

# PART 4

## Support for TOK Assessment

### 23. Assessment

“The capacity to shuttle between levels of abstraction, with ease and with clarity, is a signal mark of the imaginative and systematic thinker.”<sup>1</sup>

C. Wright Mills

Throughout your theory of knowledge course, you have been developing your skills of inquiry and thoughtful analysis, and your capacity to see from other perspectives and recognize the implications of holding them. These are skills that will benefit you all your life, as you work and communicate with other people, and as you attempt to deal with the complex issues that arise in your community and your world. These are skills, too, that you will consciously develop and refine as you undertake your two “assessment tasks” for the theory of knowledge course.

The *class presentation* and the *essay* both give you a chance to show your own mind at work, engaging with knowledge questions in a mature and thoughtful way. They push you to show yourself at your best – at your *present* best, as you continue to learn and grow. If you tackle them with a genuine interest in exploring ideas and the TOK course behind you, you are likely to do them with pleasure and gain the reward of a good grade.

After all, what you do for your mark is just a distillation of what you’ve been doing the whole time in the course – flying high above knowledge, dipping low to see the close-up, and frequently landing securely on the ground. You’ve been learning to navigate through levels of abstraction, learning concepts and skills that make the steering easier, and more fun.

By now, you’ve practically qualified for a pilot’s license! You’ve been up, up, up into the stratosphere, asking, “How do we know?” You’ve zoomed closer to earth to examine areas of knowledge, and you’ve flown with some of the questions there. For instance, “What difference does the subject matter of study make to the methods of gaining knowledge?” (We don’t investigate human beings with a Large Hadron Collider! We don’t stage and appreciate a musical performance with the methods of a mathematical proof – or, at least, not entirely!) Cruising over knowledge, you’ve seen its broad contours and how the parts all fit together.

Closer to earth, you’ve recognized from above the humming groups of busy people – sharing ideas, critiquing them, and using them to explain our world, our societies past and present, our moral codes, our varied and vibrant arts, and the meanings we give to life.

And you’ve landed. Right there on the ground, you’ve met real people creating and applying knowledge – a dancer, for instance, or a historian, or a physicist. You’ve met individuals personally, and found out a lot about their colleagues and what they’re engaged in doing, why and how.

Here, in a recognizable world of people observing, creating, writing, and arguing, you’ve brought your experience of the high-flying overview to your everyday life and the subjects you’re studying. Here in your own life, you can apply those concepts – “knowledge”, “perspectives”, “justification”, “implications” – and use those skills of thinking critically to figure out what you’re being told, evaluate it for its justifications, apply your filters to allow in the most reliable knowledge

<sup>1</sup> Wright Mills, C. 1959, 2000. *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press. P 34.

claims, and appreciate their contributions to your own understanding.

If you can demonstrate for assessment the concepts and skills you’ve gained between the stratosphere and the ground, then you’re likely to do well. The real reason for learning to navigate is the pleasure and value of the flight (and its landing!) but if you can get a mark for it, well, that’s a fine bonus!

#### The two assessment tasks

For your mark, you have to do two things: an oral class presentation and an essay. The presentation starts on the ground with a particular situation you’ve noticed in the world, picks out one of the knowledge questions that make it interesting, and travels skyward to look down upon the situation and comment on how it distills many of the questions of the TOK course. In contrast, the essay starts high in the sky at an overview level of knowledge questions, but dips to cruise over particular areas of the territory below. To show the territory better, it includes plenty of examples of what the people are doing on the ground. Both of these tasks you can do!



**AND SO...** here are the practical details.

The class presentation is oral. It will be on a topic you propose, with guidance from your teacher. Your teacher will grade it out of 10 and keep a record of all documentation that goes with it, since the IB moderates a number of schools each year – that is, it checks for appropriate work, procedures, and

documentation. The security of your mark depends on your fulfilling the expectations. The mark contributes to 33 per cent of your final TOK mark.

The essay (maximum 1,600 words) will be a written piece of work on a topic you choose from a list of six provided by the IB. Your essay is sent to an external marker appointed by the IB, and marked out of 10. The mark contributes to 67 per cent of your final TOK mark.

Your final grade will take the form not of a number but of a letter, as the mark for TOK is combined with the mark for the extended essay in a single outcome for these core requirements of the IB Diploma Programme.

#### Refreshing core concepts

Before we go into detail on the assessment tasks, we’ll briefly go over the key concepts that are used in the evaluation of both. In this book, we’ve been dealing right from the beginning with the key concepts and skills, so they’re familiar to you. Still, before doing the assessment tasks, you should refresh your memory on terminology and set your sights very clearly on the concepts and qualities relevant to doing well.

What should you re-read from this book? Well, certainly you should go back to chapter 14 to look again at the *aims* and *objectives* of theory of knowledge. You might also benefit from the transitional chapter 4 on exchanging knowledge, since it introduced the ways of knowing as means towards building knowledge, sharing it, and justifying it.

The central concepts of TOK have run right through this book. But to pull them to the front of your mind, you might want to look back at a few parts in particular:

##### 1. knowledge questions

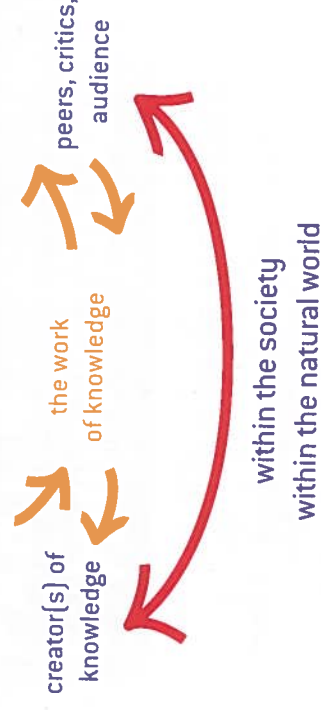
See the overview on inquiry (page 68). Look also at the conclusion to chapter 2 on gaining knowledge, re-reading the final sections on knowledge questions, broad and narrow.

##### 2. perspectives

Review the touchstone pages to which we have referred so often during this book: the early reflection “Your own personal perspective” (page 26) and “Exploring different perspectives” (page 28). In all of the areas of knowledge, watch for variations



on the basic diagram that often gives a structure to shifting perspectives:



### 3. implications

Seeing implications of different conclusions – that is, what follows in logic and in action from accepting them – is part of understanding perspectives. To refresh the definition of “implications”, see the chapter on reason, and for an example of implications see the discussion activity on different measurements of poverty at the end of chapter 18. For the implications of classification and concepts, see chapter 13.

#### 4. exploration and analysis

Although an approach to inquiry should be so familiar as to need no conceptual review, do look back through all of the pages identified as “Thinking critically”, including the summary that concludes Part 2, “Should I believe it? A guide to evaluating knowledge claims”. The table of contents is also likely to be useful to you in identifying pages for spot-review.

