

Assessment grade descriptors for the extended essay

Effective May 2018

Grade descriptors

The extended essay is externally assessed, and as such, supervisors are not expected to mark the essays or arrive at a number to translate into a grade. Predicted grades for all subjects should be based on the **qualitative** grade descriptors for the subject in question. These descriptors are what will be used by senior examiners to set the boundaries for the extended essay in May 2018, and so schools are advised to use them in the same way.

Grade A
<p>Demonstrates effective research skills resulting in a well-focused and appropriate research question that can be explored within the scope of the chosen topic; effective engagement with relevant research areas, methods and sources; excellent knowledge and understanding of the topic in the wider context of the relevant discipline; the effective application of source material and correct use of subject-specific terminology and/or concepts further supporting this; consistent and relevant conclusions that are proficiently analysed; sustained reasoned argumentation supported effectively by evidence; critically evaluated research; excellent presentation of the essay, whereby coherence and consistency further supports the reading of the essay; and present and correctly applied structural and layout elements.</p> <p>Engagement with the process is conceptual and personal, key decision-making during the research process is documented, and personal reflections are evidenced, including those that are forward-thinking.</p>
Grade B
<p>Demonstrates appropriate research skills resulting in a research question that can be explored within the scope of the chosen topic; reasonably effective engagement with relevant research areas, methods and sources; good knowledge and understanding of the topic in the wider context of the relevant discipline; a reasonably effective application of source material and use of subject-specific terminology and/or concepts; consistent conclusions that are accurately analysed; reasoned argumentation often supported by evidence; research that at times evidences critical evaluation; and a clear presentation of all structural and layout elements, which further supports the reading of the essay.</p> <p>Engagement with the process is generally evidenced by the reflections and key decision-making during the research process is documented.</p>

Grade C

Demonstrates evidence of research undertaken, which has led to a research question that is not necessarily expressed in a way that can be explored within the scope of the chosen topic; partially effective engagement with mostly appropriate research areas, methods and sources—however, there are some discrepancies in those processes, although these do not interfere with the planning and approach; some knowledge and understanding of the topic in the wider context of the discipline, which is mostly relevant; the attempted application of source material and appropriate terminology and/or concepts; an attempted synthesis of research results with partially relevant analysis; conclusions partly supported by the evidence; discussion that is descriptive rather than analytical; attempted evaluation; satisfactory presentation of the essay, with weaknesses that do not hinder the reading of the essay; and some structural and layout elements that are missing or are incorrectly applied.

Engagement with the process is evidenced but shows mostly factual information, with personal reflection mostly limited to procedural issues.

Grade D

Demonstrates a lack of research, resulting in unsatisfactory focus and a research question that is not answerable within the scope of the chosen topic; at times engagement with appropriate research, methods and sources, but discrepancies in those processes that occasionally interfere with the planning and approach; some relevant knowledge and understanding of the topic in the wider context of the discipline, which are at times irrelevant; the attempted application of source material, but with inaccuracies in the use of, or underuse of, terminology and/or concepts; irrelevant analysis and inconsistent conclusions as a result of a descriptive discussion; a lack of evaluation; presentation of the essay that at times is illogical and hinders the reading; and structural and layout elements that are missing.

Engagement with the process is evidenced but is superficial, with personal reflections that are solely narrative and concerned with procedural elements.

Grade E (failing condition)

Demonstrates an unclear nature of the essay; a generally unsystematic approach and resulting unfocused research question; limited engagement with limited research and sources; generally limited and only partially accurate knowledge and understanding of the topic in the wider context of the relevant discipline; ineffective connections in the application of source material and inaccuracies in the terminology and/or concepts used; a summarizing of results of research with inconsistent analysis; an attempted outline of an argument, but one that is generally descriptive in nature; and a layout that generally lacks or incorrectly applies several layout and structural elements. **Engagement with the process is limited, with limited factual or decision-making information and no personal reflection on the process.**

Unpacking the criteria

The following is intended to help you understand each criterion in terms of what should be included in the extended essay to achieve the highest level.

Each criterion is organized at three levels of information. Firstly, the **markband**, which relates to the mark range available; secondly, **the strand**, which relates to what is being assessed; and, thirdly, **the indicators**, which are the demonstration of the strands within a markband. For example:

