

Assessment of the extended essay

Assessment of the extended essay is a combination of:

- formative assessment, i.e. preparation for the reflection and progress form (RPF)
- summative assessment, i.e. the extended essay itself and the reflective statement on the RPF.

Generic assessment criteria are applied to all essays, whether subject-focused or interdisciplinary. Application of the criteria is informed by the subject context or interdisciplinary context of the essay.

Best-fit approach and markbands

Levels of performance are described using multiple indicators per level. In many cases, the indicators occur together throughout the essay, but not always. Also, not all indicators are always present. This means that a student can demonstrate performances that fit into different levels. To accommodate this, the IB assessment models use markbands and advise examiners and teachers to use a best-fit approach in deciding the appropriate mark for a particular criterion. From various assessment trials, we know that introducing markbands and using the best-fit model is not always self-evident, and guidance is needed to help with their application.

While the extended essay is an externally assessed component of the DP, supervisors are required to submit a predicted grade, referring to the extended essay grade descriptors as outlined in the “[Extended essay grade descriptors](#)” section in this guide. However, understanding the way in which the **criteria** are applied by examiners will assist with the guidance given to students. The following explains how **markbands** are used by examiners.

The best-fit approach and positive marking

The aim is to find the descriptor that conveys most accurately the level attained by the student’s work, using the **best-fit approach**. A best-fit approach means that adjustments will be made when a piece of work matches different aspects of a markband at different levels. The mark awarded will be one that most fairly reflects the balance of achievement against the markband. It is not necessary for every indicator of a level descriptor to be met for that mark to be rewarded. For example, if the student’s work matches two of the three requirements within a markband but one is seriously lacking, the student should be awarded for the strands that have been met well. The mark awarded should be at the lower end of the markband to compensate for what is lacking in one strand.

When assessing a student’s work, examiners take the IB approach of **positive marking**: they give credit where appropriate for what students have written, rather than looking for omissions. Examiners will read the level descriptors from the highest markband down, until they reach a descriptor that most appropriately describes the level of the work being assessed. If a piece of work seems to fall between two level descriptors, both descriptors will be read again and the one that more appropriately describes the student’s work will be chosen. There are a number of marks available within a level. Examiners will award the upper marks if the student’s work demonstrates the qualities described to a greater extent. Examiners will award the lower marks if the student’s work demonstrates those qualities to a lesser extent.

The highest level descriptors do not imply faultless performance and should be achievable by a student. Examiners will not hesitate to use the highest possible mark if they are appropriate descriptions of the work being assessed.

Extended essay assessment criteria

How the assessment criteria are applied

Examiners mark positively, giving credit where appropriate for what students have written, rather than looking for omissions. Their aim is to find the level descriptor that conveys most accurately the level attained by the student's work, using the **best-fit** approach. A best-fit approach means that compensation should be made when a piece of work matches aspects of different markbands. The mark awarded should be one that most fairly reflects the balance of achievement against the markband. It is not necessary for every indicator within a markband to be met for a mark to be awarded in that markband. **Awarding the top mark does not imply faultless performance.**

Note: Criteria A, B, C and D are applied to the extended essay as a whole. Criterion E is applied only to the reflective statement on the student's RPF.

Assessment criteria

Criterion A: Framework for the essay	Guiding question: Do the research question, research methods and structural conventions followed provide an effective framework for the essay?		
	Note: If the work does not reach a standard outlined by the performance level descriptors, 0 marks are awarded for this criterion.		
	1–2 marks	3–4 marks	5–6 marks
Research question	A research question is stated but it lacks relevance to the topic of investigation, clarity or focus.	The research question is relevant to the topic of their investigation and clear but only partially focused in relation to the scope of the essay.	The research question is relevant to the topic of investigation, clear and focused in relation to the scope of the essay.
Research methods	Research methods are used, but these are mostly unsuitable for the research question.	Research methods that are mostly suitable for the research question are explained and applied with partial effectiveness.	Research methods that are suitable for the research question are explained and applied effectively.
Structure	Structural conventions are present in the essay but these do not support communication of the research.	Structural conventions used in the essay support some aspects of the communication of the research.	Structural conventions used in the essay effectively support communication of the research.

