

Diploma Programme

Group 3

Geography

Guidelines for supervising extended essays 2009 and onwards

This document contains guidance for teachers who are supervising geography extended essays. It has been written using feedback from examiners, and should be used in conjunction with the *Extended Essay* guide (published 2007) for examinations starting in 2009 and onwards.

Specific recommendations to teachers

- Spend time helping the student to formulate a structured plan of approach.
- Familiarize the student with the assessment criteria.
- Ensure that the research question is geographical, tightly focused and will lead to an analytical approach.
- Focus the student on integrating geographical theory into the research topic.
- Ensure that the extended essay topic does not duplicate internal assessment work.
- Encourage the student to write a discursive essay and not another fieldwork report.
- If hypotheses are appropriate to the research question, ensure that the number is limited and that they are all testable with the data collected.
- Make sure that the research question is clearly stated in the introduction.
- Ensure that the introduction does not contain statements that would be better placed in the conclusion.
- Check that the abstract contains all of the necessary elements (research question, scope and conclusion(s)).
- Ensure that any primary data has been collected by the student independently and not by groups during a fieldwork session.
- Advise students on the construction of questionnaires (where appropriate) to include only questions relevant to the investigation.
- Make students aware of different types of sampling methods (where appropriate) and when to use them.
- Encourage the student to use hand-drawn maps specific to the topic and not
- Internet downloads that demonstrate no geographical skill.
- Computer drawn maps constructed by the student are to be encouraged.
- Do not allow the inclusion of poor-quality graphic downloads from the Internet.
- Ensure that photographs are relevant, captioned, annotated or labelled, are placed at appropriate points in the essay and are referred to in the text.
- Advise the student on the selection of appropriate graphing techniques.
- Encourage the use of statistical methods and encourage students to carefully check their calculations for flaws.
- Encourage the use of significance tests to check the validity of statistical results
- Ensure that all illustrative materials are placed at relevant points in the body of the essay and not in the appendices or grouped at the end of the essay.
- Do not supervise a large number of essays.
- Conduct a viva voce with the student as an opportunity to reflect on the learning process and if necessary check the authenticity of the work
- Complete the comments section of the yellow extended essay cover, with special reference to criterion K (holistic judgment), which can be supplemented by information gained in the viva voce.
- Stress the importance of the word limits for the abstract and the essay

Requirements for a geography extended essay

The *Geography* guide (published 2009) state on page 14 that “almost all areas of the syllabus lend themselves to deeper analysis and investigation in an extended essay”.

A geography extended essay requires:

- a research question that is not too broad to be satisfactorily answered within the word limit
- a narrow area of research in depth
- a spatial component*
- a local scale
- data collected in the field is not required for extended essays, the research questions can be more broadly based than those used for fieldwork and can rely on information derived from sources other than direct fieldwork.

Secondary data

An extended essay that relies on secondary (published) data only is acceptable, but there must be a degree of originality in how the data is analysed that must go beyond simply referring to or describing the secondary data and should include the candidate’s own ideas and show initiative.

Fieldwork

An essay that analyses secondary material in an innovative way is equally valid to one based on fieldwork and is often better. If students base their extended essay on fieldwork they run the risk of producing long fieldwork reports as opposed to discursive essays which become self penalizing and as a result may not achieve high marks.

**Note: a temporal element is acceptable where, for example, the topic involves changes in climate over a stated period.*

Approaching the essay in relation to the criteria

The *Extended Essay* guide (2007) is essential reading.

All subjects are assessed using the same criteria but they are applied specifically to geography as follows.

Criterion A – research question

Make sure the research question is geographical and allows for an investigative approach. Make sure the research question is clearly stated (bold type), preferably at the start of the introduction and is not over-complex. Make sure the research question can be answered with currently available data/information and does not focus entirely on speculation about what might happen in the future. Keep the area of study small and the topic tightly focused.

Criterion B – introduction

In geography essays the introduction should place the research question clearly in its academic and locational context. Maps are therefore essential at this point. The introduction is a good place to outline the aims of the study and to introduce hypotheses if relevant. State clearly why the topic is of geographical significance and include only relevant geographical theory. Do not answer the research question in the introduction.

Criterion C – investigation

Plan the investigation carefully. Make sure that there is enough information/data, especially with regard to the number of respondents in a questionnaire. Show evidence of raw data collection where relevant. Select only relevant information. Make sure the essay is not based on only one secondary source such as a published report or a text. Make sure the data allows for depth of analysis. Appropriate data may be quantitative or qualitative.

Criterion D – knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

Testing geographical theories in the real world forms the basis of a good geography essay, demonstrates a good understanding of the topic and provides an excellent academic context for the investigation. Outline relevant theory or theories clearly and succinctly making sure that theoretical explanations are not over long.

Criterion E – reasoned argument

The data should be used to present evidence that answers the research question and/or helps to support or reject hypotheses. A descriptive/narrative approach must therefore be avoided. In the instance of an issue or problem approach, the argument should be balanced and avoid bias. It is important that statements are backed up with evidence and are not just opinion. The reader must be convinced of the validity of the findings.

