

Sample ISE IV portfolio tasks Candidate answers, assessments and rationale

ISE IV - Section 1 - Correspondence (300-350 words)

Your university or college is offering a bursary award for a student research project. They are inviting applications.

Write a formal letter to the Head of Faculty outlining your proposed research project and justifying why you strongly believe you should be considered for the grant.

Your application has not been accepted. Write an email to a close friend detailing the grounds for rejection and giving your personal reaction to them.

Candidate X
32 Bellefield Road
London SW1 8PT

Dr. Robert Clarke
School of Slavonic and East European Studies
University of London
Tower Street
London, WC1 9BT

Proposal for SSEES Foundation Fellowship

Dear Dr. Clarke,
I am a recent UCL graduate with a Master's degree in Political Economy of Eastern Europe. I was fascinated to discover the research opportunities supported by the SSEES Foundation Fellowship. I believe that my recently completed dissertation (enclosed with this letter) has provided me with the necessary expertise for further in-depth research of the labour markets of transition economies.

The impact of the transition from a centrally planned to a free market economy on the workforce is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon. In my work, I will attempt to examine the labour market behaviour in Bulgaria, 17 years after the fall of communism. By exploring how Bulgarians find jobs in the public and private sectors, the level of development of formal and informal labour market institutions and intermediaries, my research will aim to conclude with an evaluation of the stage of maturity of the Bulgarian labour market and its comparison to that of a developed market economy.

The Foundation Fellowship Grant would enable me to make a significant contribution to the study of transitional labour markets and most importantly, to arrive at some valuable conclusions about the efficiency of current labour market policies and their impact on well-being.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration!

Yours faithfully,

Candidate X

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Hello Sofia,

How are you? I hope this letter finds you in a state better than mine. I just received the long-awaited reply from SSEES: the grant I applied for has been awarded to someone else! I am so disappointed! SSEES is one of the most prestigious universities I could have continued my studies at. I am trying to adopt a philosophical approach and console myself that everything happens for a reason, but it is not easy.

Will you join me for a cocktail tonight, to help me drown my sorrow? Let me know if you can make it.

Yours, tearfully,

Candidate X

ISE IV - Section 1 - Correspondence (300-350 words)

Rationale for ISE IV Portfolio assessment
Grade: C
Overall achievement of communicative aim
The first part of the task is carried out adequately, with a clear outline of the proposed research project. There is an attempt to justify the candidate's eligibility for consideration for the grant. However, the email to a friend crucially omits to 'detail the grounds for rejection', though it does describe the writer's personal reactions to the news of the rejection. ★Tip - Candidates must analyse the task in detail. It is vital that all requirements of the task are satisfied. Failure to do so will have a detrimental effect on the grade awarded. The task is within the prescribed word length range.
Text organisation
Sender's and recipient's addresses are included and correctly positioned at the top of the letter. ★Tip - Please note the address is not included in the word count. However, the date has been omitted. The greeting 'Dear Dr. Clarke' should link with 'Yours sincerely' (not 'Yours faithfully') at the end of the letter. ★Tip - It is important that candidates learn the standard conventions for different text types. Paragraphing and cohesion in both the letter and the email are well-managed and help the reader to follow the text without difficulty.
Appropriacy of format, style and register
The use of the exclamation mark at the end of the final sentence is inappropriate for a formal letter. Conversely, the expressions 'trying to adopt a philosophical approach' and 'it is not easy' (no contraction) are too formal for an email to a close friend, but in general, the format and register are sufficiently appropriate. ★Tip - At ISE IV, candidates are expected to appreciate subtle distinctions of style.
Accuracy and range of the grammatical, functional and lexical items of the level
There are occasional lexical slips such as the confusion between graduate and postgraduate in the first sentence of the letter and 'drown my sorrow' in the email. For the most part, though, there is a good and accurate range of grammatical and functional language items of the level, with only occasional incorrect choice of prepositions, e.g. 'research of the labour markets'.
Spelling and punctuation
Spelling is very accurate. However, there are a few examples of unsuitable punctuation, such as the exclamation mark at the end of the letter (mentioned under stylistic appropriacy above) and the use of a colon in the email, when a dash would be more appropriate to the informality of the text.
Effect on reader
The overall effect on the reader is positive.

