

Assessment Criteria

Ok, read this very carefully: the grading criteria that the IB provides for your EE is undoubtedly the most important resource that you will use in completing your EE. The vast majority of students don't even know that such grading criteria exist. Don't be counted among them! Remember, although the method of assessment judges each student in relation to the criteria and not in relation to the work of other students, you are still in a way competing against the rest of the students writing an EE in your area, so you want to make sure you do positive things that they will probably forget to do. The most important of these is making sure your EE ticks all the boxes in the grading criteria, flawlessly.

The EE will be graded by examiners appointed by the IBO using a scale of a maximum of 36 points. This maximum score is made up of the total criterion levels available for each essay. Your EE will be scrutinized and the examiner will literally read each criterion, starting with level 0, until a level is reached that best describes the work being assessed.

As of the new EE regulations that came into place starting 2009, there is no distinction between 'general marks' and 'subject specific marks'. Now there is only the generic 'Assessment Criteria', however examiners are

still suggested to consult further advice on interpreting the assessment criteria within the guidelines of each subject in the 'Details – subject specific' section of the IB published guide on the EE.

Now I'm not exaggerating. Once you think you have come somewhere near the completion of your EE, sit down, EE in one hand, Assessment Criteria in the other. Start with the first descriptor and go through each section. Give yourself what you honestly think you deserve in each part. Now the IB is very picky about their assessment of EEs. They will have someone sit down with your essay and do exactly as you are doing. Here's another fact you probably didn't know: they are paid by the paper. What this means is that they will want to get through each paper as fast as they can – use this to your benefit and make your essay more accessible for the examiner to mark.

This means paying extra close attention to the exact wording in the assessment criteria. If it says "the approach used to answer the research question..." then you better make sure you have the words "research question" somewhere in the beginning of your essay, and when you begin to answer it, make sure you say "the approach I will be using to answer my research question is..." I know, it sounds ridiculous, but believe me, you will gain points for small things like that. If they ask for an abstract that "states

clearly the research question that was investigated, how the investigation was undertaken and the conclusion of the essay,” then you damn well make sure it does! In fact, the abstract is probably the easiest section to score full marks on. If you read the guidelines, you literally cannot go wrong.

Get this into your head right now: the IB is not going to read your EE and give you a grade depending on how “good” your essay is. Even if you write a world-changing piece on a mathematical breakthrough, you must tick all the appropriate boxes in the Assessment Criteria. Similarly, if you write a pretty crap essay in your subject but manage to fulfil most of the requirements in the Assessment Criteria, then you will be surprised at how many marks you can get for simply following the guidelines.

The highest descriptors are not reserved for flawless essays, and if you deserve the highest mark then you will obtain it. There is no arithmetic relationship between the descriptor numbers – a level 4 is not necessarily twice as good as a level 2 performance. Moreover, it is also important to understand that scoring high in one criterion will not necessarily mean you will receive similar marks in the other descriptors.

Here is a great tip I learned from my own EE coordinator to make sure you get full marks in stating your topic question. Look carefully at

the grading criterion part A, the research question. If you want full marks you need to make sure “the research question is clearly stated in the introduction and is sharply focused, making effective treatment possible within the word limit.” Although I can’t ensure that you fulfil the second part of that statement, with regards to the first part I have a great piece of advice for you. If you want your research question to stand out, why not make sure that in your introduction, you place your research question in a clearly bordered rectangular box, perhaps even shaded lightly. Use a bold font and place your question in quotations (see my EE if you still don’t know what I mean). This could easily get you a mark or two (which might not seem like a lot out of 36), but you need to understand that if you work in a similar manner throughout the whole Assessment Criteria – probing every sentence and word that the IB use - you can easily pick up a few points here and there for just minor adjustments.

Although there is no longer a ‘subject specific’ grading criterion, you should not ignore the idea that your EE is specific to your subject. The IB still publishes subject specific ‘details’ which examiners will read before marking your essay. Have a good look at these documents because often there will be examiner reports and comments on common pitfalls and highlights of essays written in your subject.

If something is lacking in clarity or if you don't think you have met the requirements, then go back and make changes. Keep doing this until you believe you can get at least 90% on your EE – chances are you will be getting an A or a B. Be realistic when you are doing this and get it into your head: the Assessment Criteria is the most important factor in deciding how successful your EE will be!

As I briefly mentioned before, try and make life easier for your examiner. You don't want to waste his/her time if he/she can't tell where your introduction finishes and your essay body begins. Similarly, if your conclusion is muddled together with your evaluation (if you have one), then it becomes more difficult to grade. Although not obligatory, I would strongly recommend having sections (chapters) in your essay – that way you can expand your contents page to be more detailed.

The most successful essays written every year are done by students who have kept the Assessment Criteria as a poster up on their bedroom wall. If you know what the examiner wants, you can provide it for him/her. They will be able to skim through it and give you a good mark if you tick all the boxes that they want ticked. Bottom line (and I'm sorry for repeating myself, but this is crucial to your success): treat the Assessment Criteria as the key to getting your A-grade essay.