## 5. argument and counter-claims

Review the final pages of chapter 7 on reason on the nature of arguments. If you feel the need for further practice and advice on tracing or building arguments, do the discussion activity later in this chapter entitled “Follow an argument”.

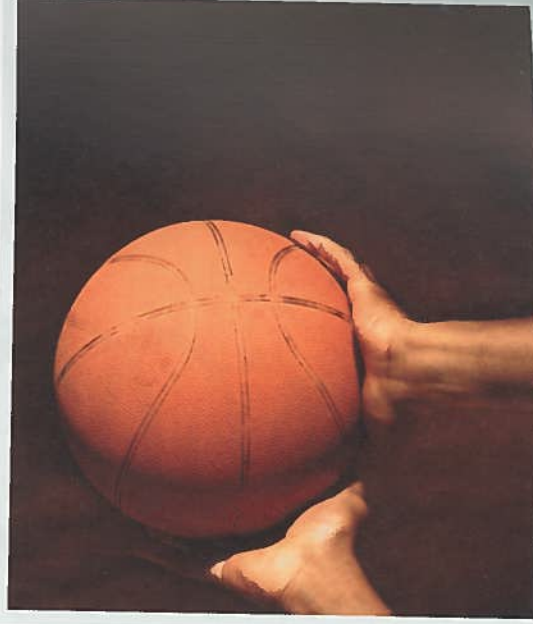
## 6. real-life situations and examples

There is no point to the TOK course unless you can apply the awareness and thinking skills to the world you live in. We have tried to keep the book grounded throughout in examples from the real world. To refresh a general way of thinking, though, you might look back through all of the interchapters marked “Thinking critically” for the kind of examples we gave. You might also have a quick look at how each of the chapters on areas of knowledge concludes: the arts with

commenting on society, history with an activity including colonial attitudes towards African art, human sciences with concepts of poverty, natural sciences with social responsibility, mathematics with the role of statistical measures in understanding a world issue, ethics with ideas of service to others, and indigenous knowledge and religious knowledge with extracts on treating other people respectfully and ethically. TOK does fly high in the sky with its abstractions and general overviews, but it is not helpful to your everyday thinking unless you also bring it down to the ground.

## How to do a really good class presentation

During your TOK course, you must do at least one oral class presentation in which you demonstrate your ability to apply your thinking skills to the world around you. You have a lot of flexibility in what you choose as a topic, whether you do it solo or with others, and how you bring your ideas to life. With plenty of choice and a world full of situations alive with knowledge questions, surely you will be able to shape the presentation to be a good experience for yourself and for the rest of your class.



## Know what's expected

You cannot score in basketball if you're demonstrating the skills appropriate for tennis or golf, or following the rules for football. You cannot score in a class presentation if you don't meet the expectations of the form. In planning your presentation, set yourself appropriate goals.

Do(es) the presenter(s) succeed in showing how TOK concepts can have practical application?					
Level 5	Excellent	9-10	Level 4	Very good	7-8
Level 3	Satisfactory	5-6	Level 2	Basic	3-4
Level 1	Elementary	1-2	Irrelevant	0	

Typical characteristics			Some possible characteristics		
<p>The presentation is focused on wellformulated knowledge question that is clearly connected to specified real-life situation. The knowledge question is explored in the context of the real-life situation, using clear arguments, with acknowledgement of different perspectives. The analysis are shown to be significant to the chosen real-life situation and to others.</p>	<p>The presentation is focused on a knowledge question that is connected to a specified real-life situation. The knowledge question is explored in the context of the real-life situation, using real-life situation, using some adequate arguments. There is some awareness of the significance of the outcomes of the analysis.</p>	<p>The presentation identifies a knowledge question and a real-life situation, although the connection between them may not be convincing. There is some attempt to explore the knowledge question. there is limited awareness of the significance of the outcomes of the analysis.</p>	<p>The presentation describes a real-life situation without reference to any knowledge question, or treats an abstract knowledge question without connecting it to any specific real-life situation.</p>	<p>There is no evidence that the requirements of the TOK presentation have been understood.</p>	

Sophisticated	Credible	Relevant	Underdeveloped	Ineffective	
Discerning	Analytical	Adequate	Basic	Unconnected	
Insightful	Organized	Acceptable	Unbalanced	Incoherent	
Compelling	Pertinent	Predictable	Superficial	Formless	
Lucid	Coherent	Ordinary	Derivative	Elementary	



Your presentation is going to be evaluated according to criteria that emerge from the single summary question:

Do(es) the presenter(s) succeed in showing how TOK concepts can have practical application?

The answer, if you plan well, will be “yes” – and the grade will reward you.

Think of the presentation as a performance in which you demonstrate particular skills that will be evaluated according to particular criteria – rather like any competition for dance, music, or sports. Perhaps think of yourself as playing basketball, and aiming to dunk the ball in the hoop, using the appropriate set of skills. And then dunk it!

STEP 1: Know what is expected

You’re expected to choose a real-life situation of interest to you, identify a knowledge question that arises from it, and explore that knowledge question analytically. You should demonstrate your skills of critical thinking as you identify and investigate different perspectives on your chosen situation, including the implications of taking particular perspectives. You should also indicate how the investigation of the particular real-life situation is broadly relevant to other such situations. In short, you’re getting right into the way that knowledge is constructed by real people in the real world – on a topic you care about.

You have to do at least one class presentation. Whether you are permitted to do more than one – and to have the best mark submitted to the IB – depends on your teacher’s overall plan for class time. If you do more than one, you can’t treat the same knowledge question again, or deal again with the same real-life situation. No repeats! Move on!

STEP 2: Decide whether to go solo or as part of a team

There are advantages to either way of doing your presentation – on your own or with others, up to a maximum of three in a group.

A major factor to take into consideration is the effect of the timing on the breadth of ideas. Approximately 10 minutes of class time is allowed

<sup>2</sup> Theory of knowledge guide, P 48.

Criteria

What are the criteria for an excellent presentation?

The presentation is focused on a well-formulated knowledge question that is clearly connected to a specified real-life situation. The knowledge question is effectively explored in the context of the real-life situation, using convincing arguments, with investigation of different perspectives. The outcomes of the analysis are shown to be significant to the chosen real-life situation and to others.

for each presenter, so that two people will have roughly 20 minutes and three people roughly 30 minutes. If you decide to work on your own, then, you’ll have to choose a narrower topic in order to manage it in a short time. If you work with others, you’ll want to choose a topic with a wider focus and develop ideas more fully.

Another major factor to consider is whether you can get together with others easily for the planning process. If you don’t have opportunities to meet and discuss ideas – face to face or electronically – it is probably more practical to work on your own.

If you do work with others, though, you have some advantages in the variety of ways in which you will be able to present the ideas. A pair or trio can more easily dramatize different perspectives, run mock interviews, and so forth. If you can compose a group where individuals genuinely bring different perspectives – such as from their cultures or religions – you might find the planning all the more interesting. (It is not necessary for individuals to speak from their own perspectives in dramatizing ideas. They could speak from each other’s.)