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ISE IV - Section 2 - Factual writing (300-350 words)

Is constant exposure to reality television distorting our perceptions of what is 'real', blurring our moral boundaries and increasing our desire for ever more grotesque entertainment?

Write a critical review of two reality television programmes for a national newspaper discussing to what extent the programmes can be considered a valid form of social commentary. Conclude with your viewpoint on where reality television and society are headed.

Reality television has existed in various forms since 1940s, but it is only in recent years that it has sadly become the dominant genre of TV entertainment.

One of the world's most watched reality television shows is *Big Brother*. Due to its unprecedented popularity, its winners usually become national celebrities. But is it reality that this show portrays? Or 'an abbreviated, twisted characterisation' of an artificially created environment, with cut off boring parts and dramatically exaggerated intriguing parts in order to create a story that sells?¹ It is a fascinating and yet disturbing anthropological phenomenon that on such a large scale television viewers seek to be entertained by voyeurism of fame-obsessed trivial characters, whose most prevalent form of interaction is petty scandals and intrigues.

In her book *Sulphuric Acid*, Amelie Nothomb depicts a fictional reality television show which is somewhat reminiscent of *Big Brother*, except that it is set in a concentration camp. In it, random people are arrested on the streets, herded in cattle wagons and driven to a camera-laden concentration camp. The inmates' daily ordeals and struggles for survival are then broadcast on television. Just like in *Big Brother*, the audience votes off one of the participants each week. The person doomed to leave the programme gets killed. And although the show is inhumanly cruel, it has the highest audience ratings in the history of television.

Despite being fictional and exaggerated, Nothomb's idea is a poignant portrayal and a sharp critique of the contemporary culture dominated by mindless entertainment. Our human nature is left in the background, displaced by a ubiquitous desire for cheap spying, and the boundaries of what is acceptable and human are blurred by the thrill of the show.

Reality television seems to be an outlet for our inherent cruelty and '*schadenfreude*'- taking delight in the misfortunes of others.² But as Amelie Nothomb points out, it is not the producers to blame for creating such degrading forms of entertainment.³ The final responsibility lies with the masses of brainless viewers who choose to watch the grotesque spectacle.

¹ <http://www.collegiatetimes.com/news/3/ARTICLE/6160/2005-11-18.html> [accessed 9 January 2008]

² <http://www.zonalatina.com/Zldata302.htm> [accessed 12 January 2008]

³ Nothomb, Amelie, *Sulphuric Acid*, (Faber and Faber Limited, 2005), p. 74.

ISE IV - Section 2 - Factual writing (300-350 words)

Rationale for ISE IV Portfolio assessment Grade: C
Overall achievement of communicative aim
This answer only partially fulfils the task, which is to write a critical review of <u>two</u> reality TV programmes. The candidate only covers one TV programme and compares it with a fictional reality TV show in a recent book, nor does the answer finish by predicting the direction that reality TV and society are likely to take in the next few years. ★ Tip - Candidates must analyse the task in detail. It is vital that all requirements of the task are satisfied. Failure to do so will have a detrimental effect on the grade awarded. The writing is generally pertinent and reflective. Furthermore, the task is within the prescribed word length range.
Text organisation
The writing is well-organised into appropriate paragraphs and cohesion is ensured by the use of a range of appropriate linking words and phrases such as 'due to', 'although' and 'despite'. There is an effective logical structure, enabling the reader to recognise the main points with ease. Referencing skills are of a good level, both within the text and in the form of footnotes.
Appropriacy of format, style and register
The format is suitable for a review in a national newspaper, and the tone appropriately stimulating for a serious piece of journalism. The use of questions in the first paragraph helps to encourage the reader to continue.
Accuracy and range of the grammatical, functional and lexical items of the level
There are some examples of misuse of articles, e.g. 'since 1940s' and 'a sharp critique of the contemporary culture' and slips with prepositions, such as 'herded in cattle wagons'. Minor lapses in word order, e.g. 'it is not the producers to blame' and lexical choice e.g. 'cut off boring parts', also occur occasionally. ★ Tip -Having had the benefit of the use of reference materials and drafting and correcting, a very high level of accuracy is expected. However, overall the level of language is sufficiently wide-ranging and accurate for the very high demands of this examination.
Spelling and punctuation
There is only a single spelling error, 'camera-laiden', and a good level of appropriate punctuation.
Effect on reader
Overall, the task has a positive effect on the reader.

