2017 VCE Extended Investigation: oral presentation examination report

General comments

The Extended Investigation oral presentation affords students the experience of presenting and defending the research they have completed over the course of a year. The conduct of the assessment allows students to celebrate and reflect on their research journey.

The oral presentation comprises two sections: the presentation of the investigation and the response to questions/challenges. The duration of the oral presentation is 15–20 minutes. Students present for 7–10 minutes, after which they will be asked questions for a further 8–10 minutes.

Assessment of the oral presentation is based on knowledge and understanding of the research area, defence of research findings and understanding of audience, response to questions and challenges, and reflection and evaluation. Students are strongly encouraged to use the four assessment criteria when developing the content and structure of their presentations.

In preparation for the oral presentation it is important that students are made aware of speech structure, signposting, language choices and presentation techniques that will assist in explaining their research effectively. While no marks are awarded for presentation style, clarity of expression and pace have an impact on the way that assessors receive information.

Specific information

Each oral presentation is assessed individually against the criteria. Comments regarding performance levels as outlined below are for illustrative purposes only and do not constitute all aspects of a student's work that may contribute to achievement.

Very high – High

Presentations scoring at this level of achievement were characterised by a critical and highly detailed exploration of the student's investigation. Students had developed a clear and robust research question, and the significance of the topic was justified and explained through reference to a wide range of literature. Background research was critically interrogated, with areas of debate, conflict and congruence identified and elaborated upon. By comprehensively and critically engaging with past research in the chosen field, students who scored highly were able to clearly explain the key issues existing in the selected research area. Students showed a thorough understanding of background research and were able to make strong links between and within the literature. Furthermore, these students were also able to position their investigation in a knowledge, content or methodological 'gap' in the research field.

Presentations comprehensively explored the methodological design and processes undertaken within the investigation, critically justifying the design and process of the research with specific reference to existing studies and the student's own research question. Students who scored highly were able to demonstrate how their selected data collection method enabled them to collect data that helped them to respond to the specific demands of their research question. The collected data

was well synthesised and often grouped within overarching themes to identify significant findings within the investigation.

In order to defend their research findings, presentations that scored highly explored the connections as well as the disconnections between previous knowledge in the research area. Students scoring in the high range reflected on the decisions they made throughout their investigation and were able to critically examine and evaluate these choices. These students were able to account for the literature they selected to discuss. They were able to articulate the implications of the limitations of their research design on the outcomes of their investigation. These students' presentations were clearly adjusted for a non-specialist audience; however, they maintained a level of complexity in their engagement with concepts within their research. They demonstrated critical thought, reflection, and analysis of their investigation and its outcomes.

In responding to questions and challenges, students elaborated on and clarified their research design, supported their discussion with reference to previous research and further reflected on the findings of their investigation. Students often brought in additional information to the discussion not previously mentioned in the first part of the presentation. By responding to questions and challenges in depth, students who scored in the high range were able to explore their own ideas and thinking about the investigation.

Medium

Students demonstrated a sound understanding of their investigation despite gaps or overly brief explanation in some sections of their work. Often this meant that students provided a summary of key issues identified in the research area rather than offering a critical exploration of these issues. This approach to background research often involved students compiling a list of quotes taken from the literature rather than a careful synthesis of relevant arguments and evidence. In justifying their choice of method, these students were able to provide insight and detail into their data collection process, though there was often a disconnect between their research question and their methodological approach.

Findings from the students' investigations were discussed, though the connections made between their findings and previous literature were limited. They usually presented some synthesis and an overarching conclusion at the end of their work, though the conclusion did not always match the research question being asked. Some students provided a detailed and thoughtful reflection and evaluation of the research process and their findings, though there was a need to critically explore how the limitations of their research design may have had an impact on their results. Language was generally well-adjusted to suit an educated non-specialist audience, although some students appeared to assume that their key terms and ideas were accessible to an educated audience, regardless of the complexity or specialised nature of their research area. Other students oversimplified their presentation and appeared to assume that a non-specialist audience was also one with limited capacity to engage with complex concepts.

During the question and challenges section of the presentation, students were generally able to offer responses that were supported by some form of evidence. Often their responses repeated information from the first part of the presentation, rather than making greater links to existing literature or data gathered through their investigation. Students would have benefited from elaborating in greater detail. Some students who scored in this range appeared to be making connections between their own work, their methods and previous literature for the first time during the response to questions/challenges.

Low – Very low

Students who scored at this level of achievement provided a brief, general summary of their work and demonstrated inconsistent engagement with the research process. This inconsistency was observable across their investigation, including the development of their research question, use of background research, methodological approach and the overall findings of the investigation. When explaining the significance of their topic, these students often used personal anecdotes rather than dealing with an existing body of research. When connections with previous research occurred they took the form of brief acknowledgment of sources or engagement with a small number of less authoritative sources. Some students provided a brief outline of their method, but were missing key elements, such as a discussion of participants or an explanation of why a particular method assisted them to respond to their research question.