STEP 3: Choose your topic

For your presentation, you can pick a situation that really interests you – one that seems to involve lively knowledge questions on a topic that you’d enjoy investigating. It’s possible that you will see situations all around you and will launch yourself easily into thinking and talking about it. It’s also possible that...suddenly...not a single

situation leaps into your field of vision! Oh no! Where can you find ideas?

Make your shopping list! You are looking for a topic for your presentation that seems to offer three ingredients:

- a real-life situation that interests you
- knowledge questions appealing to pose and consider
- different perspectives on the knowledge question(s).

You could start with any one of the three and use it to find the others. Interesting incidents, enticing questions, and different ways of answering them are often found together. Any one could lead you to the others.

With this shopping list in mind, there are several approaches you could take to finding a topic. The suggestions below range across a spectrum from fairly passive alertness to active research.

As a first approach, be alert to ideas that just happen to cross your path as you go through your day.

- A teacher has commented that the box at the back of the room holds old textbooks that have gone out of date. What has made them go “out of date”? Are your current textbooks giving you the truth, or just a version that is “in date”?
- You notice that your friend’s mother has a very different attitude from your own mother about the oil pipeline that has had people in your town going to protests. How is it that they have such different perspectives?
- A friend of yours hesitates to go to a party because of what it said in her horoscope. Why does she believe, and why don’t you? Are there some interesting questions about justifications for belief and confirmation bias hidden in this possible topic?

As a second, keep all possibilities open and look in the news for real-life situations or debates that -catch your interest.

- Find out what people are talking about. In newspapers, check the editorials, opinion columns, and letters to the editor. Online, check blogs that accompany news sites or others that deal with special topics. There are almost always lively discussions on science, nutrition, medicine, and technology.

- Deliberately read the news from sources that comment from different positions on the political spectrum. Sometimes accounts of events are startlingly different, and could provoke some interesting questions of knowledge.

Or, third, start with personal interests and go looking for situations or knowledge questions related to them.

- If you love sports, are there any topics currently generating intense discussion, such as ethical issues surrounding performance-enhancing drugs?
- If you’re good at photography and digital modification, are there current hot topics about representation of reality on which you might have some insight?
- If you enjoy astronomy, movie-making, dancing, sailing, orienteering, or gymnastics – just to name a few – could they yield questions of knowledge?

Fourth, perhaps decide in advance that a particular issue of local or global significance is one you want to investigate, somehow. Any major global issue is alive with questions of knowledge. You might find knowledge questions through thinking about some of the topics we’ve raised in this book:

- definition and its implications for how we think about topics and investigate them (for instance, “faith”, “culture”, “poverty”).
- classification and its implications
- symbolic representation such as language, photographs, maps, or statistics that can be used factually and/or persuasively
- causal connections that can be drawn differently according to different concepts of cause and different perspectives.

Similarly, fifth, start with perspectives you want to learn more about, and then figure out a topic that could focus them. You might want to team up with one or two others from the class from different cultural or religious communities to talk about how you see things – and then go looking for your real-life situation.

- If there is a debate on differences in a multicultural society, could there be a specific incident or legal challenge that raises knowledge questions?



- Is there a particular life experience that you might examine from different perspectives for the different ways you understand it?

Or even, *sixth*, start centred in a particular academic subject or area of research, perhaps one that you’re studying. You might team up with others from one of your IB classes.

- If you are history students, could you look for current topics that use your understanding developed in history class? Are there official apologies for the past in the news, or truth and reconciliation commissions, or national replacement of historic monuments with others?
- If you are biology students, is there any current breakthrough that illustrates characteristics of science?

You are likely to go back and forth repeatedly between different real-life situations and possible knowledge questions to explore before you settle on one. When you have a proposal, you should consult with your teacher to make sure that you are on the right path, and to get advice. As your ideas develop, you are permitted to consult a second time with your teacher.

### STEP 4: Identify knowledge questions

If you’ve chosen your real-life situation as we’ve suggested here, you have some good raw material for creating a good presentation. But now you have to shape it!

The most important point to remember about your presentation is that it is *about knowledge*. It is not really about your topic: it is *not* a report describing your real-life situation, giving information. It is about the inquiry that animates that situation – the *knowledge questions* that the topic illustrates. Your real-life situation becomes your grounding example for the questions that arise from it.

Now, do this: put into words, in two or three sentences, what your topic has to do with knowledge. Use the word “knowledge” or “know”. If you are working with teammates, all of you should do this independently, exchange your sentences, and discuss them. Don’t worry about shaping a clear knowledge question yet. Just come to grips with whatever *ideas about knowledge* your real-life situation raises.

<sup>3</sup> Eileen Dombrowski, “Kony 2012: viral videos, responsibility, action”, 9 March 2012. <http://blogs.triplelearning.com/2012/03/diploma/dp.tokglobal/kony-2012-viral-videos-responsibility-action/>

It might help to phrase your sentences with familiar vocabulary for central concepts: for example, perspectives, ways of knowing (and specific ones), areas of knowledge (and particular ones), knowledge claims, justification, evidence, certainty/uncertainty, prediction, causation, fallacies, methodology, confirmation bias, cognitive biases, truth, assumptions, values.

Only after you’ve figured out roughly what you want to talk about should you try to phrase the knowledge question that will focus your presentation. You can probably see several possible directions any presentation could take, depending on what you emphasize. Choose one, the one that you think will best be able to unify your ideas and bring out the really interesting features of your real-life situation. It will be your focus for developing your exploration.

#### Example 1

- *real-life situation:* In October 2012 a court in Italy found a group of scientists guilty of failing to give adequate warning to the people of Aquila of a devastating earthquake in 2009, and sentenced them to six years in prison.
- *rough ideas:* There is a lot of controversy about holding scientists responsible for warning people when the knowledge of earthquakes is uncertain, and does not allow prediction. If scientists don’t have the justifications for a time-based prediction, they can’t be expected to warn people. Scientists around the world are protesting the verdict, but people who lost families and homes think they should have been given better information about risks, and the court agrees. One consequence is that other disaster experts are quitting their jobs in case they might be next.
- *knowledge question:* To what extent can we predict with confidence in the sciences? or Are scientific experts ethically responsible for warning the public of possible dangers?

#### Example 2<sup>3</sup>

- *real-life situation:* A video by Invisible Children went viral on YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter in March 2012 and raised widespread support for bringing to justice Joseph Kony, wanted for war crimes for his exploitation of child soldiers in Uganda. Called “Kony 2012”, it

stirred up support but also major criticism for its representation of a complex issue.

- *rough ideas:* Perspectives are easy to find here. The video makers seemed genuinely to mean well and can point out that Kony had violated human rights, abducting and brutalizing children, and was still on the loose. But many Ugandans protested that the information was out of date, that the video oversimplified and misrepresented a complex situation, that it did more harm than good in giving notoriety to a war criminal who no longer had power in any case, and that it misdirected resources that could have been used better to help the former child soldiers. Some felt the video as a western do-gooder insult to African competence to deal with their own problems.
- *knowledge question:* What is the impact of new media on knowledge? or How do we judge when we have enough knowledge to act responsibly?