Criterion F – application of analytical and evaluative skills appropriate to the subject

Analytical skills might include the use of maps, diagrams, photographs, charts, tables, and statistical methods. Place these at appropriate points in the text and not at the end of the essay. Make sure all such material is referred to/explained in the text. Avoid the sole use of overly simple analytical methods, such as % pie charts. These alone show lack of depth of analysis. Wherever statistical methods are used, check the significance of the results. Show awareness of the value and validity of the information and the limitations of the methods used to analyse it.

Criterion G – use of language appropriate to the subject

The geographical terminology should be used accurately throughout the essay and remain appropriate to the topic so that ideas can be communicated clearly and with precision.

Criterion H – conclusion

The concluding statements should be consistent with the evidence presented in the essay. Where relevant hypotheses should be accepted or rejected with reasons given. Hypotheses may be modified and new avenues of investigation suggested. Unresolved questions that have come to light should be stated. This is an appropriate place to evaluate the information and the methodology. Emotive statements should be avoided. No new information should be introduced.

Criterion I – formal presentation

Make sure the essay has a title page, a contents page, a bibliography that is consistently laid out and numbered pages. All sources must be referenced including downloaded graphics from the Internet and published data. Make sure graphical material appears at relevant points in the essay and not in the appendices. Large tables should be placed in an appendix and referred to in the text. The essay should avoid adopting the format of a fieldwork report, with more emphasis on developing an argument appropriate to the research question.

Criterion J – abstract

The abstract should not be an introduction to the topic but a brief summary of the essay. The research question must be stated. The scope should include the types of data collected and the methods used to analyze it. The findings should be summarized to reflect the conclusion of the essay.

Criterion K – holistic judgement

Intellectual initiative is judged on the candidate's ability to formulate a challenging research question and to use inventive analytical methods to produce an essay that shows originality. Depth of understanding and insight are shown by the ability to reflect, overcome problems and modify ideas. The supervisor's comment is an important element in assessing these qualities and should never be omitted.

Selecting titles

The following are given as suggestions of good titles

A study of vandalism and distance decay: to what extent can graffiti and vandalism be correlated to crime rates with distance from a CBD?

To what extent do selected eco-lodges in Ethiopia fulfill Martha Honey's criteria for eco-tourism?

What effect has Globalization had on music genres in selected areas of an MEDC and LEDC?

The relationship between literacy/income and child labour in India. Do patterns of literacy relate to levels of absolute poverty in selected Indian states/regions?

Does air quality, along a 10 km transect from one of London's busiest roundabouts, improve with distance?

What effects have congestion charges levied on traffic entering central London had on traffic levels?

To what extent does the level of arsenic poisoning decrease with distance from selected river channels and irrigated areas in Bangladesh?

Does female reproductive health decline between Addis Ababa (urban) and Harar (rural), in Ethiopia?

Do selected rural villages in Kenya exhibit land use (farming) patterns which reflect Von Thunen's model of land use?

How does Lake Vatten influence the local temperature (micro-climate) during the autumn?

What is the ecological value of Menagesha state forest and to what extent is it managed sustainably?

Does the juxtaposition of low and high class socio-economic areas change with altitude and distance from the CBD in an LEDC?

Does the quality of the entertainment industry (bar and club culture) change in response to the urban social area in Addis Ababa?

To what extent does the incidence of female infanticide increase with distance from major urban areas?

The following are given as examples of poor or inappropriate title, with a brief explanation

What are the social and economic implications of NAFTA on the US, Canada and Mexico? *Too broad – socioeconomic emphasis*

What are the causes and consequences of ENSO? *Too broad - descriptive*

To what extent does Global warming affect the Earth? *Too broad – very difficult to answer*

The impact of Globalization on the retailing of honey. Hypothesis - "The clearness and cost of honey will not affect the price." *Non-geographical hypothesis*

Does the warm current passing along the coast of Virginia and the Netherlands affect the climate of these two areas in a similar fashion? *Inaccurate*

What are the perceived threats and potential consequences of a Mega-Tsunami? *Hypothetical*

A study of cardiovascular disease. *No spatial element*

What was the influence of the Pacific Ocean on the Second World War? *Non-geographical*

To what extent was the Nile more important several thousand years ago? *Impossible to assess accurately – historical emphasis*

Do we still live in a patriarchal society? *Anthropology*

How does the American way of life affect teenagers in Munich? *Sociology*

What evidence is there to support the existence of Pangaea and the possibility of its reformation in years to come as “Pangaea Ultima” and what effect will this gradual movement of the plates have on the inhabitants of the Earth? What is in store for our planet in the future? *To many questions - hypothetical*

Before you have finished your breakfast this morning you will have relied on half the World. Do my eating habits have an impact on the LEDW? How can I change them? What does it cost to change? How does this affect my family? *Too many questions – most lack geographical emphasis*