

CAMBRIDGE INTERNATIONAL PROJECT QUALIFICATION

Paper 9980/01 Project
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Key messages

In this series, Cambridge IPQ candidates explored a fascinating range of research topics and most demonstrated real enthusiasm in the production of their report. The Cambridge IPQ allows candidates to explore their chosen topic in depth, alongside developing independent research and writing skills which are useful in higher education or the world of work. This series, many candidates had clearly been working on their project over a period of time but others appeared to have completed their project quickly and without a thorough understanding of the assessment criteria.

General comments

Successful projects are the product of good planning and preparation, so accessing the support materials on the School Support Hub is beneficial. The Assessment Objectives are set out in the syllabus and the mark scheme and show clearly what candidates need to do to meet the full range of the assessment criteria; not doing so makes it hard for the candidate to access the higher levels of the mark scheme.

The Cambridge IPQ is a candidate led qualification and so the role of the centre coordinator, a teacher of skills and the supervisor is that of support. There is material which explains and illustrates these roles in the syllabus, the Teacher Guide and the Learner Guide. Another helpful resource is the Example Candidate Responses document; time spent becoming familiar with these resources gives candidates the best chance of success.

A critical first step is the candidate's choice of project title as this sets their direction of travel. The title should be linked to the assessment criteria so that a candidate is exploring their chosen topic from a perspective which will allow them to access the full range of the criteria and reach the higher levels.

Each candidate should submit three separate files – a report, a log and a bibliography – in Microsoft Word (.docx) format. This series, some centres submitted an additional video file of the candidate talking about their project – such files gain no credit. The report has a limit of 5000 words and text much beyond that will not be credited. There is no need for an acknowledgements section, suggestions for further research by others or appendices relating to other documents such as interview transcripts. The log should be a record of the research process and must not be used to include material for which there is no space in the report; any such material gains no credit.

Comments on specific assessment objectives

AO1 Research

In this series most reports began with a title page; this should always be the case and should include a word count. A table of contents is useful as evidence of design and planning, as well as helping an assessor understand the flow of a report. The best projects use a question which leads to more than a purely affirmative or negative answer so as to give the report an analytical and evaluative focus. Project titles in the form of a statement tend to contain extensive and largely descriptive material, and so some assessment criteria are not accessed. An introduction or an abstract can be helpful; it gives a direction to what follows and provides an opportunity for the candidate to explain their choice and to demonstrate their enthusiasm.

The research question is the guide for the material the candidate includes in their report, and linked to this is their choice of research methods and justifications for their choice. These might include the availability of research, the candidate's skills or practical issues such as limitations linked to resources and facilities. Explaining why the candidate has chosen a particular research method or methods for their research question, even if it seems obvious, is important in accessing the higher assessment levels. Only methods useful for the research question should be used; there is no need to include primary research methods if these are not an appropriate way to answer the research question.

Projects should demonstrate good planning and design; helpful evidence can include a table of contents, relevant subheadings, details about experiments conducted or how a questionnaire was set up. Planning and design can also be demonstrated in the log, which should chart a timeline for the project and evidence its development by explaining how a candidate used particular sources in its evolution. This series, some logs spent a lot of time on the very early stages of the project process; the submitted log should focus only on what happens once the research question or project title has been settled. A simple list of dates and the activity undertaken will struggle to reach the higher levels of the assessment criteria; this is also the case for a list of sources – connection to the development of the project is needed to gain credit. Evaluation of sources, strengths and weaknesses of the project or reflections of the candidate are only credited in the report.

AO1 Analysis

Successful projects demonstrate excellent analysis of the secondary sources used, and the findings from primary research if this is undertaken. This can best be done by the candidate explaining in their own words the key findings of a source or sources and making connections or explaining differences between them. Clear analysis which links back to the research question regularly can help a candidate maintain focus. Paragraphs and subheadings are a useful way for the candidate to consolidate analysis into clear, supported and cogent conclusions based on research evidence. This can be done throughout the report or in a conclusions section; some form of systematic approach helps a candidate reach an overall answer to their research question which is, clear, logical and reflective of their evidence. Projects which include source information without any real attempt at analysis or the building of an argument struggle to access the higher assessment levels.

In the report it is important to be clear which words are from sources and which are those of the candidate; this was not always the case in this series. Source material should be acknowledged by the use of quotation marks or by citation and reference. It must be evident to the assessor when the candidate's own analysis and conclusions are being expressed rather than those replicated from the sources; if this distinction is not clear the candidate cannot gain credit.

The candidate can answer their research question at several different points in the report; it may be in the introduction and then they demonstrate how they can justify this, it may appear at different points in the report or there may a final summation section. In essence, the reaching of a clear answer reflective of the candidate's research is more important than where it is found.

AO1 Evaluation

It is important for the candidate to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their research method or methods; this can be done by exploring gaps in data or pointing out advantages or shortcomings of their chosen method or methods. In this series some reports contained extensive generic comments on selected research methods; to gain credit such remarks need to link to the particular strengths and limitations of the candidate's project.

Just as vital is evaluation of the sources used; this may be by comparing and contrasting different views, commenting on the legitimacy of the source or its author, or discussing strengths and limitations of arguments seen in the sources. In this series a good number of reports contained no evaluation of sources at all or it was found in the log – where it gains no credit. Other reports made very basic comments such as the expert status of the writer and without more detail it limits the candidate's opportunity to move up the assessment levels.

AO2 Reflection

A successful report might include a section headed 'Reflection', but points of reflection can also occur throughout and this is a key area in which centres and candidates need to use the guidance material referred to earlier so as to understand what reflection means in the Cambridge IPQ.

The first aspect is a candidate's reflection on the strengths and limitations of their project; this is broader than the methods they used and could be linked to the availability or quality of their evidence, what went well or not in their research and data collection, as well as specific issues relating perhaps the availability of secondary research or problems with primary research methods.

The second, and equally important, aspect is the candidate's reflection on their project journey with a focus on how their views about their topic have been reinforced, modified or changed completely due to their research. There is no need to comment on what a candidate has learnt about research skills or completing a project as these do not attract credit. A good number of candidates only reflected on the project process and thus gained no credit; some produced basic comments indicating that their views had changed but there were also encouraging examples of candidates reflecting clearly and in detail on their views at the start and the end of the project, showing clearly the impact of their research evidence.

AO3 Communication

Most candidates used subject-specific terminology accurately. However the level of vocabulary can also expose a difference in linguistic skills between material taken from sources and the candidate's own words, suggesting that more sophisticated language is not the candidate's own. This is often not acknowledged by appropriate punctuation or citation and referencing and candidates are reminded that their work should be their own, without the influence of outside assistance and this includes the use of AI when constructing a report.

Many reports used appropriate methods to clearly demonstrate the results they had drawn from research material, experiments or surveys; this might be in the form of tables, graphs or charts. To gain credit the candidate needs to use this material to develop their argument rather than simply stating in a different format what their research shows.

The last aspect of this assessment criteria is the bibliography, which should be a MS Word document in a consistent and appropriate format; this would normally include the title and author, the source and date of publication, a working link for internet sources and the date the material was accessed. A good number of reports were inconsistent in referencing and citation; it was often the case that material in the report could not be found in the bibliography, or vice versa, rendering it incomplete. Some bibliographies were very brief, some were mixed in the level of citation given or provided links that did not work and some gave little or no information to help find the source. Sources of a popular nature can provide helpful context but are insufficient on their own to allow a candidate to build an argument likely to reach the higher assessment levels. The bibliography is an important element of a successful project; it deserves as careful attention as the report and the log and in many instances in this session this was not the case.