

Should psychologically competent terminally ill individual have the option of physician-assisted suicide?

Criterion	Marks available	Marks awarded
A: Focus and method	6	6
B: Knowledge and understanding in context	9	8
C: Critical thinking	12	11
D: Communication	3	3
E: Engagement and reflection	6	6
Total	36	34

Commentary

Criterion A: Focus and method

The candidate selects a morally complex ethical dilemma and devises a research question that allows them to explore a range of different perspectives and arguments. The ethical dilemma is clearly defined and the focus on it sustained throughout the response. Research is thorough and well-planned, citing a wide range of well-chosen evidence that supports and develops points. Though there is little explicitly on potential bias of source material, validity is addressed through the range of sources selected.

Criterion B: Knowledge and understanding in context

The candidate presents a thorough and convincing evaluation of the ethical dilemma from a range of different perspectives—legal, medical, religious. These viewpoints are clearly explained and consistently developed with concise use of specific examples and relevant contextual information (eg Oregon’s Death with Dignity Act; reference to the significance of the Hippocratic Oath). A global context is included by looking at how the issue is addressed in different countries, though this is described rather than fully explored and could have developed further by, for example, considering the cultural influences behind the different attitudes. The impact on different groups is well-integrated into the response and is beginning to be developed.

Criterion C: Critical thinking

An argument is developed logically using well-chosen examples to support different points of view, though occasionally points are asserted rather than supported (“There is much more support for physician-assisted suicide as opposed to euthanasia...”). The connections made are clear and thoughtful (eg moving from discussing the potential for patient-assisted suicide to be abused by doctors to a careful analysis of the Hippocratic Oath) and develop the overall argument. The various positions are weighed up to come to a measured conclusion that doesn’t shy away from considering difficult and emotive issues. Overall, while some points could have been developed further (eg ethical differences between suicide, euthanasia and patient-assisted suicide), the response is balanced and is beginning to acknowledge a degree of complexity in the ethical dilemma that shows a perceptive, and at times nuanced, understanding of the issue.

Criterion D: Communication

The project is consistently clearly written and well organized, with sections following logically on from one another to build up points and develop an overall argument. Terminology (Euthanasia, Physician-assisted suicide, palliative care, Hippocratic Oath) is well-used and clearly defined. The top mark for this criterion is awarded.

Criterion E: Engagement and reflection

There is compelling evidence of a thoughtful and evaluative approach to both the issue and the research methodology that is particularly strong on understanding of the ethical nature of the project (eg rejecting an issue because it was “clearly wrong” and therefore did not present a dilemma and reworking her research question to focus more precisely on the ethical dilemma). From the candidate’s *Reflections on planning and progress form* and the supervisor’s comments, a picture emerges of a committed and perceptive student that is able to justify decisions (eg leaving out case studies from the final draft); shows intellectual initiative (eg preparing ideas on different possible subjects for the dilemma in advance of the initial supervisor meeting); and articulates a reasoned, convincing and personally-engaged response to the complexities of the dilemma chosen. The top mark in this criterion is awarded.