



TOK

HANDBOOK

STUDENTS' GUIDE

Stars College High Schools



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What is the Theory of Knowledge?

Theory of knowledge (TOK) is a course about **critical thinking** and **inquiring into the process of knowing**, rather than about learning a specific body of knowledge. It plays a special role in the DP by **providing an opportunity for students to reflect on the nature of knowledge**, to **make connections between areas of knowledge**, and to **become aware of their own perspectives** and those of the various groups whose knowledge they share.

It is a core element undertaken by all DP students, and schools are required to devote at least 100 hours of class time to the course. The overall aim of TOK is to encourage students to **formulate answers to the question "how do you know?"** in a variety of contexts, and to see the value of that question. This allows students to **develop an enduring fascination with the richness of knowledge**.



CURRICULUM MODEL

Core Theme

- Knowledge and the Knower
- Me as a knower and a thinker
- What shapes my perspective?
- Where do our values come from?
- How can we navigate the world?
- How can we tell when we are being manipulated?

Optional themes: (two were chosen)

- Knowledge and language
- Knowledge and Technology

Areas of Knowledge:

- History
- The Human Sciences
- The Natural Sciences
- Mathematics
- The Arts

TOK Course Aims and Structure

TOK Course Aims

TOK's overarching goal is to encourage students to formulate responses to the question "How do you know?" in a variety of contexts, as well as to recognize the value of that question. This enables students to develop a lifelong fascination with the breadth of knowledge.



The TOK course's specific goals are for students to:

- 01 Make connections between a critical approach to knowledge construction, academic disciplines, and the larger world.
- 02 Gain an understanding of how individuals and communities construct knowledge, as well as how this is critically examined.
- 03 Foster an appreciation for the diversity and richness of cultural perspectives, as well as an awareness of personal and ideological assumptions.
- 04 Critically examine their own assumptions and beliefs, leading to more thoughtful, responsible, and purposeful lives.
- 05 Recognize that knowledge comes with responsibility, which leads to commitment and action.



How is TOK structured?

TOK is almost entirely comprised of questions as a thoughtful and purposeful inquiry into different ways of knowing and different kinds of knowledge.

The most important of these is "How do we know?" Others include:

- What counts as evidence for X?
- How do we determine which model of Y is the best?
- What does theory Z mean in practice?

Students gain a better understanding of their personal and ideological assumptions, as well as an appreciation for the diversity and richness of cultural perspectives, through discussions of these and other questions.

Assessment:

The TOK course is assessed through a 1,600-word essay and an exhibition.

Internal Assessment: TOK exhibition

The exhibition aims to evaluate how TOK concepts can be applied in the real world and it must be completed by the student alone. They must select one prescribed IA prompt and three objects. Prompts:

1. What counts as knowledge?
2. Are some types of knowledge more useful than others?
3. What features of knowledge impact on its reliability?
4. On what grounds might we doubt a claim?
5. What counts as good evidence for a claim?
6. How does the way that we organize or classify knowledge affect what we know?
7. What are the implications of having or not having knowledge?
8. To what extent is certainty attainable?
9. Are some types of knowledge less open to interpretation than others?
10. What challenges are raised by the dissemination and /or communication of knowledge?
11. Can new knowledge change established values or beliefs?
12. Is bias inevitable in the production of knowledge?
13. How can we know that current knowledge is an improvement upon past knowledge?
14. Does some knowledge belong only to particular communities of knowers?
15. What constraints are there on the pursuit of knowledge?
16. Should some knowledge not be sought on ethical grounds?
17. Why do we seek knowledge?
18. Are some things unknowable?

19. What counts as a good justification for a claim?
20. What is the relationship between personal experience and knowledge?
21. What is the relationship between knowledge and culture?
22. What role do experts play in influencing our consumption or acquisition of knowledge?
23. How important are material tools in the production or acquisition of knowledge?
24. How might the context in which knowledge is presented influence whether it is accepted or rejected?
25. How can we distinguish between knowledge and opinion?
26. Does our knowledge depend on our interactions with other knowers?
27. Does all knowledge impose ethical obligations on those who know it?
28. To what extent is objectivity possible in the production or acquisition of knowledge?
29. Who owns knowledge?
30. What role does imagination play in producing knowledge about the world?
31. How can we judge when evidence is adequate?
32. What makes a good explanation?
33. How is current knowledge shaped by its historical development?
34. In what ways do our values affect our acquisition of knowledge?
35. In what ways do values affect the production of knowledge?

Summary of the TOK Exhibition process



Step 1

TOK is almost entirely comprised of questions as a thoughtful and purposeful inquiry into different ways of knowing and different kinds of knowledge.

Step 2

Students produce a single file containing their TOK exhibition. This must include:

- A title clearly indicating their selected IA prompt
- Images of their three objects
- A typed commentary on each object. (In this commentary, students identify each object and its specific real-world context, and justify each object's inclusion in the exhibition and links to the IA prompt.)
- This commentary should be a maximum of 950 words in total.
- Appropriate citations and references.