#### Example 3

- *real-life situation:* In May 2012 the National Science Advisory Board for Biosecurity in the United States recommended censoring scientific studies on bird flu virus (avian H5N1 influenza virus) because the information could be used by bioterrorists.
- *rough ideas:* There are different perspectives on whether scientific knowledge should be censored – whether conjectured national security or scientific freedom is more important, or even if it’s even practical to try to restrict information. Who decides what should be censored, and with what justification? Would censorship conflict with the fundamental methodology of the sciences as shared knowledge? If we want to think ethically about social responsibility, do we judge according to guiding principles or according to evaluation of likely consequences?
- *knowledge question:* Are ethical restrictions on the sharing of scientific knowledge ever justified? If so, on what grounds? If not, why not?

#### Example 4

- *real-life situation:* In 2010 the last speaker of the Bo language died at the age of 85, on an island east of India.
- *rough ideas:* This incident got press coverage, with articles saying that the extensive death of

languages is a significant loss. Bo might have been the carrier of knowledge that is now also lost. But on the other hand, knowledge is always changing in any case and maybe it’s more useful for communicating knowledge if people speak fewer languages anyhow, and have fewer language barriers. Does it matter if languages die out?

- *knowledge question:* To what extent does the knowledge of a culture depend on its language? or In what ways does the immense variety of languages affect knowledge?

#### Example 5<sup>4</sup>

- *real-life situation:* In France in 2012, the findings of a study on rats linked large tumours with their being fed genetically modified food. It seemed to be revealing health problems concealed by GM industries and created enormous public concern.
- *rough ideas:* If sound, the study points towards possible human health dangers previously unrecognized. It seems to confirm public suspicion of GM industries justified on other grounds. However, the study has been seriously criticized for its methodology and has been rejected by the European Union.
- *knowledge question:* To what extent is it important to understand the methodology of science in order to evaluate scientific knowledge claims presented in the media? or How can the line be drawn between sensationalistic reporting and responsible “whistleblowing” journalism?

#### Example 6

- *real-life situation:* In December 2011, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)/Doctors without Borders announced in its regular newsletter two projects to convey important social issues: the multimedia Urban Survivors and a fundraising music album Positive Generation, songs about living with HIV/AIDS.
- *rough ideas:* MSF regularly uses numerous ways of communicating, using newsletters, personal blogs, statistical information, and such. What’s interesting about these projects is the use of the arts to inform us, engage our imaginations, and make us care. MSF talks about “shedding light” on a humanitarian

<sup>4</sup> Theo Dombrowski, “Guest blog: GM foods and the French rats”, 5 October 2012. <http://blogs.triplelearning.com/2012/10/diploma/dp.tokglobal/guest-blog-gm-foods-and-the-french-rats/>



crisis, with implications for how we should respond and act.

- *Knowledge question:* What is the role of the arts in giving us knowledge and understanding of social issues? or What ways of knowing can the arts use to give us understanding beyond just facts? or In what ways can the arts give understanding of ethical responsibility?

Do you recognize what we're doing in these examples? We're taking you from the real-life situation on the ground up, up into the overview of knowledge, where the situation becomes an *example* of an open and general question of knowledge. (See page 49.) We're zooming back and up, from close-up to panorama! What we look for, then, is what makes the selected real-life situation alive with interest and challenges to explore, with knowledge questions also applicable to other examples that we can see around us.

The subject guide for TOK speaks of “extracting” the knowledge question from the real-life situation, using a metaphor for drawing out of the particular event an essential question about *how we know*.

The development thereafter will be an analysis of the knowledge question, with grounded reference to the real-life situation. It will surely bring out further knowledge questions in the process, and differing perspectives.

### STEP 5: Identify perspectives

At this point, you've identified perspectives along with your knowledge question. We need to add very little further advice.

Remember, though, that you shouldn't just describe perspectives: A says this, B says that. This may be your starting point as you investigate the topic, but go further. Be analytical about the ways that those perspectives work to shape conclusions on your real-life situation: stay aware of the assumptions, values, selection of facts, different process of validation, and implications. (See familiar page 28.) What justifications are offered from different points of view, and how do you evaluate the relative merits of the different conclusions?

Take care not to make some silly assumptions about perspectives:

- Don't assume that there are just two and that they are distinct, without overlap.

- Don't assume they necessarily oppose each other rather than both (or all) adding something different to the discussion.
  - Don't assume that a particular view can be attributed firmly to any group, since communities have internal variability.
- Be analytical about the perspectives. Ask yourself, for example:
- Who holds the perspective? Why does this group care or get involved?
  - Does there seem to be self-interest behind the perspectives?
  - Do people communicate their views explicitly and give justifications for their conclusions, or do they imply them, or communicate them otherwise? Do some perspectives seem to get a lot more attention than others?
  - If communication is public, how are the ideas presented? Is the viewpoint apparent in the selection of information to put forth, the emphasis placed on some information, the apparent colouring given by values and emotions, or the placement in context? (Check the Critical Thinking pages after chapter 8.)
  - What are the implications of accepting each perspective?

You will also want to be aware of your own assumptions and values as you take your own perspective.

### STEP 6: Organize your ideas in preparation

Leave nothing to chance or last minute spontaneity. You're taking responsibility for a slice of class time, so have to be well prepared for your own success and for the sake of the rest of your class.

During your planning in steps 2 to 5, you had support and advice from your teacher. At the point of more detailed organization, he or she will provide you with a copy of the IB planning document (form TK/PPD), which will help you to concentrate on the order of your ideas. Several days in advance of the presentation, you are expected to give a completed copy to your teacher and have a final consultation. Listen closely to any advice at this point; you and your teacher both want a

presentation that will show your ideas at their best and also benefit the rest of the class.

The planning document requires that you follow a particular sequence, a template that ensures an appropriate presentation. You have to be clear and compact: you are expected not to exceed 500 words or the two sides of the planning form (typed in 12 point font).

Do *not* expect this step to be easy. It's *always* challenging to organize fuzzy and interconnected ideas. It is painful to cut and discard some appealing ideas as you recognize that your time is limited and you have to focus. Below are the five instructions to which you will respond, followed by our advice for each one.<sup>5</sup>

#### 1. Describe your real-life situation.

You have to be ready to give essential features of the situation so that the audience will understand, but spend little time in doing so. This is just preamble.

#### 2. State your central knowledge question.

Usually, many possible knowledge questions could come out of a real-life situation, but you must extract a single central one as your primary focus. Put it clearly into words and keep it in front of you as you do all the rest of your planning.

#### 3. Explain the connection between your real-life situation and your knowledge question.

Putting the connection into words, briefly, can be enormously helpful to your own sense of control. In this step, you are thinking at a high level of generality for your knowledge question, but at the applied and particular level for the real-life situation that acts as the focusing example for your analysis.

