

MUSIC

This is a supplementary report following the May 2010 session and should be read in conjunction with the May 2009 extended essay report.

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

There was a wide range of work, from sharply focused, well planned, and structured investigations, several with imaginative enquiries, productively pursued, to some with ill defined topics, disorganized ideas and/or no strategy. There was a variable understanding of research methodology (weak to accomplished). A few papers were made exclusively of personal views; others demonstrated some discernment of the difference between opinion and fact; and some had rigorously objective approaches. Many of the topics were music centred, though many could have used more music illustration and substantiation. Some used isolated argumentation, unsupported by an academic context or other lines of enquiry and a great deal of use of general, non-specialized sources, with reliance on the internet - noticeably Wikipedia. Several essays involved lengthy explanations about aspects of music theory. These essays inevitably received lower marks than those that focussed on real pieces of music.

Other candidates focused on general research topics: the history of punk rock, classical and romantic music, and lives of performers for example. Other inappropriate essays included topics such as 'music as a universal language' and 'music and its effect on academic results'. It is exceptionally difficult to apply the assessment criteria with rigour to such general extended essays, and those which were not musically based (as in the above two examples) inevitably received low marks. Those who achieved very good marks concentrated on specific analytical and/or compositional features of certain works. Such candidates worked with scores and were able to find detail in the respective texts and comment with authority and confidence. Some candidates wrote 'compare/contrast' essays, which did not show a specific rationale for the research question – i.e. 'what am I trying to find out?' Several essays focused on a purely descriptive analysis, which is unhelpful without musical examples. Essays trying to prove a mood or nationalistic feel lacked success, as it was difficult to effectively support such research without it inevitably becoming too subjective, without any evidential support. Often these were vague or lacked real musical analysis.

More and more essays are including a CD of examples, sometimes without illustration in the text. This is not appropriate for an EE (see below).

Candidate performance against each criterion

A: research question

Some essays achieved full marks. However on many occasions the research title was not sharply focused and not clearly stated. A few had a level of focus and a maturity generally not associated with the age group, though others were predictable or of very limited scope. Several essays did not mention the research question at all in the introduction, resulting in a score of 0. The research question as a title heading is not sufficient here.

B: introduction

Many essays placed their research question into context and gave some validity to why they had chosen such a topic. However the concept of the Introduction appears not to have been thoroughly absorbed, and could offer easy marks, so this was an opportunity quite often missed. Too often personal involvement and interest replaced an academic attempt to explain the significance of the topic in hand, and its worthiness of investigation. Very few essays mentioned other research about the topic, and in many cases the introduction was the weakest area of the essay.

C: investigation

Some form of planning was evident in many essays, and several had a good range of appropriate sources. However other essays relied solely on secondary sources. However it was good to see that some essays had now and again used first-hand information through interviewing, though it was not always made clear as to the status of these interviewees, and the information gleaned was not always useful or effective.

D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

Too many comments were superficial and elementary, or demonstrated knowledge and understanding of issues other than music itself, which is a requirement for achieving a higher mark here. Some essays however demonstrated academic rigour, and showed a high level of knowledge and understanding.

E: reasoned argument

Several essays presented clear ideas which were coherent and logical, though many arguments were superficial and elementary. These essays lacked depth and coherent arguments were not developed. Presenting a reasoned argument is perhaps one of the more challenging tasks, and essays which did well here substantiated assertions and presented a logical discourse, and were among the higher scorers.

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

Much analysis focused on general comments. Those essays which achieved full marks in this criterion were engaged in the actual music and used their research materials with care and understanding. Some showed effective application of analytical and evaluative skills, though there was a high reliance on using structural and harmonic detail as supporting data, which was not always relevant.

G: use of language appropriate to the subject

Essays which analysed music generally included the use of musical terminology, though it was not always used consistently and accurately. The best essays were fluent in description and analysis, using terms with understanding and meaning. Other, more general essays, included very little musical language, and therefore scored lowly in this criterion.

H: conclusion

Most essays included a conclusion, though often the final comments lacked consistency with the evidence presented in the extended essay, or simply reiterated the introduction. Some of the better essays included unresolved or new questions in their conclusion. The best conclusions showed that their research had brought about a new synthesis to the topic concerned.

I: formal presentation

More care needed to be taken when incorporating musical examples into the text. Examples must be complete – with clefs, key and time signatures. Not all quotations were supported by footnotes and bibliographies were not always complete or included sources which were not referred to in the essay. If reference to bar numbers was included, then the score or musical examples were required for verification. Occasionally scores supplied were provided without bar numberings, and a few scripts provided the whole score of a sonata movement, amounting to many pages, with little need for doing so. Bibliographies were generally included, though occasionally www dates were omitted as were recording or score information. Score illustrations were often not referenced, and clefs in many examples were omitted. A few scripts recorded merely www sources and nothing else; these were generally in essays of little original thought and of a poor standard.

J: abstract

Not all elements were clearly stated in the abstract. Too many candidates used the abstract as an introduction, rather than a précis of the essay, which should be written after the essay has been completed.

K: holistic judgment

Many essays showed some or better evidence of intellectual initiative, understanding and insight, though others were rather 'run-of-the-mill', based on a paraphrasing of secondary resources, and having a research question that would not allow for these qualities to be shown in any depth. Candidates need to appreciate that criteria C, D, E, F and G are 20 marks in total. Achieving good marks in these sections of the assessment criteria will then have an impact on criterion K.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

Research topics need to invite powerful analysis, and candidates need to use language and terminology associated with music analysis. Candidates and teachers need to work alongside the assessment criteria when progressing with the extended essay, and always bear in mind that extended essays need to be musical. The choice of a focused musically based research question is therefore crucial, as is planning a logical argument to sustain the progression of ideas.

Bibliographies need to be complete, and not rely solely on internet resources, and scores used as examples in the body of the essay need referencing. Clefs must also be included in every notational example, for the sake of clarity.

CD recordings should not be included, as the model for the extended essay is as a paper in an academic journal. See the EE Guide on page 19.

There was clearly some confusion as to the nature of the task in relation to the IBDP as a whole at times – essay with titles such as 'TOK extended essay' EE for TOK course' showed a lack of understanding of the essay's place in the core.

Supervisors' comments are always useful in helping the examiner assess the research and writing process, and understand special circumstances, if any. These comments also clarify the supervisor's input and suggestions, especially when students do not follow the advice offered (one can infer that the school as such has the expertise to guide its students in the right direction). Many essays however did not include a supervisor comment at all. It was noted that successful students from within a school all benefited from generous advising time (3-5 hours is the IB's recommended contact time). More problematic are the cases where student and supervisor met for only half an hour; this is clearly insufficient to monitor and guide the progress closely, and ensure that the students attain a high level of achievement.