

May 2018 extended essay reports

Music

Overall grade boundaries

Grade:	E	D	C	B	A
Mark range:	0-6	7-13	14-20	21-26	27-34

The range and suitability of the work submitted

There were several compelling and engaging essays showing a high level of academic rigor, creativity, engagement, and commitment. Most projects grew out of a personal interest which served as strong motivation for students in pursuing their research diligently and with enthusiasm. The majority of the students presented papers that satisfied to a certain degree the requirements of the task. Many students declared that this was the first time they had faced an investigation of this magnitude. They believed that this was an excellent preparation for their future college life. Finally, there were several papers that were put together at the last minute. Unfortunately for the latter students, there seemed to be a direct relationship between the lack of planning and improvisation with a low level of marks received. There were a few papers that were marked as music yet only had a tangential relevance to music.

As always there was a wide range of topics, though with an inexplicable tendency for the same choices to reappear for different candidates. The best essays were clearly-focused on an appropriate topic which was approached from a musical perspective. The weaker essays either involved an unsuitable choice of topic, unsuitable methodology, or both. Topics were often either too ambitious in scope (e.g. 'a short history of music') or inappropriate for musical treatment (e.g. difficulties of translating opera texts), while some approaches were not suitable for a submission in this subject area (e.g. investigations of social and cultural contexts, or specifics of instrument construction).

Popular topics included music from films (particularly *Star Wars*), musical theatre and music from the western classical tradition. The outcomes were most successful when candidates provided short extracts from musical scores to support their developing arguments.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: focus and method

A surprising number of students did not present a research question. In general, without this requirement, the essays of this type were quite unfocused. Some questions/topics did not belong to the subject of music. Most of these were more related to psychology than music. In many cases, a methodology was not planned or did not exist. In other cases, it was not appropriate to answer the question.

Criterion B: knowledge and understanding

In general, students gathered information to support their knowledge and understanding, but not all of it was reliable. An alarming number of student limited their research to the internet and, unfortunately, some sites were not reliable (they were not peer-reviewed). Many students were not aware of the existence of important research already made in the area of their topic. A few students demonstrated weak or non-existent musical knowledge and appeared to be ill-advised in embarking on an EE in this discipline.

Criterion C: critical thinking

In the case of music, many of the analyses made was merely narrative or descriptive. Students often simply narrated the facts that were obvious in the fragments of scores presented. These 'analyses' lacked proper evaluation. In other cases, students presented the conclusions found on secondary sources and simply used the examples to give the appearance of an analysis. In other words, they presented examples to illustrate the 'copied' conclusions. The conclusions were not the result of their analysis. The skills in the musical analysis were generally at least adequate (except in the case of candidates lacking in musical knowledge generally), but examples of critical thinking as such were more rarely encountered.

Criterion D: presentation

Essays that showed a clear planning were also those essays where the information flowed easily. Those essays without a plan resulted in sketchy and incoherent formats. Another problem was the placement of illustrations or examples - a number of students placed them far removed from the comment that they were supposed to illustrate. They were placed several pages later or even in the appendix area.

Some marks are still being lost unnecessarily because students omitted clefs and key signatures in scanned music examples. There were also some who referred to an entire copy of the score in the appendix or external sources such as YouTube videos, neither of which is acceptable at all. The EE must be presented in its entirety for assessment – any external links will not be followed by an examiner.

Criterion E: engagement

This was the most disappointing criterion. Some candidates omitted the reflection altogether, some were brief, and others tended to use it as a vehicle for autobiography. Most students limited their comments to a chronological narration of actions taken. For instance: “today I met with my supervisor”, “yesterday I went to the library”, “I checked my spelling”, etc. The only area where a proper reflection occurred was on the concluding/’viva voce’ reflection. Here, students offered some reflections and these were probably made as a result of prompted questions such as “what have you learned from doing this essay?” or “what would you do differently if you were to start again?” It is hoped that once schools have a better understanding of this criterion, students will present better reflections that respond directly to the criterion requirements.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

A task of this magnitude cannot be improvised. Many students showed a lack of understanding of how to write a research paper. Unfortunately, the few hours available to work with the supervisor cannot be used to learn the mechanical aspects of writing an academic paper. Schools should ensure that the Extended Essay is not the first academic paper ever written by the students. Writing an essay is one of the pillars of academic life and as such it must be treated with full attention from schools, teachers, and students.

More attention should be paid to the beginning of the essay process. Students must have a clear question in mind when conducting research to help evaluate the strength and value of the information they find. That said, it is natural that on completion, a student may revisit their research question to be sure that it is still the research question that they have addressed. If no, it should be revised. Students are also encouraged to pursue a topic of individual interest out of the mainstream course content. Students who do so appear to be more engaged with the process and focused on their evidence and conclusions.