#### 4. Outline how you intend to develop your presentation, with respect to perspectives, subsidiary knowledge questions and arguments.

Here you give your plan for your analysis of the knowledge question. Use bullet points or a skeleton outline to do the following:

- identify the perspectives you will explore that are relevant to the knowledge question
- outline the main arguments you will make

- indicate any secondary knowledge questions that will come up in the development of your ideas.

On the planning document, don't give details. You don't have space. What you need to provide here for your teacher, and for any examiner who might also read your form, is the skeleton of your ideas.

#### 5. Show how your conclusions have significance for your real-life situation and beyond.

Where point 4 above was concerned with the conceptual and analytical level of the presentation, point 5 is concerned with the grounded and particular level. You should not lose sight of the sustained example *at any point* while you actually do the presentation; it is your reference point. For this form, though, you need to state only how the analysis, in its conclusions, applies to your real-life situation. How do the different perspectives, for instance, illuminate it, and what would you conclude about it?

In point 5, the words “and beyond” indicate a last expectation. As a final stage of your planning, you are asked to step back from your chosen real-life situation to think more broadly. In what ways is your central knowledge question and the analysis you have given it relevant to other real-life situations? This is your chance to indicate why the presentation topic you have chosen is important to knowledge, by showing it to apply also to other cases. The application of the knowledge question “beyond” is likely to be the final stage of your presentation as you deliver it.

Completing the planning form imposes considerable discipline on your thinking and compels you to think through your ideas in a particular way. If you give it your full attention and prepare yourself to frame a particular event or situation in the world with analytical thinking, you gain a double benefit: for the immediate practicality, you will be prepared to do a good TOK presentation; for longer term usefulness, perhaps for the rest of your life, you will have practised one form of applying your critical thinking to the world.

### STEP 7: Prepare your delivery

With your ideas clearly organized, you can think now about how to communicate them most effectively – how to bring them to life so that you

<sup>5</sup> *Theory of knowledge guide. P 42.*



enjoy doing the presentation and others become interested and involved.

Why did you choose your topic originally? Bring back to mind what drew you to that situation and why you think it is important. Can you formulate to yourself what your *purpose* is in speaking on this topic – why you *care*?

What form of presentation best conveys the ideas? How will you alternate voices for variety, and balance speaking turns within your total time allowed? The TOK guide is very clear on the possibilities for how to do the presentation.

Presentations may take many forms, such as lectures, skits, simulations, games, dramatized readings, interviews or debates. Students may use multimedia, costumes, or props to support their presentations. However, under **no circumstances** should the presentation be simply an essay read aloud to the class. While pre-recorded inserts **within** a presentation are permissible, the presentation itself must be a live experience and not a recording of the presentation.<sup>6</sup>

Use your imagination, bring the ideas to life for your class, and do so in a way that conveys your ideas most effectively. If you do choose to dramatize your presentation, remember that the role play has to function *to support the ideas*. You will be graded on clarity and effectiveness, not on acting ability and the quality of your costumes and props.

Regardless of the form of the presentation, rehearse your delivery – your verbal delivery of ideas to your audience.

- Keep your head up and make eye contact with your audience.
- Speak loudly, so that everyone can hear. Project your voice outward.
- Speak clearly, sounding every word.
- Speak with expression, modulating your voice.
- Do not rush your words. It is better to be a little on the slow side than too fast.
- Even if you are interacting with another student in a discussion or role play, turn to your audience as you speak. Realism in drama is not as important as audibility and clarity of speech.

When you rehearse, pay attention to the total timing of roughly 10 minutes per presenter and do not run over the total time you are given for

your presentation. All student presentations have to be graded on the same basis to be fair. Even for people experienced in oral presentation, the timing is one of the hardest parts to control. The solution? Rehearsal!

That does not mean at all, though, that *within* the presentation each student has to speak for exactly 10 minutes – nor that each has to take the 10 minutes in a single block. Alternating voices more frequently and creating interaction between presenters is one way of making the presentation more dynamic. The number of speaking minutes per person need not be precise, since the count may be affected by roles, but it should be approximately so. It is important that no one dominate the others, and that no one be marginalized. After the presentation, there should ideally be some time left in class for discussion.

Plan to give your audience a brief outline of the major points you are making, particularly in a longer presentation. Such an outline should be kept to very short headings. It can be written in advance on a classroom board or handed out on slips of paper.

It may be possible that you have the facilities at your school to do a computer projection of your key points as you speak. If so, beware of the seductions of technology! Many students are tempted to invest a huge proportion of their preparation time into making flashy slides, forgetting entirely that what matters is the quality of their ideas. Indeed, a computer projection can undermine the very purpose for which it is supposedly used – the clarity of communication and the quality of connection with the audience.

If you plan to use a computer projection to support your presentation, keep the following in mind:

- Just because the software can do it, that doesn't mean *you* should. Avoid dazzling transitions and needless animations that distract from your points.
- Give headings or keywords only, not sentences or blocks of text. The projection is an outline of the major points you are making, not a report.
- For maximum clarity, keep the design simple and consistent. Make sure the font is large enough to read at the back of the room.
- Never turn your back to your audience to read out text.

on how well you can demonstrate the breadth and depth of your TOK learning through an essay in response to one of these titles.

Your essay will be evaluated according to criteria that emerge from the single summary question:

Does the student present an appropriate and cogent analysis of knowledge questions in discussing the title?<sup>7</sup>

The answer, if you plan well, will be “yes” – and the grade will reward you.

Treat your teacher as a valuable – and valued – resource. Although you can choose any title, you should consult with your teacher to make sure that you are clear on what each one actually means. When you have chosen your title and pulled your ideas roughly together, you are permitted to consult your teacher again for help to finalize a plan. Then, when you have a draft of your essay, you are permitted to ask for general written comments and advice – but not corrections or editing. After that one draft, you can ask your teacher only specific questions. The essay is yours and the thought has to be your own.

### TOK essay: myth and fact

**Myth:** Every subject requires a different kind of essay.

**Fact:** Although there are some surface differences in approach, all IB subjects, the extended essay, and theory of knowledge demand some fundamental qualities in a good essay:

- a demonstrated understanding of the topic under discussion
- a demonstrated skill in analytical thinking in the form learned in the particular subject, applied in development of the topic
- a well-organized and clearly written presentation of the ideas, with control of overall argument
- honesty in not plagiarizing, and formalization of this principle by following accepted practices for footnotes and bibliography.

Gaining control of essay writing in any one part of your IB helps in all other parts.

- The earlier advice on verbal delivery still applies. You, and not your slides, should be connecting with your audience.

Computer projections, if well done, can be helpful in some cases, for example when images are an important component of a presentation, or when presenters or members of the audience have trouble with the language or accent of presentation. Still, they are not an expectation and often cause more difficulties than they solve.