Where findings were discussed this was either brief or confused, for example, presenting a range of statistics without explaining their meaning/purpose. At the lowest end of this range students often did not articulate any results of their investigation. For many of these students their investigation was more like an extended essay with limited or no data collected, which meant that they were unable to discuss any findings. Students, therefore, found it difficult to evaluate and reflect on the process and were unable to draw substantiated conclusions. For some it appeared like a personal project that had never been subjected to any academic rigour or challenge.

A particular issue with presentations scoring in this range was the adaptation of language as well as the overall structure of the presentations. Often subject-specific terminology and concepts were not adequately explained. These presentations were difficult to follow as there was often a confusing structure of ideas and lack of connection made between the different stages of the research process. In responding to questions and challenges, students made some attempt to provide information, though they found it difficult to elaborate on and clarify their ideas. Responses were often far too brief and were not substantiated with evidence from existing research or data collected in their investigation.

Advice for teachers and students

- The time frame for the first part of the presentation is 7–10 minutes, and students should be reminded to stay within this limit. Presentations that were significantly shorter than 7 minutes were often too general and did not provide enough detail. Students were asked to conclude their presentations if they exceeded 10 minutes. Presentations that were significantly longer than 10 minutes needed further synthesis and clarity.
- Students should be reminded that they are not to come dressed in their school uniform, and that their name and the name of their school are to be removed from their USB and PowerPoint presentations.
- PowerPoint is the accepted presentation format – some students arrived with presentations in different formats that could not be displayed on the computer supplied.
- Although there are no marks awarded for this, the use of visual materials often assisted students in illuminating the explanation of complex concepts, methodologies or subject-specific terminology.
- Some students struggled to adapt their language to a non-specialist audience. Those who did so often used metaphor or analogy to explain complex terms and ideas.
- The breadth and depth of reading that students had critically engaged with in undertaking their investigation was generally quite good.
- The majority of students were able to answer most questions and challenges, and elaborated on ideas discussed in the first part of the presentation. Students are reminded not to pre-empt the questions as this often led to students responding with information that may not have been suited to the question they were asked.

- Students need to be able to justify and defend their methodological choices and how the data collection technique helped them respond to the research question. This can be done, for example, by looking at how previous studies in their field have collected data.
- It is important for students to critically reflect on and evaluate the limitations of the research process and the impact this may have had on their findings.
- Although it is important for students to be interested in investigating their research question, a question with personal significance often affected the capacity of the student to maintain critical distance. Such students may have had trouble being objective in their selection of literature or pursued a research methodology in anticipation of expected outcomes.
- Students who selected a topic of a more sensitive nature often found it difficult to respond to questions and challenges. Students should be reminded that they must aim for critical distance and an impersonal or objective stance when responding to their research question.
- Extended Investigation questions and methods must comply with responsible and ethical research guidelines.

Assessment criteria

Criterion 1 – Knowledge and understanding of the research area

In order to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of their research area, students are expected to engage with the full detail of their investigation. This includes the focus and significance of their research area and question, background research in the field, as well as their chosen data collection method(s).

Most students presented a clear overview of their investigation, with reference to many of the above areas. Students who scored highly critically engaged with literature and methods throughout their presentation and demonstrated a firm understanding of the complexities of the research field. By doing so, these students consistently and convincingly justified their research choices and supported these choices with evidence and data. Students who did not score well often overemphasised one area of the research process at the expense of other areas, for example, spending too much time on the minor and inconsequential details of their method, without discussing their research area in sufficient detail.

It is important that students consistently reference sources/information throughout their presentation. In 2017 students referenced in numerous ways, including naming the author of an important study or by providing details such as the publication title or the name of a relevant institution. Students who scored highly were able to identify the implications and significance of the information contained in existing literature rather than merely relying on knowing its content. At the other end of the scale, students relied too heavily on sources external to their research area from popular websites, YouTube clips and newspaper articles. Such sources have not been peer-reviewed and their content usually lacks academic rigour. As a consequence such students had more difficulty demonstrating their knowledge and understanding of the research area. Furthermore, these students provided brief summaries of key ideas without critical engagement of the literature.

