THE EXTENDED ESSAY · FIRST ASSESSMENT MAY 2027

The EE rubric, decoded.

The new five-criterion markscheme, plus the exact checklist that hits the top band. **Keep it open while you write your 4,000 words.**

WHAT'S MARKED	Five criteria

A	Framework for the essay	6	B	Knowledge and understanding	6
C	Analysis and line of argument	6	D	Discussion and evaluation	8
E	Reflection	4			

30 marks total graded **A–E** up to **3** diploma points, with TOK

New model, first assessment **May 2027** (sitting before then? the old 34-mark rubric with a separate Presentation criterion still applies). Presentation is gone, folded into Criterion A. Criterion D is now the highest-weighted at **8** marks, and Criterion E is a single 500-word reflective statement written after your viva voce. Descriptors here are summarised, always check the official subject-specific guidance.

A Framework for the essay

6 marks

Assesses your research question, your research methods, and the structural conventions of the essay, the foundation everything is built on. Presentation now lives here.

MARKS	DESCRIPTOR
0	The work does not reach a standard described by the descriptors below.
1–2	The RQ, methods and structure provide a limited framework. The RQ is stated but unclear or too broad; methods are barely explained; structural conventions are largely missing.
3–4	The RQ, methods and structure provide an adequate framework. The RQ is focused but methods are only partly justified; most structural conventions are present.
5–6	**The RQ, methods and structure provide an effective framework. The RQ is clear and focused, methods are well justified, and structural conventions are complete and correct.** FULL MARKS

HOW TO HIT THE TOP BAND

- [ ] State your RQ as an actual **question**, focused enough to answer fully within 4,000 words.
- [ ] Justify your research **methods** and why your sources meet the academic standard for the subject.
- [ ] Follow the structural conventions for your subject: title page, contents, page numbers, section headings.
- [ ] Apply one referencing system correctly and consistently; number and label every figure and table.
- [ ] Keep appendices relevant and minimal, examiners aren't required to read them.
- [ ] Refer back to your RQ throughout, not just in the intro and conclusion.

B Knowledge and understanding

6 marks

Assesses how well your research sits within its subject, and how clearly you show understanding through subject-specific terminology and concepts.

MARKS	DESCRIPTOR
0	The work does not reach a standard described by the descriptors below.
1–2	Knowledge and understanding is limited; source material has limited relevance, and use of terminology and concepts is unclear and limited.
3–4	Knowledge and understanding is good; source material is mostly relevant, and use of terminology and concepts is adequate.
5–6	**Knowledge and understanding is excellent; sources are clearly relevant and used effectively, with accurate and consistent terminology.** FULL MARKS

HOW TO HIT THE TOP BAND

- [ ] Situate your RQ clearly within its subject or discipline.
- [ ] Choose sources that are clearly relevant and appropriate to the RQ.
- [ ] If your range is naturally narrow, justify why.
- [ ] Use subject-specific terminology and concepts accurately and consistently.
- [ ] Show a genuine range of sources, not just one type such as websites.
- [ ] **Apply** your sources to build understanding, don't just describe them.

C Analysis and line of argument

6 marks

Assesses how well you analyse your research and build it into one clear, coherent line of argument that runs through the essay and answers your research question.

MARKS	DESCRIPTOR
0	The work does not reach a standard described by the descriptors below.
1–2	Limited. Research is barely relevant, analysis is thin or descriptive, and the line of argument is unclear or narrative.
3–4	Adequate. Most research is relevant and analysed, but some irrelevant material remains and the argument has gaps or inconsistencies.
5–6	**Excellent. Research is consistently relevant, analysis is focused and effective, and a clear, coherent line of argument leads logically to the conclusion.** FULL MARKS

HOW TO HIT THE TOP BAND

- [ ] Build **one** clear line of argument that runs through the whole essay and answers the RQ.
- [ ] Keep every paragraph relevant, cut material that doesn't serve the argument.
- [ ] Make sure each step of the argument is supported by the evidence you've analysed.
- [ ] Analyse, don't just describe: explain what each finding means for your RQ.
- [ ] Make the structure logical so the reader is led steadily from RQ to conclusion.
- [ ] Save the critical weighing of that evidence for Criterion D, here, focus on building the case.

D Discussion and evaluation — 8 marks

The highest-weighted criterion. Assesses how critically you discuss your findings, evaluate your sources, methods and limitations, and weigh what your evidence actually shows.

MARKS	DESCRIPTOR
0	The work does not reach a standard described by the descriptors below.
1–2	Limited. Little real discussion; findings are reported but not evaluated, and limitations are ignored.
3–4	Adequate. Some discussion and evaluation, but it stays general; limitations are mentioned rather than weighed.
5–6	Good. A mostly critical discussion that evaluates sources and methods and addresses the RQ, with limitations considered.
7–8	**Excellent. A consistently critical discussion that evaluates sources, methods and limitations, weighs the strength of the evidence, and considers wider implications.** FULL MARKS

HOW TO HIT THE TOP BAND

- [ ] Critically **evaluate** your sources and methods: reliability, limitations, possible error.
- [ ] Weigh what the evidence actually shows, including where it falls short.
- [ ] Discuss unexpected or inconvenient findings rather than ignoring them.
- [ ] Make sure your final conclusion reflects the evidence and the discussion.

E Reflection — 4 marks

Assesses a single 500-word reflective statement, written after your final viva voce. It's marked on growth, how you developed as a learner and thinker, not on what you did.

MARKS	DESCRIPTOR
0	The work does not reach a standard described by the descriptors below.
1–2	Reflection is mostly descriptive. It recounts what happened with limited evaluation of your learning or growth.
3–4	**Reflection evaluates your learning experience with specific examples, showing genuine growth, transferable skills, and how your thinking and decisions changed.** FULL MARKS

HOW TO HIT THE TOP BAND

- [ ] **Evaluate** your learning, don't just describe what you did.
- [ ] Use specific examples of decisions, setbacks and how you adapted.
- [ ] Show transferable skills you can carry into future work.
- [ ] Explain how your thinking or perspective actually changed.

Before you submit

The marks you lose most easily on the EE aren't about brilliance, they're about following the rules.

✓ THE NON-NEGOTIABLES

Stay under the hard **4,000-word** limit, examiners stop reading there, and anything beyond it is treated as if it weren't written, across every criterion. Reference every source in one consistent system; missing references can be flagged as academic misconduct. Hold your **three reflection sessions** with your supervisor, then write a single **500-word reflective statement** after your viva voce, it's all of Criterion E. Remember the EE is now marked out of **30**, graded **A–E**, and combines with TOK for up to **3 points** toward your diploma.

THE FIVE-MINUTE FINAL CHECK

- [ ] RQ stated as a question on the title page and in the intro.
- [ ] Argument links back to the RQ in every section.
- [ ] Table of contents page numbers match the text.
- [ ] Bibliography contains only sources actually cited.
- [ ] Figures and tables numbered and labelled.
- [ ] Word count under 4,000; appendices trimmed.

GO DEEPER WITH US

This is how we break down every IA, EE and exam paper.

iBOrbit is a community run by recent IB graduates. We take the official criteria and turn them into checklists like this one, across every subject, so you always know exactly what the examiner is counting. No hype, no secret hacks.

→ Join the community

LINK iborbit.com