

MUSIC

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

A wide range of topics was submitted with some very good titles and some excellent work. A small but significant number of topics were not appropriate for the subject as they did not require any discussion, analysis or study of actual music pieces.

The topics investigated were mostly from the western music traditions with a few explorations of world music practices. Classical, film, theatre, and popular urban styles (heavy metal, jazz, blues and hip hop pieces) were the most frequently attempted areas. A number of essays had very broad topics: music biography, emotions and music, or historical issues, for example. These did not support a successfully focused investigation.

The entire range was demonstrated in terms of critical thinking and communication skills.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: research question

Too many essays had no real music as the focus or presented music topics in very broad terms as stated above. There were also some excellent, sharp and focused research topics.

Criterion B: introduction

This section was not always effectively tackled. It is important to feature the research question clearly at the centre of this section. It is the research question that needs to be introduced: How is it significant? Why is it worthy of research? How does it relate to existing knowledge? These objectives were not always met.

Criterion C: investigation

For most submissions, some very good planning was evident. There were some commendable efforts to work with primary sources. Differences in access to resources became apparent in some cases as supervisors informed of censorship restrictions and other barriers that candidates had had to overcome in order to pursue their topics and access information. Several candidates conducted interviews with composers and musicians and transcribed music for which they could not find written versions. By contrast, there were also a large number of essays relying completely on Web based resources, many of which were not critically chosen and this resulted in unreliable evidence being gathered. There were also essays based on You Tube materials that posed extra challenges to the assessment team.

Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

There were some commendable essays that demonstrated very good knowledge and understanding of the topic studied. In the good essays there was some awareness of an academic context and, where appropriate, the information was clearly and precisely referenced. On the other hand there were many essays where it was clear sources were not appropriately cited throughout the essay. In some other essays knowledge and understanding were not apparent. The candidates presented largely paraphrased material or cited information without the emergence of a clear critical voice. The understanding expressed, therefore, was not convincingly that of the candidate. In many cases sources were not consulted and there was no evidence of the understanding that is required to produce an objective approach. These essays showed little awareness of an academic context and were not able to find a suitable academic discourse.

Criterion E: reasoned argument

The topics and arguments were not always clearly original. Some seemed modelled on television documentaries or other video programmes.

In the weaker essays there was an inordinate amount of generalisation, superfluous reasoning and misconception, lack of “international mindedness” and lack of understanding of the appropriate formality needed for academic research.

Criterion F: application of analytical and evaluative skills

The essays with research topics that did not focus on actual music study scored poorly against this criterion.

Criterion G: use of language

Some music focussed essays, even though clearly motivated by a passion for the subject, struggled to incorporate musical concepts. Technical terminology was either only partially effective, or not used at all by many candidates. The resulting descriptions were often of a subjective nature and rarely effective.

Criterion H: conclusion

Most essays provided a section headed up as “Conclusion”. There was however, not always a clear understanding of what was required. Some essays used it to present some other research material. Others repeated information expressed at the early stages of the research and added some questions for possible research in the future. The process was formulaic as it was not clearly related to the argument just presented. Some succeeded in articulating a new synthesis arising from the evidence and development presented in the argument.

Criterion I: formal presentation

Essays presented fell into satisfactory to very good levels.

It is important to note that music score references were often left out. Similarly, music illustration excerpts were often featured without appropriate source references, excerpt

location, instrumentation, measure numbers, clefs or key signatures, etc. Please note that a music essay cannot achieve good level for presentation when it has these omissions.

Criterion J: abstract

This section was often put in the wrong place-please note the abstract should appear right after the title page and before the table of contents. Sometimes abstracts were not completed or it was unclear if they included the required elements.

Criterion K: holistic judgment

All levels of achievement were demonstrated here. The supervisor comments were found to be very helpful in assessing this criterion. Many candidates proved to be hard working, imaginative and insightful in coping with the significant challenge writing this essay requires. In this session, even some non-musicians found a way to write well-constructed essays. Several examiners commented on the enjoyment and reward they experienced after reading and marking these essays.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

Finding a suitable research topic is the most crucial aspect of the extended essay: the study of actual music pieces should be at its core.

Note that musical analysis/ evaluation and the use of technical terminology account for a third of the overall marks. The proper presentation, documentation and organization of the material account for much of the rest.

Guide candidates to understand the requirements of an academic paper. Using an appropriate overall tone and formality is very important.

Meticulously review and apply the extended essay guidelines.