

## A QUICK GUIDE TO TOK PRESENTATION AND TOK ESSAY<sup>1</sup>

### *Knowledge Questions*

The term *knowledge question* is essential to TOK course and its assessment. Students who can effectively *identify* and *address* knowledge questions in TOK presentation and TOK essay will most likely excel in them. To put it briefly, the whole point of the presentation and essay tasks is to deal with knowledge questions.

Knowledge questions are questions **about** knowledge. Instead of focusing on specific content, they focus on how knowledge is constructed and evaluated. They can relate to any aspect of knowledge like acquisition, production and acceptance of knowledge. In general, knowledge questions are:

- *open ended questions* that admit more than one possible answer
- *explicitly about knowledge in itself* and NOT subject-specific claims
- *couched in terms of TOK vocabulary and concepts* (WOKs, AOKs and terms such as truth, evidence and justification)
- *precise in terms of relationships between these concepts*

A good TOK presentation and TOK essay covers *all* the dimensions of knowledge questions mentioned above.

On the following page you can find a table that describes a progression of knowledge questions. The table may help you to identify and formulate knowledge questions.

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<sup>1</sup> This document is compiled from IBO *Theory of knowledge guide 2015* and IBO guide *Understanding knowledge issues*. Some parts are taken exactly as they appear in the guides and some parts are simplified drastically to serve this document better.

LEVEL	DESCRIPTOR	EXAMPLE A	EXAMPLE B	EXAMPLE C
<b>GOOD</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- An open ended question</li> <li>- Explicitly about knowledge</li> <li>- Couched in terms of TOK vocabulary and concepts</li> <li>- Precise in terms of relationships between these concepts</li> </ul>	What is about a scientific question that makes it convincing and unconvincing?	To what extent can the human sciences use mathematical techniques to make accurate predictions?	What, if anything, do optical illusions tell us about sense perception and truth?
<b>INTERMEDIATE</b>	<p>May be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- an open ended question</li> <li>- explicitly about knowledge</li> </ul>	How can we decide if acupuncture works or not?	How can we use models to predict crime waves?	What can we learn from optical illusions?
<b>POOR</b>	<p>May be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a closed question</li> <li>- implicitly about knowledge</li> </ul>	Does acupuncture work?	Will predictions in teenage smoking turn out to be correct?	Why do optical illusions happen?
<b>NOT A KNOWLEDGE QUESTION</b>	<p>May be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a statement or a description</li> <li>- a closed question</li> <li>- a subject-specific question rather than about knowledge in itself</li> </ul>	Traditional medicine	Stopping teenagers smoking	Optical illusions
<b>REAL-LIFE SITUATION</b>		My uncle went to an acupuncturist	A new government policy	An optical illusion

### *TOK Presentation*

TOK presentation weights 33% in overall assessment of TOK. In TOK presentation students are expected to identify and explore a knowledge question raised by a **real-life situation**. This real-life situation may arise from a local domain or from a wider global scope. With this in mind, TOK presentation topic can be almost anything, but it **must be related to a question about knowledge**. *Formulating proper knowledge questions are the key to a successful TOK presentation.*

TOK presentation is done **individually, in pairs** or in **groups of three**. TOK presentation must be delivered in a language accessible to all members of the class. Approximately **10 minutes per presenter** should be allowed, up to maximum of approximately **30 minutes per group**. After the presentation **discussion time** should be scheduled. Interaction and audience participation are allowed during the presentation, but there must be an identifiable substantial input from the presenter(s) that is assessable.

TOK presentation starts with a real-life situation described in “real-life” terms. From this starting point students are expected to identify underlying knowledge questions. This is then explored using the language of TOK. In the end, a conclusion is reached which is translated back into real-life terms.

TOK presentations may take many forms like lectures, interviews or debates. Students may use multimedia, costumes and props to support and enhance their presentations. However, under **no circumstances** should the presentation be simply an essay to read aloud to the class. While pre-recorded inserts **within** a presentation are permissible, the presentation itself must be a live situation and not a recording **of** a presentation. **All sources and ideas of others must be acknowledged in the presentation.**

Before the presentation, the individual, pair or group must deliver the teacher a copy of the **presentation planning document**<sup>2</sup>. This is a part of the TOK assessment procedure.

