

## VISUAL ARTS

### Overall grade boundaries

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

### The range and suitability of the work submitted

As was the case in the May session, essays ranged from those with a clear structure and carefully reasoned argument, to 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 their own cultural identity, a future university program, or for a current artistic reason, e.g. personal studio pursuits. There was an increase in essays on photography and the influences of art and culture in advertising. In a number of 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. Without a strong focused research question it is difficult to collect data and evaluate sources for comparison. However, it is not necessary to tell the whole story in the title of the essay.

All candidates should be encouraged 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 possibly interviews with significant practitioners or authorities on the subject. (In several cases interviews were included with persons whose knowledge/opinions contributed little to the success of the essay. For some reason some schools seem to think that it is mandatory to include an interview when it is not.) If candidates choose topics that have few academic sources they will not score very well on Criterion C. It is unfortunate when an essay is merely a description of artworks followed by a personal "conclusion/opinion" that is passed off as research. Some supervisors need to place more emphasis on better advising candidates of their choices, studying the subject-specific details from the guide, especially "Treatment of the topic" and "Interpreting the assessment criteria".

Titles of a few higher scoring November essays included:

- How has the Christian Dior Couture Spring 2009 Collection been influenced by the works of early Flemish painters?
- Obang colours – An investigation into the ways obang colours are used to create meaning in the works of two contemporary Korean artists.
- An investigation into the traditional pottery of Zimbabwe and region, with a view to its modern application.

It was good to see a few essays addressing issues of culture and internationalisation. For example, one candidate, whose essay was titled 'Is a culture irreparably damaged by the loss of its major traditional artistic artefacts?' stated:

"In this essay I will [...] discuss the effects of the eradication of major traditional artworks on two cultures [...] I chose these two particular cultures because they are both victims of colonisation, and there is a visible pattern in the results of colonisation in both cases. I will also consider the effect of modernisation on one specific society and discuss a way in which art was used by a group of people as a method of breaking free from the repression of the governing group."

The emphasis, in several essays, seemed upon reportage, rather than upon investigation and personal research; and upon secondary sources, rather than upon personal involvement (e.g. a new book on Banksy's street art, recent movies on Frida Kahlo and Coco Chanel, etc. seem to have spawned a number of essays). 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, unacknowledged illustrations.

## Candidate performance against each criterion

### **A: research question**

As I stated after the May session, supervisors need to help candidates turn a title into a research question. Many candidates, if they were helped in this matter, could write a livelier essay. Many essay titles, even if 'narrow in scope', do not provide the opportunity for primary sources to be visited/acknowledged/investigated/photographed/interviewed.

Increasingly more titles are being stated in the form of a question. While this is not a requirement it can 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**

Not all candidates could explain why they considered their topic worth investigating. The stronger essays generally succeeded in examining cultural contexts, attempting to locate artworks in a history and place, and providing a convincing rationale for why their study is important.

### **C: investigation**

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 candidate to 'read around' the topic more and make critical reference to some primary sources.

**E: reasoned argument**

As already noted, 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 candidates 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. As one examiner, who primarily marks essays in Spanish, stated, "Analytical skills were generally shallow, being mostly descriptive and lacking reflection." Supervisors might give more help to candidates 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 candidates also question the information they read (especially on internet sites).

**G: use of language appropriate to the subject**

It is certainly expected that candidates will use an appropriate vocabulary to describe and discuss the formal qualities of art and design (i.e. the elements and principles of art and design). The language of cultural studies may also be important. There is sometimes an unfortunate difference in language used when paraphrasing references and when the candidate is expressing their own opinions.

**H: conclusion**

This section of the essay needs attention. We are looking for a coherent 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**

Some essays rely, to a very great extent, upon secondary source material gleaned from the Internet. The nearly 100% 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. The absence of visual images in an essay written in visual arts is deemed inappropriate/unacceptable.

Some candidates need to proof read their final essays. All texts and illustrations must be referenced.

**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. If questionnaires and interviews are used they must be meaningful. Often they simply surveyed fellow candidates and, within the context of the research question, had little value. In the November session we were particularly impressed by some essays from Zimbabwe, where candidates had gone to great lengths, including walking into remote areas, to gather their material.

**Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates**

There are, unfortunately, some supervisors who either do not understand the criteria or are unable to convey them to their candidates. The best essays seek to answer a relevant question related to the visual arts, 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.

Detailed and perceptive reports from supervisors are very helpful. 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.