

## SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

### Overall grade boundaries

<b>Grade:</b>	E	D	C	B	A
<b>Mark range:</b>	0-7	8-15	16-22	23-28	29-36

### The range and suitability of the work submitted

The range and suitability of the work submitted this session has provided examples of essays at varying levels of achievement. Many candidates were successful in producing their arguments by referring to anthropological concepts, readings or sources and applying appropriate theories and methodologies. A precise, anthropologically framed, research question is of crucial importance to accomplish a successful investigation in the subject. Candidates who are familiar with anthropology tend to do well and achieve the higher marks, whereas those candidates without any experience in the discipline tend to produce weaker results.

A significant number of essays submitted were not anthropologically grounded, nor did the students present an anthropological approach. Most of the weaker essays do not present evidence of a background in the discipline. Too many students are misguided and write about anything that interests them without the proper understanding of the subject. Hence, their chances to sustain a good essay are limited. Too often an essay which shows evidence of hard work and sincere effort receives significantly lower marks than might have been expected by both the candidate and supervisor. The lack of a specific anthropological focus hinders an essay's possibility of attaining high levels of achievement.

Still, despite past warnings, it remains clear that many schools continue to permit candidates who do not take the course as their group 3 choice, to write essays on the subject. A considerable proportion of essays should have been submitted under a different subject. As has been written in past reports, it is evident this session again, that some essays appear to have been submitted with the assumption that the subject is a 'catch all' category for essays that would have a difficult time fitting anywhere else. Social and cultural anthropology is a discipline with its own standards, and common sense cannot replace solid background knowledge. Unfortunately, these essays frequently advance polemical arguments, offer opinions, and propose prescriptions. For example, an essay discussing French state policies

banishing the use of the hijab, without an anthropological approach will often produce prescriptive, 'common sense' statements.

Though the above-mentioned is a recurring difficulty, it is also worth mentioning that there has been an improvement in the quality of extended essays, clearly resulting from some schools working more closely with the guide and offering excellent supervision.

Some examples of successful essays range from an interest in classic topics of the discipline analysed in a contemporary context, as shown in the study of the changes and continuities of a female rite of initiation among the Wayuu of Colombia or how the analysis of 'good death' in a violent neighbourhood from a symbolic approach. Other areas of anthropological concern that were explored included the analysis of gender and morality through the ethnographic study of honour in a Greek pastoral community, or studies that focused on the body from different theoretical perspectives. Some essays drew on contemporary analytical frameworks, such as the analysis of the 'sworn virgins' in northern Albania from post structural approaches or an examination of a developmental project in the Andes region from post-colonial theory. Political interest was present in many essays: for example, diachronic analysis on the Maori language revitalization movement, an exploration of clientelism from theories of reciprocity, essays on the 'narco' culture and its hegemonic power, an ethnographic study of a political ritual or a study about state terror and social trauma. Globalization and modernity continue to produce interesting investigations, providing discussion on the local/global dynamics like in an essay on plastic surgery within the cultural context of the 'Korean wave', or ethnographic studies of new consumption practices.

The focus on popular culture or cultural consumption continues to be the interest of many students. These may include hip hop music; social networks; media, fashion and women; sports and life stories of popular figures. Again, some of these could have resulted in successful essays if dealt with appropriately. However because of the lack of anthropological background

## Candidate performance against each criterion

### Criterion A: research question

In light of the above, arriving at an appropriate research question proves to be a challenge. A large proportion of candidates failed to present sufficiently focused research questions, although only a few proposed inappropriate topics. Well focused and anthropologically framed research questions were key to the success of many essays. Nonetheless, some students did not narrow the research question enough.

### Criterion B: introduction

A majority of essays lacked an anthropological context for their research questions. The successful ones could frame the research question in an anthropological context, relating it to existing knowledge on the subject, and defining leading concepts within the literature. Weaker essays tended to introduce personal opinions or irrelevant arguments in the introduction.

### Criterion C: investigation

The general lack of explicitly anthropological approaches and the lack of resort to anthropological sources limit the marks which could be awarded under this criterion. The more successful essays showed evidence of satisfactory planning and drew from appropriate sources, whether focusing on ethnographic materials or analysing a topic from a theoretical or comparative perspective. In less successful cases, poor organization with regard to research procedures commonly called the effectiveness of their planning into question. Many essays did not sufficiently place their data in context.

### Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

Without an explicit anthropological approach and the demonstration of a “sufficient range of appropriate resources”, knowledge and understanding of the topic studied will be limited. A minority of candidates showed that they had done a great deal of academic research relevant to their topic, but in many cases, this research was not relevant to anthropology. In some cases, superficial academic knowledge was demonstrated. In a few cases, essays were based primarily on personal opinion, inappropriate sources, or very selective research that was not critical in nature. Many showed knowledge in their topic, but not in the discipline of anthropology.