You are allowed to incorporate audience reaction into your presentation as you run it, and in a longer presentation you may want to engage the class actively in some kind of reaction to keep their attention (voting on a proposal, standing and saluting, attempting to repeat aloud words in an unfamiliar language, singing along, etc.). But remember that you are not being graded for what others do, and that it is easy to lose control of the timing when unscripted others are spontaneously responding. So be very clear on what role you give your audience in this case, and how you will open and close their participation.

### STEP 8: Do the presentation

The first seven steps have all been planning and rehearsing. Actually performing is a minor part of a successful presentation.

It is entirely possible that you will be nervous. Remember, though, that your ideas are interesting, that you are prepared – and that your audience is on your side. Aim to finish on time, and to conclude firmly. And then...enjoy your moment of triumph. You have just completed a fine TOK presentation! You have surely also learned more about applying your critical skills to understanding knowledge in the world.

### How to write a really good TOK essay

Unlike the topics for your class presentations, the possible topics for your TOK essay – called “prescribed titles” – come from the IB and will be given to you by your teacher. Two thirds of your final TOK mark for the Diploma Programme rests

6 Theory of knowledge guide. Page 41.

7 Theory of knowledge guide. Page 44.



Does the student Present an appropriate and cogent analysis of knowledge questions in discussing the title?				
Aspect	Level 5 Excellent 9-10	Level 4 Very good 7-8	Level 3 Satisfactory 5-6	Level 2 Basic 3-4
Irrelevant 0	Level 1 Elementary 1-2			
Typical characteristics				
Understanding knowledge questions	There is a sustained focus on knowledge questions connected to the prescribed title—developed with investigation of different perspectives and linked effectively to areas to knowledge and/or ways of knowing.	There is a focus on knowledge questions connected to the prescribed title—developed with acknowledgement of different perspectives and linked to areas of knowledge and/or ways of knowing.	There is a focus on some knowledge questions connected to the prescribed title—with some development and linking to areas of knowledge and/or ways of knowing.	Some knowledge questions that are connected to the prescribed title are considered, but the essay is largely descriptive, with superficial or limited links to areas of knowledge and/or ways of knowing.
Quality of analysis of knowledge questions	Arguments are clear, supported by effective real-life examples and are effectively evaluated; counterclaims are extensively explored, implications are drawn.	Arguments are clear, supported by real-life examples and are evaluated; counterclaims are explored.	Some arguments are clear and supported by examples; some counterclaims are identified.	Arguments are unclear and/or not supported by effective examples.
Some possible characteristics				
Cogent Accomplished Discerning Individual Lucid Insightful	Pertinent Relevant Thoughtful Analytical Organized Credible	Typical Acceptable Adequate Competent Predictable	Underdeveloped Basic Unbalanced Superficial Derivative Rudimentary	Ineffective Elementary Descriptive Incoherent Formless

The TOK essay can be a great pleasure to write. It's your chance to show your own keen mind at work, truly engaged with significant questions of knowledge. It's your chance to demonstrate that you have thought about the huge range of ideas raised in TOK and are ready to speak about them in your own voice, taking your own perspective and being *aware* that you are doing so. These are sophisticated skills, but as you emerge from a TOK course thoughtfully followed, you are ready to demonstrate them. If you can do a fine TOK paper, you will have reason for immense satisfaction as you graduate with your IB diploma.

As we suggested for the presentation, think of the essay as a performance in which you demonstrate particular skills that will be evaluated according to particular criteria – rather like Olympics gymnastics, as you move confidently along a balance beam or control your stunts on the hand rings. Admittedly, you will not have an audience to give you thunderous applause nor a stadium of fans to cheer as you step onto the winner's podium. But if you can be clear about your goals in performance and meet them *as well as you can*, you will have achieved a private triumph. In the upcoming section, we will give you advice on setting these goals – and we encourage you to aim high. Go for gold!

STEP 1: Know what is expected

Read the instructions and re-read the assessment criteria. You will not be given a top evaluation for gymnastics if what you perform is ice skating – or even gymnastics with required routines left out. You will not be give a top evaluation for your essay either, if what you hand in does not fulfill the appropriate expectations.

- (a) First read over the criteria according to which your essay will be marked. Pay attention to the top descriptor to set in your mind the standard of excellence towards which you are aiming. You have to know what is required to get the gold.
- (b) Next, read closely the general instructions found at the top of the prescribed title list. These apply to all TOK essays, regardless of the title. These instructions tell you exactly what you are expected to do in your essay. (e.g. “Always justify your statements...”)

(c) Read the title you have chosen, paying attention to its particular instructions. What exactly are you being told to do?

STEP 2: Select a title from the IB list

Do not instantly seize upon a prescribed title that sounds appealing and plunge into it headlong. Often titles that at first glance seem easy are really the most difficult of all, so *really read* all six titles on the list. Remember that you may not change the title to something else that you *wish* you had been asked, but must respond exactly to what the IB has given.

Which two or three titles allow you to demonstrate *best* your understanding of TOK knowledge questions and your own skills of thinking critically? Of those, which ones *most*

What are the key words of instruction?

Identify any tasks the title asks you to undertake by paying attention to action words. If you are told to “*assess*” or “*evaluate*” a claim, then you are supposed to consider the arguments both for and against it, taking into account any ambiguities in interpreting it. Possible responses, for example, are:

- that the claim is justified in *these* ways or up to *this* point, but not justified in *those* ways or beyond *that* point. (Acknowledge the counter-claims, or what can be said *against* a point of view!)
- that whether or not the claim is justified depends on what is meant by one of its key words or concepts, so that if you understand the key word *this* way the claim is justified, but if you understand it *that* way it is not.
- that although some justification (such as the following...) can be offered for this point of view, the claim is really an oversimplification of a question which needs to be understood with awareness of the following complexities...

If you are asked “to what extent” a statement is justified – or whether a given statement is true – then you are still being asked to evaluate a knowledge claim. You will still respond with *the degree* to which you agree, and *the degree* to which (counter-claim!) you do not agree... or to which you see things otherwise.



Discussion Activity

Follow an argument

This activity is best done with pairs of students working together to compare understanding. If different pairs work on the same article, or on articles expressing contrary views, they could benefit from small group discussion as they compare work at the end.

Instructions for a single article

- Find an article that puts forward an argument on an issue that is relevant to your own life or your community. Newspaper editorials, opinion columns, or blogs are likely places to find views expressed.
  - Look for the article's central argument – its main point or thesis. It is often in a sentence at the end of the first paragraph.
  - Trace the overall sequence of ideas in support of its central point from beginning to end, looking for its main points and supporting points. Main points are often placed in the opening sentence of each paragraph (its topic sentence). What is the *line of reasoning* that holds all the parts together?
  - Look for any counter-arguments, points that acknowledge what could be said from a contrasting perspective. These could be raised for serious consideration or seemingly stated only in order that the writer can present and dismiss them.
  - Try to identify any implicit assumptions – that is, unstated ideas that contribute to the overall argument.
  - Notice any examples that the writer uses to illustrate points.
  - Identify the conclusions the writer reaches.
  - Last, take an active role yourself. Write a statement of what main point you would make yourself on this topic, with two or three further points that support it.
- Extending to different perspectives**
- If you are able to find two articles that put forward arguments from different perspectives on the same issue, you will find this activity particularly beneficial. Do contrasting opinion

What are the key concepts?

