

May 2017 extended essay reports

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

The range of essays submitted comprised of the outstanding, clearly musically-centred investigations, to others covering an entire gamut of achievement levels across the criteria, to some essays where the focus was so broad or personal that research was not possible; or where candidates could not demonstrate understanding of the task. Limits in suitability derived often from the selection of topics that were too broad to allow for systematic study or that focused the research on extra-musical factors such as lyrics, the effects of politics, music therapy, education or music history where actual music research and analysis were not required.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: research question

This crucial element for the success of the investigation has general room for improvement. Candidates need to ensure the research topic is feasible, that is to say that the sources and data required to pursue it can be found and evaluated methodically within 4000 words. Similarly, the topic must have a sharp musical focus. The focus should support musical study and analysis. Studies of music's popularity or its neurological impact, music history periods, music therapy, lyrics or instrumental development are not suitable.

Broad and general questions were submitted by a large number of candidates. Most were developed through general and ambiguous arguments. The lack of definition in the topic did not support systematic research and often raised issues of validity. Let's take, for example, an essay based on the comparative analysis of an early and a late work by composer X. Instead of defining the research (and shaping the argument) effectively, for example, "The comparative analysis of work 1 and work 2" or "What are the main compositional elements in X?", candidates frequently opt for broad, and imprecise topics such as: "Style development in

composer X” and argue as if a research based on just two works could serve to answer the larger question.

Successful essays have clear, specific and musically-focused questions. The topics are very specific and of feasible scope.

Certain topics such as a comparison of Mozart’s C minor piano sonata #14 to Beethoven’s Pathétique sonata; or about the impact of political persecution on Shostakovich’s Symphonic or string quartet writing; Gamelan influences on Debussy’s works have appeared repeatedly in the past few sessions.

Criterion B: introduction

Introductions often do not fulfil their function. Marks are missed because the elements and function of the section are not expressed. It is puzzling to see candidates confuse the significance of the investigation with personal motivation and associated anecdotes in this section. As an exercise in formal academic research, personal motivation is not relevant in the extended essay. Reference to an academic context, on the other hand, which is pertinent and relevant to the section, is often overlooked. It was also noted that some candidates restate the abstract in this section.

Criterion C: investigation

Aside from when the topics were too broad or unsuitable most investigations were suitably planned and exhibited degrees of methodical exploration. Some essays relied on the structure of audio visual documentary sources. They often struck too casual a tone. In many cases, there was a good range of sources although not all effectively utilized. For the majority, the use of primary sources was a challenge. Collecting detailed and relevant data to support and advance a musical argument persuasively was a rare instance. Some claims did not emerge from the data collected but from secondary sources producing inconsistencies in the argument.

Some candidates were unable to tell the difference between fact & fiction, real or unreliable sources, this resulted in biased and opinionated essays.

Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

Very few candidates attend appropriately to existing lines of inquiry. In most essays references to academic context were too limited, in several, inexistent. Students must ensure that there is an appropriate range and consultation of specialist sources on the topic. There can be no knowledge or successful research when the existent lines of inquiry on a topic are ignored.

Criterion E: reasoned argument

Essays generally present ideas in a logical and coherent manner although a persuasive argument did not always emerge. Musical description rather than analysis, unsubstantiated claims and a tendency to report solely from the candidate’s point of view are aspects that limit efficacy.

Criterion F: application of analytical and evaluative skills

Many candidates attempt musical research without appropriate subject preparation. The evaluation of the musical aspects is often not effective, irrelevant or superficial. Some candidates use secondary source excerpts to build an argument. This is rarely effective. Secondary source material is best used in support of a candidate's argument yet it rarely may substitute for actual music analysis in depth.

Criterion G: use of language appropriate to the subject:

Suitable for the most part except in the weaker submissions.

Criterion H: conclusion

As with the abstract and the introduction it is important to understand the function of this section. It should not be a restatement of the research topic and the findings but a clear summation of the topic as revisited in light of the investigation.

Criterion I: formal presentation

Clearly document sources and acknowledge all ideas, including all music excerpts. Several essays fail to reference quotations, paraphrased material and music sources. Some essays omitted the abstract, page numbers or information on bibliographic entries

Criterion J: abstract

Several essays lost marks for not expressing the elements required. Note that if an abstract misses one of its three elements then no marks may be accrued. Other abstracts exceeded the 300-word limit, attaining zero marks. Please familiarize candidates with the specific expectations in the EE guide and assessment criteria. The elements most frequently not expressed were the scope of the investigation and its findings. Candidates are recommended to indicate the specific pieces used in the research and to express the findings with specific musical detail rather than a general statement.

Criterion K: holistic judgement

Very few outstanding investigations attained full marks. Several demonstrated potential in the area and most essays attained little to some evidence of holistic judgment.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

- Ensure the research question selected is suitable: Is it musically centred?
- Is it sharply focused? Is the scope feasible within 4000 words?
- Are quality sources available?
- Express the topic in its most specific, precise and sharply focused version
- Follow the EE guide and subject specific section guidelines. There is no reason for candidates to miss marks for the abstract and introduction except for not abiding by the guidelines
- Support candidates to discriminate between formal and informal language, colloquial and formal approaches, fact and fiction

- No need to entertain: An investigation is to be well written and engaging yet its purpose is not to charm or entertain
- Find a discourse and an approach that takes into account diverse points of view and that supports all claims on facts meticulously
- Document and cite sources for all ideas that are not the candidate's. Many essays lacked appropriate attribution of images and general ideas
- Support candidates to discover personal and cultural bias and to demonstrate International mindedness
- Popular culture topics often lacked contextualization and rigor in the approach to study them
- Arguing for and against a topic, considering differing points of view may assist argumentation to emerge, and may support balance and range in the selection of sources.