

MUSIC

Overall grade boundaries

Grade:	E	D	C	B	A
Mark range:	0-7	8-15	16-22	23-28	29-36

This is a supplementary report following the November 2014 session and should be read fully in conjunction with the last EE subject report as published on the EE page on the OCC.

The range and suitability of the work submitted

Extended essays in music this session ranged from competent to excellent for the most part. Candidate ability, understanding and preparation for research, critical reasoning, expository writing and analysis, skills of development of argument covered the whole range of level achievement this session. Some unsuitable topics as far as Music is concerned were submitted for assessment, and these were not in response to the nature of the subject as outlined in the EE guide..

There was a selection of essays that focussed on local music traditions. Most topics were drawn from the European Art Music tradition with a few drawn from contemporary urban genres, Jazz and film music. Understanding of personal bias and international mindedness is an area that needs support as it was rarely apparent in the discourse of a large number of essays.

A good number of essays demonstrated commitment, intellectual curiosity, discipline and resourcefulness on the part of the candidate. It was evident from the supervisor reports that, regardless of the level of achievement, there was significant learning evidenced over the course of the whole task. Candidate development was described in terms of; refined critical thinking skills and overcoming challenges and obstacles; knowledge acquisition; project management, and understanding the importance and need for planning and organization; the importance of adhering to the parameters of a given task and its associated deadline; appreciating the challenges of communication: of the work required to clarify one's ideas, organize them effectively and with rigorous methodology.

The most successful essays demonstrated an academic approach of the required level (that of a DP level candidate), a balanced range of sources that were well-used and effectively documented, powerful music analysis and well organized critical research, evaluation of data and argumentation. A few candidates pursued intriguing and original investigations.

Some topics and approaches were clearly unsuitable as they did not contain any musical analysis or research, and these will be explained in more detail in subsequent sections.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: research question

It was evident that many candidates changed or refined their research questions through the development of the essay in order to sharpen its focus. This is a positive development. There is still room for improvement with regards to refined research questions. Broad, ambitious and not entirely answerable titles are often encountered. Most topics would benefit from clearer and more specific definition and focus. “What is the relation between the compositional elements in the following three pieces by composer X?” is preferable to “What is the evolution of the music of composer X?”. Some research questions did not invite music analysis. In many of these essays the candidate seemed motivated by admiration for a type of music yet did not have the skills to understand its musical aspects. The focus in such essays shifts to subjective, personal, psychological or social matters (people’s reactions or behavior for example). The resulting projects miss the key objectives in several ways, as they lack music research and musical analysis. The variables considered in such essays are complex, and not always academically measurable (people’s reactions, emotions, thoughts); often the manner in which the candidates gather such data can often be quite unreliable.

Criterion B: introduction

The introduction section can often be ineffective. Supervisors and candidates must read the guide carefully. Effective contextualization of the research question with reference to existing knowledge, that is, academic context, is rarely produced. Evidence of suitable research and consultation of specialized literary sources on the topic is rare. Citation from general web based sources or personal anecdotes are not appropriate here.

Criterion C: investigation

Marks for investigation depend on the overall planning, including the research question, range and quality of sources and the data collected. Lack of this was evident in weaker essays. Many candidates did not critically interrogate sources. Sole reliance on Wikipedia, informal blogs, personal sites or hearsay, raises problems of accuracy and acknowledgment.

Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

Most essays would benefit from involvement with the field of study under investigation. For most candidates investigations occur in a vacuum and there is little evidence of further study and consultation of specialized sources. Few candidates sustain effective interaction and lines of inquiry.

Criterion E: reasoned argument

Most essays present ideas in a logical and coherent manner although a persuasive argument does not always emerge. Musical description and a tendency to report solely one view prevail over analytical enquiry. Arguing for and against a topic, and considering differing points of

view may assist argumentation to emerge, and would support much-needed balance and range in the selection of sources.

Criterion F: application of analytical and evaluative skills

This is the core area for strong music essays. Some investigations are quite accomplished in this area, revealing commendable preparation and effort in tackling musical matters. The aspect is weak in some submissions as where there seems to be a lack of understanding of subject matter, this becomes quite apparent here. It is clear in some instances that analytical comment results from paraphrase of a secondary source, which is not always identified. It is important that candidates unequivocally indicate the origin of each idea and illustration that is not their own.

Criterion G: use of language appropriate to the subject

Several essays demonstrated adequate use of musical terminology. Some demonstrated lack of understanding and misapplication. Some candidates approached matters subjectively, using vague language and speculation.

Criterion H: conclusion

This is an important part of the essay that is expected to deliver a new synthesis of the topic as it is reconsidered in light of the investigation. This is seldom the case. Several conclusions were much too brief or basically re-stated the topic without much argument. Closer attention to the objectives of this section is needed.

Criterion I: formal presentation

Musical illustration must be effectively placed and integrated with regards to the format of the EE. Often an illustration excerpt is not on the same page of the text that refers to it, when it could have been. Some essays presented the same illustrative material in several places when a reference to the exact page and figure number where it first appeared would have been appropriate. It is important that source, precise location, all clefs, key signatures and other appropriate musical information is given with each score illustration. Cutting and pasting often obliterates important information that editing ought to supply. Musical sources need to be listed in the bibliography. In addition, and once again, the meticulous acknowledgement of sources for all ideas, images and illustrations is mandatory. Omitting this can result in academic dishonesty.

Criterion J: abstract

This section would benefit from clarity, concision and specific data. Candidates are advised to be specific in this section: list the exact pieces, strategies, elements considered, and specific findings. The section is to be written after the essay is finished, so that it veritably reflects its content.

Criterion K: holistic judgement

Some interesting topics presented were presented and their efforts evidenced by informative supervisor reports.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

- It is important to support candidates so that they become aware of the distinctions between journalistic writing and research, substantiated argument and opinion or speculation, and informal and formal language.
- Supervisors and candidates are commended to read the EE guide several times until the parameters of the task are clear. Make sure the essay adheres to the general and subject-specific guidelines. Supervisors and candidates should refer to the assessment criteria throughout the task to evaluate whether the work is meeting the expected objectives.
- Note that it is crucial that the primary focus of a music EE be actual music that can be examined or analysed. If candidates are not prepared in analytical music skills they are not likely to score well in the task.
- EEs are not reports but opportunities to evaluate, analyse and argue effectively.
- Encourage candidates to widen their exploration and use of specialized academic sources on their topic and to maintain a dialogue with these through the investigation.
- Encourage candidates to consider both views that support and that contradict their thesis.
- Take special care in formatting the essay so that illustration for musical analysis is effectively placed.
- Demonstrate distinct acknowledgment of the sources used.
- Please note that extended essays are to be self-contained documents in the manner of an academic journal article. All evidence to support the argument needs to be available in the essay.