

GEOGRAPHY

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

The standard of essays submitted in geography was generally disappointing, with very few really outstanding essays. Many of the titles were very broad and conclusions were made on the basis of very little evidence, in some cases just a handful of interviews. There was a good range of titles and ideas, reflecting a worldwide candidature and differing interest areas. A large number of essays were written on a tourism theme (often these were not well done). Too many essays were submitted where candidates treated them as if they were fieldwork reports (IA). The style recommended for IA is NOT appropriate for extended essays.

Weaker essays often had overly positive (and unrealistic) comments added to the inside cover by the essay's supervisor, suggesting that some supervisors are unwilling or unable to be objective when discussing essay topics and methods with students. There are still some supervisors unwilling to write anything at all on the inside cover.

On a more positive note, there was a good range of titles and ideas, reflecting a worldwide candidature and a wide range of interest areas. In addition, fewer essays this session had little or no relevance to geography.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: research question

Many essays were far too broad to answer in depth while remaining within the word limit. Choosing to investigate a broad RQ by looking at a limited number of specific hypotheses (which between them still leave important aspects of the original RQ unanswered) is NOT a good way to ensure that all aspects of a RQ are covered. For example research questions might investigate the social, environmental and economic impacts of a geographic event when perhaps just one of these angles could have been investigated in depth. "Futuristic" questions looking at how a particular construction project (port/airport/metro line/highway) will impact on local areas are invariably far too challenging for students to answer satisfactorily. Some RQ's were not stated clearly in the abstract or introduction and at times they were worded differently in these sections or differed slightly from the front cover.

Criterion B: introduction

Introductions were generally sound, with the stronger ones making explicit reference to relevant geographical theory. (This is also relevant to criterion D). Frequently candidates did

not really justify why their chosen area was of geographic interest or relevance. Sometimes this was inferred. The best candidates were usually able to put the topic in geographic context.

Criterion C: investigation

Investigative techniques were fairly good, though the data assembled by many candidates was sometimes insufficient in quantity or quality for them to draw any valid conclusions in relation to their RQ. Map quality continues to decline as more students opt for unannotated “Google” maps (or their various equivalents). Downloaded Internet maps are rarely an ideal base map for geographic essays, since their selection process does not include any decision about their relevance to the particular topic, about what elements to show, or how best to depict them. The scale of many maps is inappropriate to the study or intended usage. The use of colour on maps is often poor, with little thought given to the effects of colour values on the perception of the reader. One positive note is that most maps are now accompanied by the essential elements of scale, key/legend and some indication of orientation.

In many cases a limited range of sources had been gathered by the candidates. In some cases this only consisted of a handful of primary interviews and conclusions to essays were merely based on opinions of a select group of individuals and were even at times representative of one aspect or side of the study. Better essays had a sufficient range of sources but very few, if any, displayed an imaginative range of sources.

Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

The major weakness in knowledge and understanding was in relating results to existing geographic theory and in explaining anomalies using reasons other than poor methods of data collection.

Candidates were able to score quite well here, using good geographic terminology. Essays with an urban or settlement focus tended to do very well, demonstrating good knowledge of urban models and well known urban patterns. Tourism essays fared less well, some mentioned models like the Butler Model, but concepts of leakage, the multiplier effect and simple reasons that motivate people to travel or to perceive places differently or considerations of different age-groups travelling were few and far between. Knowledge of the five map elements was poor as were good sampling techniques or the use of statistical methods available.

Criterion E: reasoned argument

Most essays demonstrated some attempt to present ideas in a logical sequence. Where essays had a logical structure with clearly focused and well formulated hypotheses, an effective reasoned argument was developed by the candidate. Frequently, though where essays were based on limited sources, little or no argument was offered as candidates accepted the limited subjective opinions of interviewees.

Criterion F: application of analytical and evaluative skills

The weakest essays were overly descriptive and were compilations of information which did not necessarily have any direct relevance to the student’s chosen research question.

Most essays contained some appropriate analysis though it was often simplistic and often reliant on simple graphs such as bars and pies. Sadly there was a lack of convincing statistical analysis. Often one variable would be graphed using a bar when it would have been much more interesting and telling to plot 2 variables as an X-Y plot or scatter graph. Evaluations were in some cases very good and it was clear that the candidate had learned a great deal from the EE process especially with regards to methods of data collection and perhaps formulating clearer more precise questionnaires.

Criterion G: use of language

Most candidates used some appropriate geographic terminology, but candidates should be cautioned to base their definitions of key concepts on the ones used in the subject guide. They are welcome to “challenge” the definitions in the guide, but if they do so, they should support their ideas with academic sources, not pocket dictionaries!

Candidates do need to use the term 'association' more than correlation though as many forget the chance factor that can occur with data seemingly to plot positively or negatively. Most candidates are still unsure of the correct meaning of a random sample.

Criterion H: conclusion

Most candidates attempted a conclusion, with weaker students tending to introduce new material and elements of analysis that should have been incorporated earlier in their essay. All candidates attempted to conclude and in most cases these were well ordered and clear. At times only level 1 was awarded as it was felt that some sources of information used were not always relevant to the RQ and that the findings were only partially successful.

Criterion I: formal presentation

Formal presentation was usually satisfactory, but it remains a concern that some candidates do not provide a clear attribution to original sources for all the illustrations or maps included in the text, even if the sources used were listed in their bibliography.

Criterion J: abstract

Most candidates wrote very clear abstracts with all elements present but it is surprising that some candidates still fail to get full marks for this criterion. The commonest single error is to omit giving any conclusion. The next most basic error is to write the abstract as though the essay has not yet been written, as evidenced by statements such as “I will be attempting to show that...” and “I expect to find that...”

A small number of essays did not include an abstract and a disappointing number either did not write about how the investigation was undertaken or disclose the findings.

Criterion K: holistic judgment

Many students had clearly gained considerable personal satisfaction from the process of writing their essay, even if this did not directly correlate with their level of achievement. Some candidates had clearly worked very hard on collecting a huge amount of data and a sense of their dedication, interest and excitement was conveyed in their writing.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

Supervisors should be advised to dissuade students not studying IB geography from submitting an extended essay in the subject.

Candidates are advised to focus on a single, clearly-worded research question. Weaknesses in the formulation of the research question, or the overuse of separate hypotheses, inevitably make it difficult for the candidate's essay to remain focussed.

Candidates and supervisors should be reminded that having a clear spatial element in their essay (going beyond mere location on a map) is absolutely essential.

The best essays showed considerable insight into contemporary geographic issues. The issues do not need to be that complex. For example, studies looking at how the spatial distribution of median incomes in a city correlate to the provision of education or health facilities are fairly straightforward in terms of methodology, and allow for a variety of techniques of analysis. This kind of spatial analysis can yield interesting and valuable insights, especially at the local or sub-national scale.