There are some key words you will find in each of the titles, for example, “evidence”, “belief”, “knowledge”, “methodology” and “justification”. Are you clear about what they mean? Are there multiple possible meanings or ambiguities in their meaning? Think back on class discussions and check your notes. Refresh your memory on chapters in this book that are particularly relevant.

Put the title into your own words to make sure you understand what is being asked, and check your understanding with your teacher.

Identify explicitly what is/are the central knowledge question(s) of the title. If after having given it some thought you still aren't sure about this, choose a different title, no matter how much time and effort you have expended. Without clarity regarding the knowledge question(s) involved in the title, you will not be able to write a good TOK essay.



Know what's expected

You will not be applauded in a gymnastics competition if what you perform is contemporary dance. Nor will you receive an excellent evaluation for a TOK essay unless you demonstrate the appropriate thinking and writing skills. In preparing your essay, familiarize yourself with the marking criteria and aim to show your skills at their best.

catch your personal interest and give you a sense that you have something to say that will show your perspective as a knower?

STEP 3: Gather your ideas

Brainstorm in several sweeps across the ideas. Have paper in front of you, and a pen ready for quickly jotting down your ideas, or else be ready with a new document on your computer screen.

First sweep: think openly

You've already understood the knowledge questions in the title and your instructions. Now – what comes to your mind? Write or type it quickly. What assumptions might there be within the title? What areas of knowledge and ways of knowing will you talk about in your essay? What kind of comparisons will you make between them? What examples can you think of already? Don't give *any* attention to sentence structure or beautiful phrasing. Just write quickly until your mind storm, inevitably, passes.

Second sweep: think more deliberately

Use circles, arrows, links, bold highlighting, colour or whatever other markings work for

you to connect up the main jotted ideas on the page in front of you. Cluster them: group them for similar points. Then focus your mind again on the knowledge questions of the title, and *brainstorm again*, pushing your thoughts more deliberately now. Are there perspectives other than the ones you have noted – perspectives from other cultures, other age groups and interest groups, other areas of knowledge than the ones that came to you first? Within an area of knowledge, do different theories provide different perspectives? Can you notice any assumptions that you are making yourself, or any values that come with your own point of view? What key words do you find yourself using, and are you entirely clear over what they mean? Scribble down your thoughts. If they obviously and instantly belong to your first clusters, add them there, but otherwise *just write*.

Third sweep: counter-think

Read over everything you have written and mark new clusters forming. Then focus your mind again on the questions of knowledge of the title, and *brainstorm again*, this time giving much more deliberate attention to what you have gathered so far. Think in reverse. What can be said *against* the



points you are starting to make? What counter-claims might expose their limitations or add a level of complexity? What are the implications of your main points? If you accept them then what else do you end up also accepting? Could someone else object to the conclusions you reach and, if so, on what grounds? Without discarding anything yet, start to highlight the main points towards an essay that will treat the topic with balance and awareness of counter-claims.

Fourth sweep: develop ideas

Now enrich your immediate ideas by going back over notes from your TOK class to remind yourself of discussions that are relevant to your title. Go back through this book, using chapter titles and headings – and, of course, memory – to locate relevant ideas and refresh your memory on them. What areas of knowledge and ways of

knowing, from among the first ones you noted, would be the *best* ones to use? Gather examples to illustrate your points from notes and texts from your other IB courses, the media, people you know, your own experience, or any other relevant sources. But remember that the TOK essay is not a research paper: you will not find your response to the title in a book or on a website. Books and other sources give you only the raw material from which you, as knower and author, must shape your *own* response.

STEP 4: Organize your ideas in preparation for writing

Now comes probably the greatest challenge – to move from scribbled notes towards a plan for an essay that lays out a sequence of arguments that clearly respond to the title. If you find this

Patterns of development: thesis first or thesis last

1. Thesis first

In this pattern of development, you place your thesis in your introductory paragraph (usually as its final sentence after an opening to catch attention and a sentence or two to establish your topic) so that your central argument hits the reader right at the beginning. Each subsection of the body of the essay then supports and develops the thesis to create a sustained argument.

The overall argument is created by the sequence of main points: the thesis gives the main argument and the topic sentences of paragraphs give the supporting arguments. The conclusion picks up the thesis again, restating it in somewhat different words as an argument that you have, by that point, firmly established.

Note that the thesis will often have counter-claims built right into it (e.g. “*Although* X has some justification, Y is more convincing.”). You will usually treat counter-claims or counter-arguments at the beginning, in order to lay them aside. Move on to give arguments that you think are better justified – with the most persuasive at the end, in order of climax.

2. Thesis last

In this pattern of development, you place in your introduction (usually as its final sentence, just as

with the thesis first pattern) a focused question raising for discussion the knowledge question(s) of your title.

Each subsection of the body of the essay then treats aspects of the question or possible answers to it, usually in order of climax with the most convincing answer at the end. The thesis then emerges firmly at the end of the essay as the conclusion of the argument, the answer to the question posed at the beginning.

This pattern simulates the process of thinking and reaching a conclusion. Do not be fooled, though, into thinking that you really can just think and write as you go. This pattern demands just as much advance planning as the other; you will need to know before you start to do the actual writing exactly what your introductory question will be, exactly what your answer will be at the end, and the sequence of questions that will lead your reader through the simulated reasoning process from beginning to end.

Different school systems or writers favour one pattern or the other. If you are in doubt about which to use or unsure of your writing skills, however, the thesis-first pattern is safer in immediately getting your argument on track and giving a reader confidence in your control of ideas.

step difficult, remember that no one is born already knowing how to write an essay. It takes concentration and practice to learn to swim, to tango . . . or to organize ideas for an essay. Allow yourself only a few minutes to wail “But I *can’t* . . . !” and then settle down to start planning.

(a) Identify your thesis.

At this point, you should concentrate on identifying your *thesis* – that is, the central point that you want to make about knowledge issues in response to the title, the *argument* that emerges from your thoughts on your rough material. Distill this argument into a single sentence to write at the top of your plan. Your *thesis* is the single most important sentence in your entire essay. *Make*

The essay: assessment criteria

The essay: assessment criteria

*Does the student present an appropriate and cogent analysis of knowledge questions in discussing the title?*<sup>8</sup>

The judgment about the TOK essay is to be made on the basis of the following two aspects:

1. Understanding knowledge questions

Knowledge questions addressed in the essay should be shown to have a direct connection to the chosen prescribed title, or to be important in relation to it.

Depth of understanding is often indicated by drawing distinctions within ways of knowing and areas of knowledge, or by connecting several facets of knowledge questions to these.