A good number of candidates were successful in integrating clear and explicit evidence of specific and relevant anthropological readings into their discussions. Many were able to demonstrate some knowledge of anthropological concepts and relevant theory, in some cases also discussing methodological issues.

### Criterion E: reasoned argument

A number of essays demonstrated appropriate use of resources to construct well-organized, coherent arguments, while many presented straightforward or narrative accounts. Though only a few candidates supported their essays with anthropological concepts and theories (criterion D), many were able to present an argument, supported by some data. In few cases was anthropology made fully relevant to the argument. The most successful candidates were able to present a persuasive and solid argument supporting their essays with sound data, anthropological concepts and theories

### Criterion F: application of analytical and evaluative skills

Only the most successful candidates managed to move beyond mere description, offering anthropologically sound generalizations, explanations of the data and discussion of underlying patterns of an anthropological nature. Along with criteria D and G, criterion F requires a sound anthropological approach. A significant number of essays received low grades in this criterion.

### Criterion G: use of language appropriate to the subject:

The most successful candidates were able to effectively use terminology specific to the discipline. However, some candidates inserted anthropological terms, phrases, or authors in

their introductions, usually in a superficial way, and then failed to use them to build an analytical framework. It is a problem when concepts are used as if they were self-evident or unproblematic and do not require definition.

#### Criterion H: conclusion

Most candidates attempted a conclusion that was relevant to their essay though many conclusions are not able to present new, unresolved questions, merely summarized the preceding argument. A few essays treated the conclusion as an extension of the analysis, inappropriately introducing new material. Also, most of the social problem-oriented essays used the concluding section to present a list of prescriptions, which of course are not pertinent.

Successful essays showed how the analysis bore directly on the research question, or presented, in the words of the criterion, “a new synthesis in the light of the discussion.”

#### Criterion I: formal presentation

The majority of essays did fairly well against this criterion. A minority of essays were deficient in one or more elements, such as missing page numbers, or vague tables of contents. The most common shortcomings concerned inappropriate and/or inconsistent citation styles, and poorly organized bibliographies. The IB does not prescribe a particular documentation style, but candidates are expected to be consistent in applying one. Regardless of the reference style adopted by the school, it is expected that the minimum information given include: name of author, date of publication, title of source and page numbers as applicable.

#### Criterion J: abstract

Almost all candidates provided an abstract. Many of these contained the three elements listed in the criterion. In less successful cases, the candidate presented concluding remarks and sometimes the research question, but did not outline the method of investigation.

#### Criterion K: holistic judgement

Many candidates showed a passion and depth of insight for the topics they studied. The extent to which this was well supported with academic research varied. If their topics were not appropriate to anthropology or their approaches were marred by subjective judgments – as happened in some cases - credits for this criterion remained in the lower end.

### Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

Overall, the essays demonstrated that there are many IB candidates who are capable of writing quality research papers. It is therefore of paramount importance that supervisors make sure that candidates are able to link their essays to the subject, so their efforts may be rewarded. Supervisors need to ensure that candidates are prepared to write an essay in the subject, selecting topics appropriate to the discipline, and using ethnography and anthropological concepts and theory as a part of the investigation and analysis. The most important task of the supervisor concerns guiding the candidate.

Finding the appropriate research question requires careful consideration. Sometimes, candidates are inclined to address personal concerns or interests in their essays. This could often lead to a strong commitment to the project on the candidate's part, but all too often it also leads to descriptive, uncritical, and non-anthropological exposition. Supervisors need to ensure that very early on in their research process candidates connect their substantive interests to appropriate analytical tools. Candidates whose choice of topic was appropriate to the subject, and are familiar with social and cultural anthropology as a discipline, tend to produce successful essays.

The supervisor has the responsibility to guide candidates through an understanding of the criteria which will be applied. Frequent reference to the assessment criteria by both the supervisor and the candidate will help keep a sharper focus on the project

The development of a proper anthropological argument in the extended essay requires the candidates to demonstrate understanding of the concepts they employ, hence, candidates should be frequently reminded that most anthropological terms and concepts are problematic in meaning, and require explicit definition.

Candidates should also be provided with guidance in terms of how to reference accurately and consistently and to recognize what constitutes proper academic sources; both in terms of printed and online sources. The internet is obviously a great convenience, but candidates too often lack the perspective to evaluate resources, which of course vary tremendously in quality.

Supervisor comments are usually very helpful in understanding the process by which the candidate has come to decide on the topic. These comments provide valuable insight into the process of study and development of a candidate through the course of the EE. This is particularly helpful when assessing criterion K.

It is important to ensure that candidates conducting fieldwork research are aware of the nature of ethical practice in the Diploma Programme.