

VISUAL ARTS

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 1,724 essays ranged from impassioned, specific studies with a clear structure and carefully reasoned argument, to brief unsubstantiated opinion papers. Some EEs showed careful choice of socially and culturally interesting subjects, which often had a special meaning for the candidate either in relation to a future program, or for a current artistic reason, e.g. personal studio pursuits. In other cases the research question needed to be narrowed down and strictly focused in order for the rest of the criteria - investigation, analysis, evaluation, a valid argument, and purposeful understanding of the question, to be treated effectively. Many students were weak in Criterion F as without a strong focused research question it is difficult to collect data and evaluate sources for comparison.

All candidates should be encouraged [one hopes by their supervisors] to formulate research questions of personal interest and to draw on a variety of sources to support their arguments, such as textual analysis, study of original art works or designed artefacts, and interviews with practitioners or authorities on the subject. Unfortunately some schools allow candidates to choose topics that have few academic sources, or to make strange, sometimes bizarre, comparisons between disparate, unconnected artists. It is unfortunate when an essay is merely a description of artworks followed by a personal "conclusion/opinion" that is passed off as research. In such cases supervisors need to place more emphasis on better advising students of their choices, studying the subject-specific details from the guide, especially "*Treatment of the topic*" and "*Interpreting the assessment criteria*".

Titles of some higher scoring essays included:

- *What part did national motifs play in the creative work of Russian avant-garde artists of the Knave of Diamonds society?*
- *Should the old neon signs of Warsaw be moved to a new Museum of Modern Art?*
- *In what ways did men's and women's fashion convey the ideals of National Socialism?*
- *How does the work of Yinka Shonibare illustrate the changing role of African art in a global society?*
- *West Amman: a case study in architectural change and loss of urban identity.*
- *Le Corbusier: Chapel at Ronchamp. How does Le Corbusier use both cubist and organic architecture to create aesthetic and functional harmony?*
- *An interpretation of the reasons for various anatomic depictions of the horse throughout European art history.*

- *The Orient in the works of three orientalist artists and their diverging perspectives – Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres, Jean-Leon Gerome, Osman Hamdi Bey.*
- *A comparison of the marriage of high art and fashion in the designs of Sonia Delaunay and Yves St-Laurent.*
- *The stylistic development of Shen Jingdong: From the People's Liberation Army to the new art world of China.*

The emphasis, in many other essays, seemed more to be upon reportage, rather than upon investigation and personal research; and upon secondary sources, rather than upon personal involvement. Many topics chosen were far too broad in nature, thus not allowing candidates to focus their endeavours. For the weakest candidates, the extended essay seems to be a chore, to be completed as quickly and easily as possible. Such essays often give the impression of being early drafts, full of factual, spelling, and grammatical errors, and having poor quality (or even no) illustrations.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Unfortunately some students (and their supervisors) seem to ignore the criteria. Candidates sometimes did not make the best use of presenting a well written, clear abstract and introduction - this is also true of the conclusion. Some exceptional essays made use of firsthand experience, good contextual study, a particularly relevant (to contemporary debate) choice of topic and excellent presentation.

Supervisors and students need to thoroughly peruse the *Extended essay guide 2007*, including subject-specific details, applying constant reference in order to obtain higher standards.

A: research question

Supervisors need to help students turn a title into a research question. Many students, if they were helped in this matter, could write a much livelier essay instead of a written narrative that follows a 'title'. Many essay titles, even if 'narrow in scope', do not provide the opportunity for primary sources to be visited /acknowledged / investigated / photographed / interviewed.

Many of these titles could / should be re-worded and if stated in the form of a question, will allow more opportunity for **reasoned argument** and opinion throughout the essay, proof of **knowledge and understanding of the topic studied** and increased **application of analytical and evaluative skills**.

B: introduction

The stronger essays generally succeeded in examining cultural contexts, attempting to locate artworks in a history and place, and providing a convincing rationale for the study.

C: investigation

Here the investigation should be original and convincing in that the candidate engages critically with a variety of existing literature and uses their own sources to build and defend an argument.

