

June 2014 General Report

Humanities

General Comments

It is important to note that the new version of the *MYP Individuals and societies guide*, published in May 2014, should be used next year. This guide will come into use from September 2014 (for northern hemisphere schools) or in January 2015 (for those in the southern hemisphere). The following report, however, is based on the previous version of the *MYP humanities guide*, published in 2012.

This year, 169 schools from the three IB regions sent us 194 humanities samples from the MYP. In addition to samples for history, geography and humanities, seven samples were received for business studies, seven for economics and one for philosophy.

The number of schools that submitted samples electronically, either through the Basecamp portal or through their own online system, has continued to increase compared to last year.

The 2012 assessment criteria for humanities were used for the second time during this session. Generally, schools have implemented the adjustments that were proposed following the first year's use of the new criteria. The tasks submitted are much clearer, and better correspond to all the specific objectives. Overall, the teachers are well acquainted with the assessment criteria, as this report will show. Most schools included the five student project covers required, in accordance with the required achievement levels (three pieces of work demonstrating average results, one piece of a comparatively high standard and one of a comparatively weak standard). Very few schools made use of the pre-2012 guide.

All aspects of each criterion should be assessed at least once. This year, again, we did have to remind some schools to include sufficiently varied work to allow for this. It should also be noted that some schools do not clearly identify which criteria are assessed through the tasks.

A relatively small number of cases of plagiarism were identified. Nevertheless, many schools still need to be reminded that teachers are required to authenticate each piece of work submitted for the purposes of moderation. It might be beneficial to establish clear school guidelines linked to the use of references, or at least for schools to submit, together with the sample, details of the approach favoured. The purpose of this is to give the moderation team a better understanding of the rules that apply in different school contexts regarding academic honesty policies.

Practically all samples included a copy of the moderation report from the previous year. Several schools submitted evidence of the application of recommendations set out in that report. However, some schools had not addressed the points in the previous report that required further attention. These schools must be reminded that the achievement levels of their future students risk being lowered if they do not take these points into consideration.

Comments concerning the choice of tasks for assessment and background information

Generally speaking the samples submitted were well organized. We were able to find the requested documents and background information, even though the information did not always correspond to the unit plans included in the sample. The curricula should be framed as a central feature of the appropriate MYP unit plans in order to allow the moderation team to visualize the background information and the topic studied at the time when the students carry out the task. Schools should ensure that the unit plans cover all

tasks included in the sampling exercise. All too often, the unit plans do not include the same aspects as those covered by the tasks.

We applaud teachers who have successfully adapted and clarified the criteria in accordance with the specific context of each task. We have also noticed clear improvements in the communication with students, especially when it comes to the requirements that must be met to obtain the highest level of achievement for each piece of work. Some schools however showed only limited awareness of the new guide. This year, once again, some samples contained previous tasks that had been only minimally adapted for moderation.

Accuracy of the moderation process depends in part on the amount of detail provided by schools concerning the conditions in which the work was completed. This information would include the amount of input provided by teachers, the number of in-class hours devoted to the task and/or hours spent working at home, and the range of documents used. Only a few schools failed to provide this information. The documents submitted often do not specify the amount of time allowed for a task or the duration of a class period (in minutes).

In most cases, the assessed pieces of work included the following essential information: the mark schemes, examples of answers and the time allowed for the task. An overall improvement was noted when it came to the quality and variety of the material assessed. Most assessments made it possible for students to gain the highest achievement levels for the criteria selected. Criterion B strands including the research question and unit plan, do however seem to present difficulties. Some aspects of criterion C also require attention, especially concerning the assessment of a broad range of sources.

The written report was generally limited to between 700 and 1,500 words, as appropriate. However, just like in previous years, a small number of schools used a higher word limit or did not set one. Others set word limits which were too restrictive to allow the students to develop their knowledge, understanding, and critical thinking. In both cases it is possible that students were penalized.

Many varied and stimulating tasks were submitted. Most of them were appropriate and fully met the requirements and guidelines for moderation. Cases of having to lower the achievement levels due to tasks not being in-depth enough to allow students to reach the highest levels of achievement for the criteria selected were rarer. It is important to ensure that the tasks allow students to develop their answers well. This year, lowered levels were linked rather more to the fact that not all strands of the specific objectives had been addressed for the two or three sample folders submitted for moderation.

Schools avoided the inclusion of group work in the samples submitted for moderation, as it is very difficult to determine the specific contribution of each student for moderation. Nevertheless, some schools did still submit group work, and the moderation team struggled to identify the individual contributions of each student, which often resulted in lowered levels for the students concerned.

Comments on the use of assessment criteria

Most schools applied the criteria correctly during this second year of using the new guide for humanities.

Criterion A (knowing and understanding) was adequately assessed. Short pieces of work are the main weak point because in some cases the word count for the task was too restrictive and did not afford students the possibility of developing their knowledge and understanding sufficiently. Finally, it is preferable to always assess the two specific objectives of criterion A in one task.

