates were not able to cover the topic effectively and in sufficient depth and detail. Some titles offered too little opportunity for analysis and discussion leading candidates into too much basic narrative summaries and/or description. It is essential that candidates frame a question that offers ample opportunity to enter into appropriate discussion that leads towards thoughtful conclusions. Candidates frequently leave the “question” as a statement that offers little opportunity for discussion, or offer a question that demands little other than regurgitating facts. Too many essays read more like an entry for Wikipedia.

Criterion B: introduction

Many candidates failed to offer a clearly defined introduction. Many were vague and rambling which did little to fulfil the requirements of this criterion. It was often unclear as to where the introduction stopped and the body of the essay began. The better candidates presented introductions that were coherent, concise, well-structured and showed clear engagement with the topic.

Criterion C: investigation

A significant number of candidates did not include appropriate textual analysis of their chosen films and tended to present broad generalisations. Too many candidates scored no more than 2 for this criterion because inappropriate or very limited sources were used – frequently no more than special features on the films’ DVDs or a small number of internet sites.

Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

Candidates too frequently drifted away from a film topic and knowledge was limited. Candidates were too ready to address questions that were mainly sociological, historical or political. Certainly films should be placed within their socio-cultural context but the focus must remain with the films themselves. [It is of concern that there were a few Film extended essays where not a single film was mentioned throughout the essay.]

Criterion E: reasoned argument

The choice of question was often to blame for candidates not having sufficient scope to explore discussion and present reasoned argument. Titles frequently offered little more than a simple narrative option. [See also above.] Some candidates set out with pre-conceived ideas which they then set out to “prove” leaving very little scope for argument or discussion.

Criterion F: application of analytical and evaluative skills

The weakest essays offered little more than broad generalisations that were not supported by clear research evidence. Close interpretation, including textual analysis of the chosen films is essential.

Criterion G: use of language appropriate to the subject

Candidates who had investigated how to study and critique film were more comfortable with using the language of film analysis whereas candidates who wrote simply as film fans frequently resorted to plot description. Too few candidates understood how meaning is constructed in filmic terms.

Criterion H: conclusion

It should not be difficult to score maximum marks for this criterion. The better candidates offered clear, concise summaries whereas the weakest made no real attempt to draw together an appropriate conclusion.

Criterion I: formal presentation

Most candidates scored well in this criterion and presented essays that were well laid out with appropriately formatted and clear references to sources. There does seem, however, a reluctance to use appropriate illustrations including screen grabs. When appropriate these can be very effective. Where possible they should appear within the body of the essay, as close as possible to their first reference and not collected together in an appendix. Illustrations should also be apt and of significance to the discussion and not merely decorative.

Criterion J: abstract

The quality of the Abstracts varied enormously. There were some excellent examples and some candidates did not present one at all. A surprising number of candidates wrote Abstracts that were substantially over the word limit.

Criterion K: holistic judgement

Very few candidates who had not studied film did very well here.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

- All candidates and supervising teachers must read the current guide carefully.
- Students and supervising teachers must have a clear understanding of the current requirements for the Film Extended Essay.
- The phrase “in-depth investigation” as stated in the Guide is absolutely essential in guiding the choice of topic and the research question. Careful choice of topic and question is vitally important.
- All candidates and teachers should read the latest subject report and follow most carefully the recommendations and comments therein.
- Supervisors must complete the report on the inside of the cover sheet. It is a requirement, not optional that this be completed. It is most helpful when this report is as full as possible. This is where reference to the Viva should be made.
- An average of 4-5 hours of supervision should be undertaken. Some candidates had less than half an hour with no explanation given: a few claim to have spent over 15 hours of supervision.
- Supervisors should make it clear to candidates that the film Extended Essay is not to be approached simply from the point of view of a film fan or general consumer of film.

- Candidates should be guided away from titles that seem to have a descriptive or simple narrative default.
- Easy marks were lost on basic formal requirements. These are clearly set out in the Guide.
- Referencing skills need to be purposeful and consistent.
- The marking criteria should be made available to candidates so that they are fully aware of what is expected of them.
- Candidates should limit the number of films for study to allow for an appropriate depth of analysis. However, a study of a single film does not always allow for a full context to be discussed. In general, a study of two to four films would be appropriate.
- Special care should be undertaken when advising candidates who choose a Film Extended Essay but have not studied film. They should be particularly aware of Criteria D, F, G and H. These seem to cause the greatest of difficulties with non-film candidates.

Additional Comments

Academic Honesty

Supervising teachers and candidates must ensure fully appropriate referencing of sources is used throughout the essay: this includes illustrations used. There is an increasing number of occasions where insufficient, accurate referencing has led a candidate to be accused of plagiarism.

All candidates and supervisors must fully acquaint themselves of the regulations concerning all aspects of Academic Honesty.