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ISE IV - Section 3 - Critical and analytical writing (300-350 words)

'The world has lost touch with many traditional medical treatments and cures. Patients should be able to gain the benefit of the best of both worlds - both complementary and orthodox medicine.' (Prince Charles, 2007)

Write an essay commenting on the merit of Prince Charles's opinions. Illustrate your views with examples from your own experience and contrasting your opinions with alternative view points.

The human body is an amazingly complicated, delicately balanced biological mechanism. People have explored it for centuries seeking to gain better understanding of the way it functions.

Complementary medicine is defined as 'alternative medicine treatments used in addition to conventional medicine'⁴. Unlike science-based orthodox medicine, most alternative medicine practices take into consideration not only the physiological, but also the spiritual and social realms as important factors influencing our well-being and health.

As Prince Charles, points out in his statement, the most reasonable approach to healing is combining the strengths of both orthodox and complementary medical practices. Science-based and test-supported conventional medicine enables doctors to establish the nature of most conditions and to treat their symptoms, while the holistic wisdom of complementary therapy (most of which predates the modern scientific method) addresses the causes of the ailment and takes care of supporting and maintaining the harmony of the human body and mind.

The merits of some complementary therapeutic methods are becoming increasingly popular in the western world. A number of medical colleges in the US offer courses in alternative medicine⁵, while specific complementary medical treatments such as acupuncture and herbal medicine are covered by a growing number of health insurance providers.⁶

My exposure to complementary medical treatments has left me very impressed with some methods, and completely sceptical about others. My encounter with homeopathy has convinced me of the utter uselessness of this method of healing, while my experience with therapeutic fasting has been a very positive one. Also, my frequent yoga practice has made me aware of this teaching's potential of maintaining a healthy body and a peaceful mind.

Thus, in my opinion any method of therapy should be considered with an open mind, but not without reason and common sense. Neither conventional nor complementary medicine has all the answers to the mysteries of the human body. That is why it is important to be a knowledgeable patient, well informed and able to think critically in relation to any type of treatment.

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Complementary_medicine [accessed on 9 February 2008]

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alternative_medicine [accessed on 9 February 2008]

⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acupuncture> [accessed on 9 February 2008]

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ISE IV - Section 3 - Critical and analytical writing (300-350 words)

Rationale for ISE Portfolio assessment
Grade: C
Overall achievement of communicative aim
A shorter introduction would have enabled the candidate to elaborate further on the examples of personal experience (e.g. the nature and virtues of therapeutic fasting) and even more crucially include mention of alternative viewpoints, as required by the rubric. This lack of balance means that the writer's case is not presented as effectively as it might have been. ★Tip - Candidates must analyse the task in detail. It is vital that all requirements of the task are satisfied. Failure to do so will have a detrimental effect on the grade awarded. Furthermore, the writing in this section should be more discursive and less factual than in the previous section. The task adheres to the prescribed word length range.
Text organisation
This is again a strong feature of the candidate's writing, with appropriate paragraphing and smooth cohesion throughout.
Appropriacy of format, style and register
The formal register required in essay-writing is well handled and the format suitable for writing of this type.
Accuracy and range of the grammatical, functional and lexical items of the level
The candidate clearly has the range of language necessary to write fluently and convincingly at this level, and the ability to deploy it with clarity and accuracy. There are again only occasional lapses, such as 'the most reasonable approach ... is combining' (to combine), 'the merits of some ... methods are becoming increasingly popular' (recognised) and 'this teaching's potential of maintaining a healthy body' (potential to maintain). These slips do not interfere with the reader's comprehension of the text.
Spelling and punctuation
There are no spelling mistakes, in spite of the specialist register required here, and only occasional unsuitable punctuation marks, such as the comma after 'As Prince Charles', at the beginning of the third paragraph.
Effect on reader
The overall effect on the reader is positive.

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