Criterion B: Knowledge and understanding	Guiding question: Does the student demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being used in their research?		
	Note: If the work does not reach a standard outlined by the performance level descriptors, 0 marks are awarded for this criterion.		
	1–2 marks	3–4 marks	5–6 marks
Knowledge	Research materials are used to establish knowledge of the subject matter but these materials lack relevance.	Relevant research materials are used to establish some knowledge of the subject matter.	Comprehensive, relevant research materials are used to establish knowledge of the subject matter.

Understanding — Terminology	Terminology is used but it lacks accuracy or is very limited.	Some relevant terminology is used accurately to demonstrate understanding of the subject matter.	Relevant terminology is used accurately and consistently to demonstrate understanding of the subject matter.
Understanding — Concepts	Concepts are identified but these are not relevant or are explained superficially.	Some relevant concepts are explained and used with partial effectiveness to demonstrate understanding of the subject matter.	Relevant concepts are explained and used effectively to demonstrate understanding of the subject matter.

Criterion C: Analysis and line of argument	Guiding question: Does the student analyse the information presented in the essay and produce a coherent line of argument?		
	Note: If the work does not reach a standard outlined by the performance level descriptors, 0 marks are awarded for this criterion.		
	1–2 marks	3–4 marks	5–6 marks
Analysis	The essay is descriptive rather than analytical.	The essay includes analysis that is partially effective and produces some relevant findings.	Analysis in the essay is effective and consistently produces relevant findings.
Line of argument	A partial line of argument is present.	A partially consistent line of argument links the research question, research findings and conclusions.	A clear, sustained line of argument links the research question, research findings and conclusions.

Criterion D: Discussion and evaluation	Guiding question: Does the student discuss the findings and evaluate the essay?			
	Note: If the work does not reach a standard outlined by the performance level descriptors, 0 marks are awarded for this criterion.			
	1–2 marks	3–4 marks	5–6 marks	7–8 marks
Discussion	The significance of the findings is described, but there is no reference to supporting evidence.	A partially balanced discussion of the significance of the findings is sometimes supported by appropriate evidence.	A balanced discussion of the significance of the findings is often supported by appropriate evidence.	A balanced discussion of the significance of the findings is fully supported by appropriate evidence.
Evaluation	A partial evaluation of the effectiveness of the essay is present, but strengths and limitations are not stated.	An evaluation of the effectiveness of the essay is present, with some strengths and limitations stated.	An evaluation of the effectiveness of the essay is present, with relevant strengths and limitations described.	An evaluation of the effectiveness of the essay is present, with relevant strengths and limitations explained.

Criterion E:	Guiding question: Does the student evaluate the effect of the extended essay learning experience on them as a learner?
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Reflection	Criterion E applies only to the reflective statement on the student's RPF.			
	Evidence referred to in the reflection may be drawn from, but is not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • experiences and insights that could shape future thinking • explicit examples of how skills learned could be used in other current contexts and in the future • how changes in perspective impacted decision-making. 			
	Note: If the work does not reach a standard outlined by the performance level descriptors, 0 marks are awarded for this criterion.			
	1 mark	2 marks	3 marks	4 marks
Evaluative	Reflection on the extended essay learning experience is descriptive.	Reflection on the extended essay learning experience is descriptive and includes some specific examples.	Reflection on the extended essay learning experience is partially evaluative and includes specific examples.	Reflection on the extended essay learning experience is consistently evaluative and includes specific examples.
Growth	Reflection on the student's growth is limited to a description of the process and there is no evidence of transfer of learning.	Reflection sometimes shows evidence of the student's growth and transfer of learning.	Reflection often shows evidence of the student's growth and transfer of learning.	Reflection consistently shows evidence of the student's growth and transfer of learning.

Alignment with assessment objectives

Criterion	Assessment objectives	Why these assessment objectives?
A: Framework for the essay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge and understanding • Communication of research 	<p>“Knowledge and understanding” because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the relevance of the research question indicates knowledge and understanding • knowledge and understanding of relevant research methods is evident. <p>“Communication of research” because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • research is communicated according to appropriate structural conventions.
B: Knowledge and understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge and understanding 	<p>“Knowledge and understanding” because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • research materials establish knowledge of the subject matter • terminology and concepts demonstrate understanding of the subject matter.
C: Analysis and line of argument	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application and analysis • Synthesis and evaluation 	<p>“Application and analysis” because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appropriate analysis is used to determine relevant findings. <p>“Synthesis and evaluation” because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a line of argument links the research question, research findings and conclusions.

