
EXTENDED ESSAY REPORTS – MAY 2003

Music

Range and suitability of work submitted

This year a major problem emerged in that there was an unacceptably high proportion of essays that had topics which either verged on the unsuitable, were too broad or simply were not music orientated. Again, the approach to certain essays was inappropriate to the research question; candidates gave elementary narratives on composers, performers and general musical themes – too many failed to address analysis, arguments and evaluation. Some opted for the simple choice.

Finally a general comment from all members of my team of examiners is that all schools must choose topics that confirm to the guidelines set out in the IBO Extended Essay guide, pages 94-95.

Candidate performance against each criteria

General assessment criteria

Criterion A Research question

In most cases the question had been re-stated in the early part of the essay.

Criterion B Approach to the research question

Candidates' approach was generally appropriate.

Criterion C & D Analysis/interpretation Argument/evaluation

Analysis and argument had improved over the last few years, but this year few achieved top marks; that is to say, almost none exhibited noteworthy skill and understanding or presented a well-developed, fully substantial and articulate argument.

Criterion E Conclusion

Generally most essays had acceptable conclusions.

Criterion F Abstract

Abstracts on the whole were very good.

Criterion G Presentation

Presentation was neat and bibliographies presented according to a recognised format. Again this year, there was a lack of musical illustrations, expecting the examiner to know the work? Also, there were fewer CDs/cassettes included – some were essential in marking certain essays.

Criterion H Holistic judgment

Some candidates scored marks for 'personal engagement'; sadly fewer this year, but more achieved marks for 'depth of insight' and 'understanding' and only a few for 'flair'.

Subject assessment criteria

Criterion J Choice of music and method of study

This year, more than ever, too many candidates did not choose to use music in their essays.

Criterion K Use of appropriate primary and secondary sources

Quite a few candidates relied almost entirely on secondary sources, yet there were some (not many, sadly) who were inventive and used a range of primary sources as well.

Criterion L Description and analysis of the technical aspects of music in terms of melody, harmony, rhythm, texture, tone colour and lyrics or text as appropriate

Most candidates managed to place the music in some form of context, but others tended to be superficial or misunderstood at times.

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Criterion M Historical, social and cultural context

Most candidates did place music in correct context, though some were rather overdone at the expense of more detailed investigation of the topic in hand. The ‘potted’ biography emerged again.

Recommendation for the teaching of future candidates

In the past I have been pleased to report that IB extended essays in Music have generally improved in quality. Sadly, I am sorry to say the opposite this year – as do my team of assistant examiners. Far too many candidates are not getting the research question right! Certain supervisors would be wise to read again and again very carefully the advice given in the Extended Essay guide before allowing candidates to begin their research. If teachers are not sure of any criteria they should seek advice from IBCA.

It is vital that extended essays should deal with **real** music and not be about ‘lyrics’, ‘lives of musicians’ or ‘instruments’.

However, the greatest problem which is rearing its ugly head each year now is access to the Internet – an excellent resource, but not for plagiarism which is suspiciously on the increase it seems.