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<sup>2</sup> You can find this document from the teacher’s webpage.

Below you can see a question list. These questions may help TOK students to construct TOK presentations. The questions are derived from presentation planning document and TOK presentation assessment criteria. If you can answer these questions with ease while constructing your TOK presentation, you will most probably succeed in it.

### **Question list for preparing a TOK presentation**

- What is my real-life situation?
- Is my real-life situation described effectively?
- What is (are) my knowledge question(s)?
- Is (are) my knowledge question(s) well formulated?
- Are the connections between my real-life situation and my knowledge question(s) well explained?
- Is (are) my knowledge question(s) well explored in the context of my real-life situation?
- What kind of examples, perspectives and arguments am I using?
- What kind of counter-examples, counter-perspectives and counter-arguments am I using?
- How do my different examples, perspectives and arguments serve the whole of the presentation?
- Are my different examples, perspectives and arguments convincing?
- What is (are) my conclusion(s)?
- What kind of related findings can I find from my topic?
- Can I find any connections to other real-life situations?
- Can I execute my presentation to the class with accessible and understandable language?

*TOK Essay*

TOK essay weights 67% in the overall assessment of TOK. TOK essay is chosen from a list of six titles prescribed by the IBO. **The chosen title should be used exactly as given; it must not be altered in any way.** Students are required to identify knowledge questions connected to the prescribed title. Usually the titles are couched deeply in the vocabulary and terminology of TOK. In this respect, the TOK essay follows a path that is in some sense a mirror image of TOK presentation. Abstract TOK essay topics should be connected with concrete real-life examples.

The titles ask generic questions about knowledge and are cross-disciplinary in nature. They may be answered with reference to any part or parts of the TOK course, to specific disciplines, or with reference to opinions gained about knowledge both inside and outside the classroom.

The titles are not meant to be treated only in the abstract, or on the basis of external authorities. In all cases, essays should express the conclusions reached by students through a sustained consideration of knowledge questions. Claims and counterclaims should be formulated and main ideas should be illustrated with varied and effective examples that show the approach consciously taken by the student. Essays should demonstrate the student's ability to link knowledge questions to WOKs and AOKs.

The essay must be written in **standard 12 font** and **double spaced**. The maximum length of the essay is **1600 words**. Extended notes, extensive footnotes or appendices are not appropriate to a TOK essay. The TOK essay is not primarily a research paper, but **all used sources must be acknowledged**. This includes paraphrased or summarised sources and visual sources. If an electronic source is cited, the date of access must be indicated. **The bibliography or works cited should include only those works used by the student.** There needs to be a clear connection between the works listed and where they are used in the text. A reference to the sources needs to be done within the essay.

The bibliography or works cited list should specify:

- author(s), title date and place of publication
- the name of publisher or URL (http:/...)
- the date when the webpage was accessed.

### **Self-review question list for writing a TOK essay**

The assessment of the TOK essay is done on the basis of two aspects: **(1) understanding knowledge questions** and **(2) quality of analysis of knowledge questions**. Below you can see a question list. These questions may help TOK students to write TOK essays. The questions are modified from TOK essay assessment criteria. If you can answer these questions with ease while writing your TOK essay, you will most probably succeed in it.

- Does my essay demonstrate understanding of knowledge questions that are relevant to the prescribed title?
- Does my essay demonstrate an awareness of the connections between knowledge questions, AOKs and WOKs?
- Do I show an awareness of my own perspective as a knower in relation to other perspectives, such as those that may arise, for example, from academic and philosophical traditions, culture or position in society (gender, age, and so on)?
- What is the quality of my inquiry into knowledge questions?
- Are my main points in the essay justified?
- Are my arguments coherent and compelling?
- Have I considered any counterclaims?
- Are my implications and underlying assumptions of the essay's argument identified?
- Are my arguments effectively evaluated?

Remember, analysis of knowledge questions that are not relevant to the prescribed title will not be assessed.