Criterion	Assessment objectives	Why these assessment objectives?
D: Discussion and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Synthesis and evaluation 	<p>“Synthesis and evaluation” because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> there is a balanced discussion of the significance of the findings the effectiveness of the essay is evaluated.
E: Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Synthesis and evaluation 	<p>“Synthesis and evaluation” because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the extended essay learning experience is evaluated and the student’s growth reflected on.

Extended essay 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 the extended essay should be based on the qualitative grade descriptors for the extended essay presented below.

These descriptors will be used by senior examiners to set the boundaries. While boundaries are subject to change, it is the grade descriptors that remain consistent. Please refer to the document *Assessment principles and practices—Quality assessments in a digital age*.

Grade A
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The student demonstrates effective research skills, resulting in a well-focused and appropriate research question that can be explored within the scope of the chosen topic. There is effective engagement with relevant research areas, methods and sources. There is excellent knowledge and understanding of the topic in the wider context of the relevant discipline. There is effective application of source material and correct use of subject-specific terminology and/or concepts that further supports this. Conclusions are consistent, relevant and proficiently analysed. Arguments show sustained reason and are supported effectively by evidence. Research is critically evaluated. Coherence, consistency and effective use of structural conventions support readability to an excellent degree. Reflection on the extended essay learning experience is consistently evaluative and includes specific examples. Reflection shows consistent evidence of the student’s growth and transfer of learning.
Grade B
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The student demonstrates appropriate research skills, resulting in a research question that can be explored within the scope of the chosen topic. There is reasonably effective engagement with relevant research areas, methods and sources. There is good knowledge and understanding of the topic in the wider context of the relevant discipline. There is a reasonably effective application of source material and reasonable use of subject-specific terminology and/or concepts. Conclusions are consistent and accurately analysed. Arguments show reason and are often supported by evidence. Research at times shows critical evaluation.

- Coherence, consistency and use of structural conventions support readability to a good degree.
- Reflection on the extended essay learning experience is partially evaluative and includes specific examples.
- Reflection often shows evidence of the student's growth and transfer of learning.

Grade C

- The student demonstrates evidence of research undertaken, leading to a research question that is not necessarily expressed in a way that can be explored within the scope of the chosen topic.
- There is 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.
- There is some knowledge and understanding of the topic in the wider context of the discipline, and the knowledge is mostly relevant.
- There is an attempted application of source material and appropriate terminology and/or concepts; an attempted synthesis of research results with partially relevant analysis.
- Conclusions are partly supported by the evidence.
- Arguments are descriptive rather than analytical.
- There is a partially successful evaluation of the research.
- The essay is not always coherent and consistent, and structural conventions are irregularly applied, but this does not significantly hinder readability.
- Reflection on the extended essay learning experience is descriptive and includes some specific examples.
- Reflection sometimes shows evidence of the student's growth and transfer of learning.

Grade D

- The student 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, there is engagement with appropriate research, methods and sources, but discrepancies in those processes occasionally interfere with the planning and approach.
- There is some relevant knowledge and understanding of the topic in the wider context of the discipline but at times the knowledge is irrelevant.
- There is an attempted application of source material but with inaccuracies in the use of, or underuse of, terminology and/or concepts.
- There is irrelevant analysis and inconsistent conclusions as a result of a descriptive discussion.
- There is a lack of evaluation.
- The limited coherence and consistency of the essay and absence of structural conventions hinders readability.
- Reflection on the extended essay learning experience is descriptive.
- Reflection on the student's growth is limited to a description of the process and there is no evidence of transfer of learning.

Grade E (a failing condition)

- The student demonstrates little or no research, a lack of focus and an ineffective research question.
- There is a generally unsystematic approach and a resulting unfocused research question.
- There is limited engagement with limited research and sources.
- There is generally limited and only partially accurate knowledge and understanding of the topic in the wider context of the discipline.
- There are ineffective connections in the application of source material, and inaccuracies in the terminology and/or concepts used.

- The results of research are summarized with inconsistent analysis.
- There is an attempted outline of an argument but one that is generally descriptive in nature.
- The lack of coherence and consistency and absence of structural conventions significantly hinders readability.
- Reflection on the extended essay learning experience is very limited, with no evidence of transfer of learning.