Students were mostly able to explain the design and conduct of their investigation effectively. It was necessary for students to explain and justify their chosen method(s) in some detail, clearly demonstrating how methods helped them collect data that responded to their research question. Students who scored highly were able to explain the key components of their methodological approach and the various data collection methods they utilised. For example, where students conducted experiments, they were able to comprehensively explain the various components of the experiment, justify the use of the experimental design with references, describe how variables were controlled and accounted for, as well as the potential limitations of the experiments. Furthermore, these students were able to realise that one research choice could lead to another

that was unforeseen at the outset and to reflect critically on the connection between their research methods. Students who did not score highly struggled to explain the relevance of their selected method within the context of the research area. These students either briefly mentioned that data was collected, without explaining the process behind this, or presented a descriptive summary of their method without justification or links to the research question.

Criterion 2 – Defence of research findings and understanding of audience

Most students in 2017 displayed a very real sense of enjoyment and passion for their topics. They presented with confidence and it was apparent that students had prepared well. In general the presentations followed a clear and logical structure that allowed the students to effectively outline each area of the research process. Although there is no prescribed structure, lower-scoring presentations often lacked a coherent structure, moving from one section to another without clear links. Students who scored highly used oral presentation techniques such as signposting to highlight key ideas and important information as they moved through their presentation.

The adaptation of language for a non-specialist audience was done well in 2017. However, it is important to note that it is an 'educated' non-specialist audience. Students are reminded not to oversimplify their presentations. It is also important that highly complex and technical terms and concepts are clearly defined, perhaps through the use of an analogy or anecdote, in order to ensure that the assessors understand student work. This is relevant for all topics, from the arts and humanities to the mathematics and sciences. Students who effectively defined and adjusted key terms did so throughout their presentation and in the context of their investigation, rather than using a brief summary at the start. Some students used their PowerPoint presentations to successfully communicate meanings of key terms or phrases.

In defending their findings, students were expected to discuss the relevance of their work, justify their findings and clearly articulate an outcome of their investigation in light of their research question. This included making connections between their own work and existing research in the field. These findings may have supported or contradicted previous research and students who scored highly were able to clearly explain why these similarities and differences occurred. These students synthesised their key findings, provided evidence from data they had collected and also discussed the implication of their findings. A number of students were unable to demonstrate what the actual findings were for their investigation, instead just offering a summary of what previous research had already found. Many collected data that simply confirmed what they already thought about a given topic, or data that was skewed towards a certain outcome. Some students did not manage to overcome the potential bias that affected their work from the start. This made it difficult for students to defend their findings from an impersonal or objective stance.

Criterion 3 – Responses to questions and challenges

The response section is designed to illuminate aspects of a student's work that may not have been fully explored in their presentation. As there is no set list of questions that assessors ask, it is important that students do not leave out relevant information in the hope that they will be asked a question about it. It is very important to practise responding to questions. Students are best supported by practising how they would manage a range of unpredictable questions rather than attempting to predict the questions they will be asked and preparing exclusively for those.

In general students were able to respond to questions and challenges with confidence. It was clear that most students had a sound knowledge of their research area and understanding of the process of their investigation. Many students who scored highly were able to provide responses that drew on additional evidence and supporting arguments that had not been mentioned in the first part of the presentation. For example, further background research and unique references were used to elaborate on the significance of their investigation and clarify their key findings. Students who did not score well repeated information presented without including additional detail

and/or did not directly address the question posed. In some cases, students would offer a personal story as 'evidence' to support their responses.

Many students relished this part of the presentation as it gave them a chance to really show the depth of their knowledge and understanding of their topic, but those students who approached the task with a list of pre-prepared responses or those who had never previously reflected on their own work found this aspect of the assessment task very challenging. Many students missed opportunities during the questions/challenges section to evaluate their methodological approach and the implications the method may have had on their findings. This is an area for improvement across the range of student achievement.

Criterion 4 – Reflection and evaluation

This aspect of the oral presentation requires students to critically reflect on and evaluate their extended investigation. Both the presentation and questions/challenges sections are used to assess this criterion.

High-scoring presentations embedded the reflection and evaluation of their work as they discussed the individual components of the research process. These students thoroughly discussed the implication the limitations of their research design had on their findings and suggested areas for further study that took into account some of these limitations.

Students who did not score well listed a range of generic limitations, such as geographic proximity to participants, sample size and time constraints without explaining how these limitations affected their research and findings. Students who explained their research choices by claiming that they were time-poor or were under stress from other subjects missed the opportunity to critically evaluate the decisions they had made. Similarly, students who defended their use of a survey because it was 'quick' and the software package they used could easily display the findings in graphic form are not fully embracing the opportunities the study presents. A number of students mentioned that they did not have access to academic databases as a reason for reading a very limited range of existing research. As per the research criteria, it is important that students pursue research that is realistic and manageable within the limits that time and resources impose. Lack of access to academic databases that support an investigation in a particular research field may mean that the student will need to pursue a different research area.