Breadth of understanding is often indicated by making comparisons between ways of knowing and areas of knowledge. Since not all prescribed titles lend themselves to an extensive treatment of an equal range of areas of knowledge or ways of knowing, this element in the descriptors should be applied with concern for the particularity of the title.

Relevant questions to be considered include the following.

- Does the essay demonstrate understanding of knowledge questions that are relevant to the prescribed title?

*sure* that it responds to the title and focuses on its central knowledge questions.

(b) Consider counter-claims.

Will you agree with the title’s assertion (if it makes one) or will you disagree? Most of the best essays agree (or disagree) *with reservations*. What will these be? There is almost always something to be said for different perspectives and for different sides of an argument. Consider alternate views and be as critical (or as forgiving) of your own perspective as you are of others.

(c) Plan your sequence.

To write a golden essay, have a golden plan. The sequence of ideas as you move from subsection to

- Does the essay demonstrate an awareness of the connections between knowledge questions, areas of knowledge, and ways of knowing?

- Does the student show an awareness of his or her 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)?

2. Quality of analysis of knowledge questions

This aspect is concerned only with knowledge questions that are relevant to the prescribed title.

Relevant questions to be considered include the following.

- What is the quality of the inquiry into knowledge questions?
- Are the main points in the essay justified?
- Are the arguments coherent and compelling?
- Have counter-claims been considered?
- Are the implications and underlying assumptions of the essay’s argument identified?
- Are the arguments effectively evaluated?

Analysis of a knowledge question that is not relevant to the prescribed title will not be assessed.

<sup>8</sup> *Theory of knowledge guide*. Pp 44–45.



subsection in the body of your essay must develop your thesis, which in turn must respond to the title. Generally it should be possible to follow the argument of your essay simply by reading your thesis in the introduction, the opening topic sentence of each of your paragraphs, and the restated thesis in your conclusion, clinching the argument.

### STEP 5: Write your draft essay and revise it

The actual writing is only a small part of a good essay.

Before you start, be aware of some of the most common pitfalls that assessors of TOK essays can recognize in an instant. Things to avoid:

- Avoid sweeping claims (overgeneralization and oversimplification). If you do not intend to show that you are aware you are making a large generalization or to analyse it in some way, do not make it.
- Avoid caricatures and stereotyping: for example, all historians are unaware of their biases; all adherents to religion possess blind, perfect faith in what their religion tells them to believe; because of their professions, scientists rely on reason, artists on emotion, always. Go back to the section on reason as a way of knowing for a review of the dangers of the hidden “all” and possible fallacies, and go back to the section on classification to remind yourself of its possible dangers.
- Avoid an essay composed principally of questions, paragraph upon paragraph of questions: What is truth? Can we ever be certain? How can we know? If you do not try to answer the questions, they will be considered to be empty rhetoric and you will gain no credit.
- Avoid quoting other people’s words unless you will analyse them or otherwise use them directly in argument. An essay that merely pastes quotations together does not achieve the critical analysis and argument that you are expected to do in your own words.
- Avoid full-blown preaching. Absence of counter-claims and acknowledgment of alternative perspectives significantly undermines the quality of an essay.
- Avoid using this book as a substitute for thought. We have written it to stimulate your

own thinking – to encourage you to consider thoughtfully a multitude of knowledge questions with a perspective of your own of which you are increasingly aware. You should not need to quote us. Put ideas entirely into your own words. You do not need to borrow the examples we use to illustrate ideas. Find your own examples. Have confidence in yourself. After a course in TOK, you are entirely ready to fly on your own.

Now write. Use your introduction to:

- catch your reader’s attention
- establish the title that you are going to discuss
- give your thesis.

The taste for stylistic flourishes and fine writing in an introduction varies from culture to culture, but be warned that the marking criteria do not reward elegance of style. But they do count the words in a preamble as part of your maximum allowed.

As you write, *develop ideas in proportion* to their importance in your overall plan. Your essay must not be more than 1,600 words in length, so control the degree to which you expand on an idea as you go. Doing so is not easy, but it is easier than trying to readjust the whole essay at the end.

*Clarify concepts as you go*, defining and/or exemplifying terms if they are key terms necessary to your argument.

Things to avoid:

- Do not pad your essay with definitions of terms which are not particularly ambiguous.
- Do not drop into your essay lumps of definition which are not clearly linked to your argument and are ignored thereafter.
- Do not, above all, use a dictionary definition to bypass complexities: no assessor will be impressed if, after a course in which you discuss possible understandings of “truth” or “knowledge”, you resolve this question of ambiguity and different perspectives by plunking down a citation from the dictionary as if you have thereby settled the matter.

*Use examples* to develop and illustrate your arguments. Examples do not *prove* a point. Remember all that you learned about the evidence base necessary for sound inductive conclusions. However, well-chosen examples can bring arguments to life, clarify concepts,

expand upon points, and demonstrate your understanding. In your brainstorming, you have already gathered possible examples from which you now have to *select*.

*Select examples for breadth.* Take your examples from a variety of sources and areas of knowledge as a major means of demonstrating the breadth of your understanding. Draw from the media, books that you have read, lectures on special topics that you have heard, cultural issues of which you are aware, documentary films that you have seen, and so on. Draw from your other IB courses and course textbooks. Do not just make up your examples or suppose them in a hypothetical way (“If a historian were to write from an American perspective, he might...”). Then, out of the wide range of examples select the ones that seem most effective for illustrating your points. Your goal is not to stuff your essay with as many examples as possible, but to have breadth within the ones selected as best.

*Use the examples effectively.* Think strategically to use those examples to give the best support you can to your ideas. Will you use a single sustained example in a paragraph in order to demonstrate, in some detail, how knowledge works in a particular area? Or will you use two or three smaller examples, giving them brief development to ensure that they do play their part to clarify points and illustrate your argument?

*Reference your work.* Give the source of any quotation or unusual pieces of information, using accepted conventions of footnotes and bibliography. Acknowledge any source that has contributed significantly to your thinking. If you are not sure whether to footnote or not, it is better to footnote too much than too little.

*Check your facts* as you bring in examples and support generalizations. Are your assertions accurate, sufficiently specific and detailed?

*Polish the essay as you finish writing.* Check for mistakes in sentence structure, grammar, word choice and spelling. Errors can interfere with the clarity of your communication.

You are almost finished, but there is still an essential step between the draft and your final version: you have to make sure that you have not drifted from the expectations of a top performance that you had in mind as you began. With the marking criteria in hand, go through the essay to confirm that it is as close as you can make it to the description of the top achievement. Read carefully, check, and pick out features of your essay that you may still strengthen and polish. This done, you are ready, triumphantly, for the final step.

### STEP 6: Hand it in – and celebrate!

A good TOK essay demands that you think deeply about questions about knowledge that thread themselves through all areas of your life. If you have done your best to take a significant question and make it your own, you have achieved a goal central to TOK and your International Baccalaureate diploma – and important in the growth of your own thinking.

Congratulations! Regardless of what the mark on the essay ends up being, you have reason for celebration. You have won the gold.

