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## EXTENDED ESSAY REPORTS – MAY 2003

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### German – Group 2

#### General impression

Seventy-two extended essays were submitted this year, reflecting, as usual, a wide range of interest. The overall level of this year's essays reflected competence and ambition, with a good few candidates writing focused and relevant pieces of research, often backed up by in-depth analysis.

Guidance from supervisors was usually good (exceptions and recommendations see below), however, there was great variation in the amount of time that supervisors claimed to have spent with each candidate (from 1.5 hours to 40 hours); moreover, not all supervisors provided comments as to the nature and involvement of their support. As not all candidates seemed to understand the significance/importance of the criteria, one might appeal to supervisors to spend a little more time going over the criteria and helping the candidates to produce a clear, acceptable essay – paying special attention to the abstract (see below).

#### Range and suitability of the work submitted

As mentioned above, this year's candidates dealt with a wide range of topics; fewer candidates tried and tested old diehards (*Wiedervereinigung*, *Rechtsextremismus*), and very few candidates submitted essays that were not relevant (e.g. *Tattoo*, *Globalisierung* – these did not allow the candidate to prove sufficient insight into the culture/language or literature of the language studied), however, a few more could have been narrowed down a little more (USA – *Deutsch als Amtssprache*, *Umwelt*). A growing preference for non-literary topics was to be observed. The subjects ranged from resistance groups against Hitler, discussion of films/TV programmes, to the analysis of issues regarding the integration of foreigners, and to fashion.

In general it can be said that the majority of candidates chose well narrowed-down topics, and focused on specific research questions, such as the rise and decline of a German company (case study), certain specific aspects of the *Wiedervereinigung* (once in conjunction with its literary reflections). There was an interesting rendering of an old favourite – “1968”.

A fair number of essays dealt with literary topics (*Brecht and the Verfremdungseffekt*, aspects of *Der Vorleser*). The literary topics were focused and contained clearly defined research questions (e.g. ‘Frauenrollen’ in two of *Dürrenmatt's* works, *Geschwisterbeziehungen in Grimm's Märchen*, *Lale Andersen and 'Willie' in 'Lili Marlen'*, *Die Beziehung der männlichen Hauptfigur zu den Frauen in KAFKAS 'Prozess'*).

One or two candidates chose linguistic topics (*Schweizerdeutsch; die Probleme beim Uebersetzen* – using a literary example). These were of varying quality and insight. One problem seemed to be that the candidates concerned were not able to separate personal involvement from factual information.

A number of essays exceeded the prescribed word length, and some abstracts did not state the research area and/or ran over the given 300-word limit (see below).

A number of candidates fell down on presentation and referencing (see below).

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### Candidate performance against each criterion

#### *Criterion A Research Question*

As mentioned above, most candidates thought about their topics before starting to write their Extended Essays and in many cases consulted their supervisors. This resulted in a good few essays with clearly defined research questions, which were adequately presented and also dealt with efficiently in the main body of the essay. Many candidates also included a motivation statement, which gave a nice personal note to the essay without lowering the tone.

Isolated problems remained concerning both the formulation and the presentation of the research question. The title of the essay itself is not sufficient as a research question, the research question needs to be stated clearly and explained in the introduction. Moreover, it is vital that candidates actually ‘answer’/refer to their research question in the essay.

The following essay-title may serve as an excellent example: *Inwiefern haben Jugendliche Widerstand gegen Hitler und sein Regime geleistet, und wie hat sich deren Geist bis heute ausgewirkt?* (This essay sensibly confines the argument to the discussion of the resistance of one particular group [young people] and broadens it to encompass the inspiration which has been felt in order to sustain and encourage the fight against injustice up to the present day). Please refer to the above comments regarding literary topics.

#### *Criterion B Approach*

A clearly defined, concise research question points the way to a clearly defined investigation of the topic area, reinforced by a suitable methodology for the substantiation of the issues in question. It also serves as the foundation for the abstract as an illuminating synopsis for the reader.

Many candidates used an acceptable variety of sources (books, internet, leaflets, questionnaires, interviews...) but several candidates relied solely on the Internet (often foreign language sites), which is not acceptable. Likewise, the use of secondary literature that is entirely in/related to a foreign language is not advisable (e.g. English language books translated by the candidate).

There were some unusual, and often successful, interesting approaches to the topics chosen; one particularly nice example was the analysis of young people’s attitudes in East and West Germany, based on literary sources – although this essay was not always concise it provided interesting material, and an unusual viewpoint.

#### *Criterion C Analysis*

Most candidates were well capable of analysing and extrapolating but the support material was not always clearly referenced (see below) and often inappropriate.

