

CAMBRIDGE INTERNATIONAL PROJECT QUALIFICATION

Paper 9980/01
Project

General comments

Planning and preparation are key to a successful project, and a productive working relationship between the candidate, their supervisor and the centre coordinator is important. It is also important that candidates develop research skills which are appropriate for a project at this level; these will prepare them for experiences they will meet in higher education or in the world of work. Many candidates, supported by their centres, were able to demonstrate impressive skills in research and project planning.

Centres are to be commended for the way in which they have managed the submission of the material necessary for projects to be assessed; this must be in Microsoft Word (.docx) format. The key documents are the report, the log and the bibliography. The report has a limit of 5000 words, which must be adhered to as any text beyond 5000 words will not be included in the assessment. The bibliography is best submitted as a separate Word file; the same applies to other information the candidate wants to include, although the latter is for information only and is not assessed. The research log is important as it supports the research process and helps demonstrate planning and organisation. In the most successful projects, the log was used purposefully, for example, to record ideas, actions required, evaluative comments and reflections which were later written up in the report. In less successful projects, the research log was simply a record of what happened at particular times.

Comments on specific assessment objectives

AO1 Research

The best projects used a question rather than a statement as the basis for their report. Once the question had been stated it was then thoughtfully justified, this might have been by exploring why the candidate was interested in their topic or their personal connection to the focus of their research. Some projects used a statement as their title which often led to a narrative or descriptive account that did not address the full range of assessment criteria. In addition, some projects provided little or no context as to why the candidate had selected their research topic. In the most successful projects, the question had clearly guided the candidate's research and the material in their report. Research lies at the heart of success in this qualification and the best projects explained clearly why they had selected their particular research methods and also justified their choice; this might be linked to the kind of research available on their chosen topic, the skills the individual candidate possessed, the opportunity to explore a particular issue as a precursor to further study at undergraduate level, or specific issues such as the impact of the pandemic. Some projects used appropriate research methods but needed to include explanation or justification for their decision to access the higher mark levels. The most successful reports also had a clear sense of design and planning, from the conception of the idea, through the planning and research processes and up to the completion of their report. This was often evidenced by a focused contents page at the start of the project which guided the reader through the report in a structured and appropriate way with subheadings or rhetorical questions as staging posts. In successful reports, the research log was a key supporting document which provided a timeline of the project's evolution. Successful research logs provided evidence of the planning and also included evaluative comments relating to the research conducted or sources read which impacted on the project's overall development. Less successful research logs were simply a list of dates and what was done, without including evidence of how this had an impact on the evolution of the project. Some logs were very brief, suggesting that the development of the project had not been recorded as it progressed.

AO1 Analysis

The best projects demonstrated excellent analysis of the sources they had used and of any findings they made during the research. This was often done by explaining what the sources or findings showed and drawing out connections or differences between them. The analysis in the best projects was focused on the research question consistently through the report. A way to make good use of this analysis was as the basis for conclusions and in the best projects this was often a device used to consolidate evidence and findings which had been analysed to build an argument in an incremental way. Such conclusions then supported an overall clear answer to the question which had been reached logically and reflectively on the evidence presented and analysed. Projects which did not score so highly often included information from different sources but there was little or no attempt to draw analysis from them or use them in a summative way to reach an overall conclusion. In some projects, sources were dealt with in a way which made it difficult to distinguish the words of the author and the summation by the candidate; for high level analysis this distinction needs to be made clear by good and clear referencing. Some sources were used in isolation which made it less easy to see the development of an argument building towards an overall answer to the research question. This impacted on the level and relevance of the analysis as well as the project's development and planning.

AO1 Evaluation

The best projects contained a high level of evaluation of strengths and weaknesses of the research methods they had used. This took a variety of forms, such as explaining gaps in data or unexpected difficulties experienced in administering a research method, such as not being able to access appropriate sources or struggling to get responses to a survey due to the pandemic, through to explaining the features of the research methods used which made them particularly suited to the type of data the candidate collected. The sources used were also evaluated, often by explaining why the author was a credible source or by discussing strengths and limitations of the argument the author had developed in the source. Less successful reports often omitted any detail on the strengths and weaknesses of the research methods or sources used. Some projects dealt with only strengths or weaknesses, with a tendency to focus on what had not gone well. Some projects contained some evaluation of methods or sources, but it was superficial and lacking in detail and depth; others did not engage with this aspect at all.

AO2 Reflection

The best reports often included a section headed 'Reflection' although in some reports excellent reflection was weaved throughout the body of the report. Successful reports reflected firstly on the overall strengths and limitations of their project, perhaps by exploring the range of evidence available, as well as the successes or challenges thrown up by aspects of the project process. Successful reports also reflected on the impact their project had on them as a direct consequence of the research they had conducted in terms of the extent to which it had reinforced or changed views and ideas they had held at the start of the project. Less successful projects contained small amounts of reflection, frequently in the form of passing comments; other projects omitted this aspect altogether. Some projects referred to 'learning a lot' but this was often linked to skills acquired rather than the topic researched.

AO3 Communication

The most successful projects communicated clearly throughout their report, using a clear structure which was easy for the reader to follow. Most candidates used subject-specific terminology accurately and effectively in their report, which enhanced its overall quality; this was often seen to good effect in projects of a technical nature and was another way in which the reader could be supported. Successful reports also used an appropriate form of citation and referencing throughout the report to highlight the source of ideas and information presented and the range of sources used. They also used appropriate methods to present data and were selective in its inclusion based on its relevance to the development of an argument. Successful reports also included bibliographic references for all sources used, in an appropriate and consistent format. Less successful projects were usually less organised in the referencing in their report and in their presentation of data – the latter might not be in the most appropriate format or in a less helpful place in the report to support the candidate in building an argument. Some bibliographies were very brief, some were limited in the level of citation given or provided links that did not work, whilst others referenced sources that could provide context but were not of a suitably rigorous nature to be used in a report at this level.