D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

As this criterion clearly asks the candidate to locate their study within an academic context it is important for the student to 'read around' the topic more and make critical reference to the reading.

E: reasoned argument

Too often personal opinion passes as argument, there is rarely another opinion cited. As stated on page 173 of the Guide, "Good essays are those that have something interesting to communicate, where there is evidence of original thought, and where students are able to substantiate their ideas and opinions."

F: application of analytical and evaluative skills appropriate to the subject

Analysis and evaluation too often is just personal opinion. Supervisors might give more help to students who appear not to understand the use of analysis. Hard questioning and challenging the candidate's points of view may stimulate a deeper investigation. It is important that students question the information they read (especially on internet sites) and that they attempt to cross reference and examine information by providing new examples and exploring alternative views.

G: use of language appropriate to the subject

It is important to avoid clichés. It is certainly expected that students will use an appropriate vocabulary to describe and discuss the formal qualities of art and design. The language of cultural studies may also be important.

H: conclusion

This section of the essay is looking for a synthesis that refers to the discussion in the body of the essay. Although generally set out under a separate subheading, this is not an absolute requirement. Unresolved questions may not fit all topics.

I: formal presentation

More than a few candidates are neglecting to properly acknowledge the source material used in their essays. This is a very serious problem, verging on plagiarism. A few essays, in fact, seem to consist of little more than a series of extracts or quotations (poorly acknowledged),

linked by brief comments by the candidate. This severely limits the level of achievement to be expected in several criteria.

Some essays rely, to a very great extent, upon secondary source material gleaned from the Internet. The dependence of some candidates upon *Wikipedia* and similar sites is quite disheartening.

Candidates writing visual arts essays must pay careful attention to the use and referencing of images. Well presented images make a lot of difference to the readability of the essay and provide an indicator of the candidate's understanding and commitment to the essay. Where images are used, they must be decent size and placed in the body of the text so that the image being discussed is clearly seen. Students are highly encouraged to include relevant visual images that will enhance and expand the text. The absence of visual images in an essay written in visual arts is deemed inappropriate/unacceptable.

Candidates need to proof read their final essays!

J: abstract

Of the three necessary components, candidates most often omit relevant information pertaining to how the investigation was undertaken. Remember that an abstract is a summary of completed work – it is not a proposal.

K: holistic judgment

We are looking for clear evidence of independent thinking and innovative approaches that give more weight to an essay than merely sitting in front of a computer and searching websites. Many essays submitted tend to use the Internet profusely for extended essay research; Candidates need to make effective use of books and gallery visits. Out of the 50 visual arts extended essays received by one examiner only one student had indicated gallery visits as part of his/her research process; one had visited a museum; one had interviewed a contemporary artist, one had visited an archaeological site and interviewed an archaeologist. If questionnaires and interviews are used they must be meaningful. Often they simply surveyed fellow students and, within the context of the research question, had little value.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

We are looking for essays that are sharply focused on one aspect of the visual arts (broadly defined). The best essays are persuasively argued, clearly structured and well organized; they show evidence of independent thinking, and demonstrate good knowledge of the topic. Candidates are expected to exhibit ability to assemble evidence and information intelligently and to analyze it with insight and understanding.

Considering the general standard of submissions, the hours reported and supposedly spent in consultation with candidates often seem rather excessive. It is recommended that supervisors spend up to 4 to 5 hours with each candidate. However, a few supervisors did not spend even one hour with their student(s). These supervisors appear not to understand the importance that the fulfillment of their responsibilities has upon the ultimate success of their

student(s). Some supervisors, unfortunately, appear not even to have read the section on the responsibilities of the supervisor and the criteria in the new *Extended essay guide*.

Some supervisors are neglecting to write any comments on their candidates' performance – even though sometimes claiming great amounts of time “supervising”. A sizeable proportion of essays contained either very brief, uninformative comments, judgments, or even no comment at all. Some supervisor's wrote lengthy reports that included irrelevant information. Where a finding from a viva voce was included, this information proved useful in considering Criterion K: Holistic Judgement.

Supervisors are **required** to comment upon each candidate's performance.