Markband 1–2 (lowest)	<p>(Strand) The topic is communicated unclearly and incompletely.</p> <p>(Indicators of the strand)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identification and explanation of the topic is limited; the purpose and focus of the research is unclear, or does not lend itself to a systematic investigation in the subject for which it is registered. <p>(Strand) The research question is stated but not clearly expressed or too broad.</p> <p>(Indicators of the strand)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The research question is too broad in scope to be treated effectively within the word limit and requirements of the task, or does not lend itself to a systematic investigation in the subject for which it is registered.• The intent of the research question is understood but has not been clearly expressed and/or the discussion of the essay is not focused on the research question. <p>(Strand) Methodology of the research is limited.</p> <p>(Indicators of the strand)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The source(s) and/or method(s) to be used are limited in range given the topic and research question.• There is limited evidence that their selection was informed.
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Criterion	Unpacking the criterion
A: Focus and method	<p>This criterion focuses on the topic, the research question and the methodology. It assesses the explanation of the focus of the research (this includes the topic and the research question), how the research will be undertaken, and how the focus is maintained throughout the essay.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The topic chosen is identified and explained to readers in terms of contextualizing and justifying its worthiness. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How well does the research paper identify and communicate the chosen topic? 2. The purpose and focus of the research to be addressed is within the scope of a 4,000-word extended essay, is outlined in the introduction and specified as a research question. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is the research question appropriate given the scope of the task? For example, is the topic sufficiently focused to be adequately addressed within the requirements of the task? ○ Is the research question clearly stated, focused and based on/situated against background knowledge and understanding of the chosen subject/topic area? ○ Is the focus of the research question maintained throughout the essay? 3. The research is planned and appropriate methods of data collection (methodology) are chosen and identified in order to address the research question. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is there evidence of effective and informed source/method selection with regard to the choice of appropriate sources and/or method(s) used to gather information, including narrowing of scope the range of sources/methods, in order to address the research question within the constraints of the word limit? 4. Sources/methods are considered relevant/appropriate or sufficient in so far as the academic standards for the discipline are concerned. For example, for an economics essay, it would not be sufficient to only use textbooks but rather include reports and data. There is no consideration of the research question as such.

B: Knowledge and understanding

This criterion assesses the extent to which the research relates to the subject area/discipline used to explore the research question, or in the case of the world studies extended essay, the issue addressed and the two disciplinary perspectives applied, and additionally the way in which this knowledge and understanding is demonstrated through the use of appropriate terminology and concepts.

1. The research question being investigated is put into the context of the subject/discipline/issue.
 - Demonstration of the appropriate and relevant selection and application of the sources is identified.
2. Knowledge and understanding of the topic chosen and the research question posed is demonstrated with appropriate subject-specific terminology.
 - The use of subject-specific terminology and/or concepts is an indicator of knowledge and understanding of the discipline(s)/issue discussed.
3. Sources/methods are assessed here in terms of their appropriateness to the research question.

C: Critical thinking

This criterion assesses the extent to which critical thinking skills have been used to analyse and evaluate the research undertaken.

1. The selection and application of the research presented is relevant and appropriate to the research question.
2. The appropriateness of sources/methods in terms of how they have been used in the development of the argument presented.
3. The analysis of the research is effective and focused on the research question.
4. The discussion of the research develops a clear and coherent reasoned argument in relation to the research question.
5. There is a critical evaluation of the arguments presented in the essay.
6. Unlikely or unexpected outcomes can also demonstrate critical thinking.

**D:
Presentation**

This criterion assesses the extent to which the presentation follows the standard format expected for academic writing and the extent to which this aids effective communication.

1. **Structure:** the structure of the essay is compatible with the expected conventions of a research paper in the subject for which the essay has been submitted. (Examiners, supervisors and students are advised to check the guidance given in the *Extended essay guide* for the relevant subject.)
2. **Layout:** title page, table of contents, page numbers, section headings (where appropriate), effective inclusion of illustrative materials (tables, graphs, illustrations, appropriately labelled) and quotations, bibliography and referencing.
 - The referencing system should be correctly and consistently applied and should contain the minimum information as detailed in the *Extended essay guide*.*
 - The extended essay has not exceeded the maximum word limit.**

* If referencing does not meet this minimum standard work should be considered as a case of possible academic misconduct.

** If the essay exceeds 4,000 words, examiners should not read or assess beyond the maximum 4,000-word limit. Students who exceed the word limit will compromise the assessment of their extended essay across all criteria. For example, in criterion B, any knowledge and understanding demonstrated beyond the 4,000-word limit will be treated as if it were not present; in criterion C, any analysis, discussion or evaluation made beyond the 4,000-word limit will be treated as if the point had not been made. Given the holistic nature of the assessment criteria, students who write in excess of the word limit will self-penalize across all criteria.

E: Engagement

This criterion assesses the student's engagement with their research focus and the research process. It will be applied by the examiner at the end of the assessment of the essay, after considering the student's [Reflections on planning and progress form](#).

1. **Engagement with the process:** the student has engaged in discussions with their supervisor in the planning and progress of their research; the student is able to reflect on and refine the research process, and react to insights gained through the exploration of their research question; the student is able to evaluate decisions made throughout the research process and suggest improvements for their own working practices.
2. **Engagement with their research focus:** an insight into the student's thinking, intellectual initiative and creative approach through reflections on the thought and research process; the extent to which the student voice is present rather than that of the supervisor and academics; is the student's engagement reflected?