Assessment of criterion B (investigating) presented a greater difficulty, although some schools applied the requirements of this criterion very effectively. In many cases, last year's recommendations linked to the research question explored by the students and the implementation of the action plan were taken on board and we noted a clear improvement. However, in many cases the question and the research plans were rather more implied than explicitly stated.

In the absence of a clear research question and a clear action plan, the achievement levels for this criterion were lowered considerably. Regarding the recording methods linked to the third strand, several schools submitted only one approach, which is not in accordance with what is set out in the guide. Moreover, in several cases some schools were moderated only on the specific objective strand "addressing the research question" as the piece of work did not allow for a thorough assessment of the other strands linked to this criterion.

Criterion C (thinking critically) had been correctly applied most of the time and the framework for it favoured critical analysis as well as a summary of arguments and evaluation of a high quality. Evaluating a broad range of sources sometimes presents difficulties, as occasionally we find only a basic grading of sources, without them having been evaluated according to their value and limitations.

For criterion D (communication) a large number of samples were submitted of work structured in accordance with the target audience and the objective concerned. Once again we noted overall improvements in the source referencing system. Different recognized systems were used in a consistent manner and teachers correctly penalized errors in referencing of sources. However, tasks should include clearer instructions from teachers on the use of the chosen recognized convention for citing sources, with references in the text and the inclusion of a bibliography.

Tests were generally assessed in accordance with criteria A and C, the most suitable criteria for this purpose.

Nearly all schools published the two judgments required for each criterion, or eight achievement levels in total. They were distributed between two or three tasks. Few schools included any more than that.

The most problematic point was the application of all strands of the criteria. A relatively significant number of schools did not meet the requirement to apply each strand at least once to the sample as a whole. Inversely, many schools attempted to apply all strands to each task. These two scenarios can lead the moderation team to lower the achievement levels.

Like last year, schools are increasingly making use of electronic tools to verify cases of plagiarism, which was therefore a very rare occurrence among the samples. However, compulsory authentication by teachers was found to be missing for many pieces of work.

This year, the criteria were correctly applied overall, and significant changes in the achievement levels of students were only observed in a limited number of the samples. This is the case particularly for schools that have been submitting samples for moderation for several years. Most of them included suitable and original tasks, appropriate for the criteria and with due consideration for recommendations provide in previous reports - for which we commend the teachers.

Organization of samples provided for moderation

The quality of samples continues to be high overall during this second year of the 2012 criteria. The general organization, the inclusion of the cover-page forms, the assessment of a large number of the judgments and the background information supplied were, generally speaking, relevant and accurate. Some teachers made suitable use of the back of the cover pages to include specific information about certain students. Schools are encouraged to continue to do this in future. We also remind schools that more general information about the sample, the tasks and the students should be included in the background information folder. It is worth highlighting that some schools have not submitted unit planners together with the tasks or that some units did not contain the same information as the tasks linked to them.

The samples submitted electronically were well organized overall and easily navigated. Scanned pieces of work sometimes left something to be desired, particularly when it came to the quality of the copies of documents.

Possible improvements

This general report has identified the following possible improvements:

- Continue efforts in all areas where strengths have been identified in this report, especially concerning the organization of samples and application of criteria A and C.
- Ensure that the pieces of work assessed for criterion B (investigating) do contain a research question and a detailed, clear and precise action plan for carrying out the research; additionally, ensure that more than one method for recording information is submitted for assessment of this criterion.
- Ensure that all strands of each criterion are applied appropriately in at least one instance among all the samples.
- Bear in mind that applying each strand to each task is not advisable, as it risks penalizing students.
- Do everything to guarantee that the recommendations contained in individual reports to schools are applied when preparing the sample, with a view to moderation for the coming year.
- Contribute to the broader efforts to submit tasks electronically.
- Ensure that pieces of work and tests are developed in a way that allows students to achieve the highest levels for the criteria specified, that they contain stimulating questions that allow room for in-depth answers, that the work set is of an appropriate length and that enough time is allocated to complete it.
- Include clear instructions on referencing and citation of sources, linked to criterion D, in the information on the background information or on instruction sheets.
- Continue to provide varied and interesting tasks.
- Ensure that the subject-specific report and this general report are made available to all humanities teachers at the school.

Once again we congratulate schools and teachers for the ongoing general improvements which we have noted in this year's samples, and for having adapted to the realities and requirements of the new criteria. We hope that this report and the individual school reports will help teachers to put together accurate and suitable samples of work bearing in mind the moderation process, and that the advice provided here will prove useful for all humanities subjects taught at the schools.

Schools are reminded to use the new Individuals and societies guide (For use from September 2014/January 2015). Any copies of the pre-published guide should be replaced by the final publications (May 2014 on the OCC).

Note: for moderation in 2015, only **one** judgment per criterion will be required. Please consult the eAssessment Development Report and the *Handbook of Procedures for the Middle Years Programme: Moderation and monitoring of assessment (2015)* in the MYP coordinators section on the OCC.