

WORLD STUDIES

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

As in earlier sessions there was a considerable range of work submitted, perhaps naturally for the WSEE where juxtapositions of disciplines and topics are likely to be unique. Most disciplines cited were in Group 3 and sometimes fairly close together academically. This is permissible but perhaps a little disappointing. Essays which crossed IB groups with, for example and science and humanities base were rarer but always very welcome. Of course it is a difficult balancing act to find a topic with resonance in more than one discipline and which is a matter of global concern with a local manifestation, but finding one is a very important task.

Suitability was variable depending on degrees of success with the balancing act referred to above. It seemed that sometimes a local topic of interest to the student was chosen, and then a somewhat contrived retro-fitting of global issue and disciplines occurred, implying that not enough "bigger picture" thinking had been done at the outset. The role of the supervisor is paramount in promoting such thinking in the early stages, and it does not always seem to happen.

There was often a sense, with the weaker essays, that disciplines were added without any true sense of their relevance or significance. It is not sufficient to cite history as a discipline just because the topic is located in the past: history as a discipline is concerned with more than just temporal or chronological narrative; it engages for example the nature of causation, and the balance of determinants and consequences. Therefore if history appears as a discipline cited its conceptual approach needs to be evident. Similarly, social and cultural anthropology seems to be used as a catch-all for many forms of human interaction, yet its concerns are far more specific and its concepts potentially valuable in application within the WSEE. Sadly, there are still essays in which the underlying disciplines are not mentioned at all or merely printed on the cover sheet. Best practice means referring to them in the abstract and conclusion and developing them the introduction and main body.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: research question

Some candidates identified a topic but not a research question, or stated a research question on the cover sheet but not in the introduction, losing a mark needlessly and implying lax

supervision. Relatively few returned to it directly in the conclusion. Best practice was to highlight the research question in the introduction and discuss its scope and focus.

Criterion B: introduction

Many introductions were little more than a few lines or a single short paragraph. This again incurred needless loss of a mark. The best introductions explained the significance of the topic and research question, its worthiness for investigation and its context. In the most successful introductions, issues of global significance were elaborated over several pages with proper citations, and the conceptual framework of the academic disciplines was made clear.

Criterion C: investigation

Generally the range of secondary sources consulted to establish the issue of global importance was too narrow and lacked thoroughness, and students rarely used judgment to identify their strengths and limitations. Some used Wikipedia or similar Internet sources uncritically to establish the global issue, without commenting on reliability, partiality etc. Only the best students explained why they chose the sources they did, how they related to the disciplines used and how primary research was influenced by them. Primary research is not compulsory, but the WSEE is a research essay so if questionnaires or surveys are devised they must generate meaningful data and samples should be representative and a proper size. The best essays carried the examiner through the research process explaining outcomes, shortcomings and matters of validity along the way.

Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

Students are expected to select concepts, theories, perspectives and ways of thinking from two or more disciplines, and apply them to the topic. This did not happen often, and very few students were able to place their topic in an academic context in two disciplines. Students who were actually studying the disciplines used seemed to have an advantage over those who were not. Examiners could sometimes see and judge the level of understanding from the register of the arguments, but students rarely wrote overtly about knowledge and understanding of each discipline and how it related to the topic. There was room for improvement on this criterion and the supervisor could be the facilitator.

Criterion E: reasoned argument

Generally students did well on this criterion having had the time to ensure logical sequencing and coherence throughout the essay. The weakest essays tended to generalise without supporting evidence or examples, showing a basic lack of skill in argument. What remains lacking at the top end was integrative argument, taking the approaches of the different disciplines and juxtaposing them meaningfully. The best essays engaged the reader so well as to make it impossible to put them down, a sure sign of successful reasoned argument.

Criterion F: application of analytical and evaluative skills

This is the hardest criterion because it asks for the Diploma's most advanced skills (seen and rewarded in the final examinations). It could be argued that the extended essay is a good place to learn these skills, but for this to happen the role of the supervisor is again critical.

Given that we expect an integrative approach involving more than one discipline, the task is even more demanding but potentially rewarding. It was rare to see students achieving the highest level on this criterion, and supervisor training might be helpful.

Criterion G: use of language

Using the discrete vocabulary of the underlying disciplines comes naturally to those studying the disciplines (though definitions can be helpful to the examiner). Where the discipline is not studied it is important for students to acquire it, as rendering academic points into everyday language can undermine arguments. Not surprisingly, few students treated any academic concepts as contestable though the WSEE would be a good place to do this. As with criterion E, this one was reasonably well done, though supervisors could urge able students to be more confident in their use of appropriate subject language.

Criterion H: conclusion

Some bad practices were introducing new material, not referring to all of what has gone before, and omitting reference to the research question. At best the conclusion is an opportunity to highlight the novel outcomes arising from seeing an issue from more than one perspective, and a chance to reflect on how things could be done differently in the future.

Criterion I: formal presentation

A mark is lost for each omission of simple rubric tasks. A few essays had no page numbers; rather more had a contents page but no corresponding chapter titles in the text, making it hard to see where the introduction ended for example. Citation was sometimes poor, with author name or subject given in parenthesis in the text, and a bibliography at the end with no details of page numbers etc. There seems to be a slow deterioration in citation skills. This could be overcome simply by the IB Co-ordinator organising training for students. There were few word limit infringements.

Criterion J: abstract

The abstract must contain the research question, scope/methodology and conclusion. About half of all WSEEs did not contain all three and this is lamentable. For the WSEE it is also possible to include the disciplines and how they were incorporated.

Criterion K: holistic judgment

Personal reflection, whether in research reflection logs or appendices, are very helpful to examiners in deciding achievement levels here. It was a pleasure to reward those students whose evident global consciousness shone through their essays.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

- Make more overt use of underlying disciplines. Candidates and supervisors should be encouraged to think about interdisciplinarity early in the process rather than hoping it will emerge once the essay is complete.

- Once disciplines are identified, candidates should seek the concepts, ideas and proposals that can be used productively during the essay. IB Course Companions could be helpful here. Students who are actually studying the disciplines cited have a clear advantage as they are already exposed to their modes of thought.
- Make use of data generated. In some essays appendices contain large amounts of data from questionnaires or other primary sources. These are sometimes not made use of in the main body but merely presented gratuitously. Examiners are not required to mark appendices so it is vital that their import is conveyed in the main body, and of course the hard work of the candidate is wasted. On a broader level, supervisors should familiarise students with good practice in research methodology. Many students attempt social science surveys through questionnaires which are simplistic and subsequently regret that the wrong questions were asked. Proactive help by supervisors could be valuable.
- Some of the most successful essays offered an hypothesis at the end of the introduction, setting out the author's theoretical expectations of the outcome of the research question before starting research. This set up a "win-win" position for the conclusion, because the research could support or contradict the hypothesis with either outcome proving significant!
- Examiners really want to give marks, and to see weaknesses in the rubric-based criteria (A, B, H, I and J) is distressing. There are 12 marks here, and supervisors should ensure they are won. Supervisors should take particular note of the comments made under these criteria headings.