It is obvious that some candidates – those who generally achieved the highest grades – have been very well coached and made fully aware of the criteria as set out by the IBO.

A number of students have concentrated excessively on just one aspect of their chosen research topic (e.g. Michael’s ‘Abwehrmassnahmen’ are dealt with rather verbosely in an essay about the main characters in *Der Vorleser*).

#### *Criterion D Argument/evaluation*

Most candidates scored much lower in this criterion than one would have expected, showing that not all candidates are able to draw conclusions and to go beyond the obvious. A lot of candidates also simply presented facts without reflection, which resulted in lower marks in criteria C and D.

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It must be said that the argumentation was much better (more concise and relevant, more focused and factually correct) when it came to literary or general cultural topics, compared to linguistic/language-based ones.

### *Criterion E Conclusion*

Though not all conclusions were clear and to the point, this year's sample was an improvement on last year's, as most candidates actually attempted a conclusion. Those who did usually followed the guidelines and related their conclusion to the research question.

### *Criterion F Abstract*

As mentioned above, the most common problem regarding the abstract was excessive length, often by as much as 20%.

Furthermore, many candidates did not state the research question or their conclusions in the abstract.

As in previous years there were still a number of candidates who included the abstract in their essay, sometimes using it as an introduction, which is not at all the purpose an abstract should serve.

Having said this, there were a large number of excellent (clear, concise, coherent) abstracts, which were a pleasure to read.

### *Criterion G Formal Presentation*

I must say that I was very impressed with the overall standard of presentation. Most essays were clear, well set out and logically presented.

I encountered problems concerning the use of paragraphs and chapters. Some candidates took the idea of an "essay" literally and wrote a long piece of work without any sub-divisions or chapters, as one would in a Paper Two, for example.

On a number of occasions the abstract and the bibliography were included in the essay, which I would not recommend.

One or two candidates were a little clumsy when it came to choosing fonts and layout; creating very busy and thus often unclear work.

Not all candidates stated the total number of words; as virtually all extended essays are word-processed it does not take much effort to print the number of words as counted by the PC.

The greatest problem remains the use of references and quotes. In fact, there seems to be a certain decline in standard compared to previous years. Many candidates were unable to reference quotes that were not verbatim or make a clear distinction between direct and indirect quoting. Most references did not carry any sources, and referencing was not done in a consistent manner (e.g. page numbers were given for some, but not all, quotes; dates missed off newspapers; switching from one system of referencing to another...). Quotes in another language (cf. English) that are not explained or translated in a footnote are unacceptable. The standard varied considerably, but on the whole it can be said that very few essays were flawless.

### *Criterion H Holistic Judgment*

Refer to comments made re. Criteria A - G

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### Subject-specific Assessment Criteria

#### *Criterion J Knowledge and Understanding of the Language/Culture/Literature*

The majority of candidates demonstrated good to thorough understanding of the topic studied as well as the wider field of language/culture related to the topic. However, there were some essays with serious flaws in this area, e.g. the ‘target culture’ had nothing to do with German or the topic was so badly chosen that the candidate could not prove his/her knowledge within the specified criterion. (See criteria A, B, G above)

#### *Criterion K Point of View on the Topic*

Most candidates demonstrated that they are capable of structuring an essay in such a way that their point of view is clearly stated and backed -up by arguments and examples.

#### *Criterion L Communication and Style*

The difference between A2 and B language candidates is obvious, with the near native speakers obviously able to manipulate the language a lot more effectively and communicating with much greater ease and panache. But most candidates demonstrated that they are able to communicate successfully using formal language in an organized manner.

Some grammatical difficulties might have been picked up and eradicated through more thorough teaching, spell-checking or closer supervision.

Moreover, some candidates do not reference all sources correctly and adequately which results in style -breaks as the style of a text -book or other source is most likely to be rather more ‘adult’ than an 18 -year-old second -language student’s.

### Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

Most of the recommendations follow from what has been said above:

- It is vital that candidates receive adequate supervision and that the supervisors state this clearly in the space provided. (It would be very helpful to the examiner to know how much formal training a candidate had received – writing skills, quoting rules etc. not necessarily language -specific.)
- Great care should be taken that topics are within the guidelines (see the Extended Essay guide) and sufficiently narrowed down.
- Spell-check and grammar -check are useful tools.
- The number of words should be clearly stated – for the abstract as well as the essay itself.
- Title, contents page, chapters with appropriate headings, literature list and references should be evident in every essay.
- Abstracts should be set apart from the main body of the essay and clearly identified as such.