Once complete, this file is submitted to the TOK teacher to be marked. Samples of student work are then submitted to the IB for moderation.

Step 3

Teachers are required to provide all students with an opportunity for their completed exhibitions to be showcased and exhibited to an audience.
At Stars College, this will be held on an exhibition night along with CAS and Group 4 Projects on exhibition.

External Assessment: TOK Essay



The TOK essay

Essay titles will be presented in the form of knowledge questions based on the Areas of Knowledge. The essay begins with a conceptual framework. It may, for example, ask students to debate the claim that the methodologies used to create knowledge are dependent on the use to which that knowledge will be put. The TOK essay must be double-spaced and written in standard 12 font. Each student selects one of six essay titles provided by the IB. The titles change in each examination session.

WRITE AN ESSAY



Some examples from May 2023 include the following questions:

01

Is replicability necessary in the production of knowledge? Discuss with reference to two areas of knowledge.

02

For artists and natural scientists, which is more important: what can be explained or what cannot be explained? Discuss with reference to the arts and the natural sciences.

03

Does it matter if our acquisition of knowledge happens in "bubbles" where some information and voices are excluded? Discuss with reference to two areas of knowledge.

04

Do you agree that it is "astonishing that so little knowledge can give us so much power" (Bertrand Russell)? Discuss with reference to the natural sciences and one other area of knowledge.

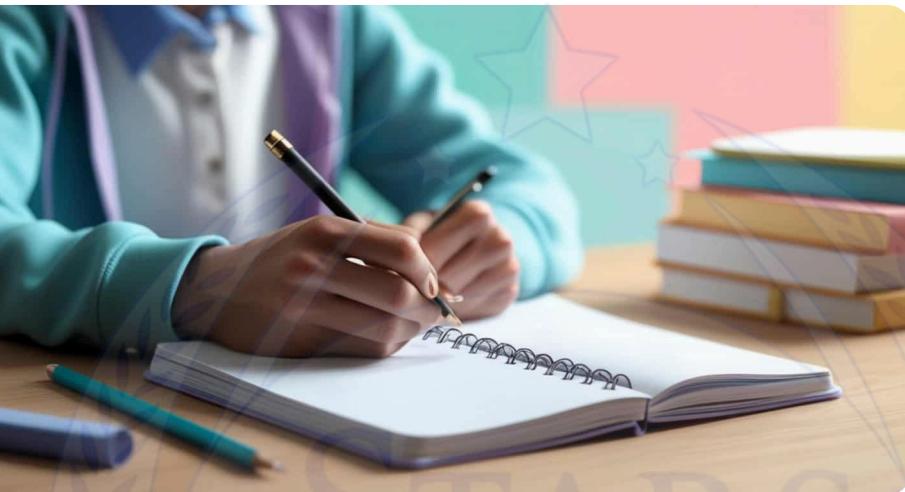
05

Are visual representations always helpful in the communication of knowledge? Discuss with reference to the human sciences and mathematics.

06

To what extent is the knowledge we produce determined by the methodologies we use? Discuss with reference to history and one other area of knowledge.

The maximum length of the essay is 1,600 words.



The word count includes:

- the main part of the essay
- any quotations.

The word count includes:

- any acknowledgments
- the references (whether given in footnotes, endnotes or in-text) and bibliography
- any maps, charts, diagrams, annotated illustrations or tables.



Assessment Rubric: TOK Exhibition

Does the exhibition successfully show how TOK manifests in the world around us?

Excellent 9-10	Good 7-8	Satisfactory 5-6	Basic 3-4	Rudimentary 1-2	0
<p>The exhibition clearly distinguishes three objects and their respective real-world contexts. The connections between the three objects and the chosen IA prompt are obvious and well-explained. There is strong justification for the specific contribution that each individual object makes to the exhibition. All, or nearly all, of the points are well-supported by relevant evidence and explicit references to the chosen IA prompt.</p>	<p>Three objects and their real-world contexts are identified in the exhibition. The connections between the three objects and the selected IA prompt are explained, though this explanation may be lacking in precision and clarity in places. There is a justification for each individual object's contribution to the exhibition. Many of the points are supported by relevant evidence and references to the chosen IA prompt.</p>	<p>The exhibition identifies three objects, though their real-world contexts may be vague or imprecisely stated. There is some explanation of the connections between the three objects and the selected IA prompt. Each object in the exhibition has some justification for its inclusion. Some of the points are supported by evidence and references to the IA prompt chosen.</p>	<p>The exhibition identifies three objects, though their real-world contexts may be implied rather than explicitly stated. Basic connections are made between the objects and the selected IA prompt, but the explanation for these connections is unconvincing and/or unfocused. Each object's inclusion in the exhibition has a superficial justification. Reasons for including the objects are provided, but they are not supported by appropriate evidence and/or are irrelevant to the selected IA prompt. There may be significant repetition among the various object justifications.</p>	<p>The exhibition features three objects, but the real-world contexts of these objects are not stated, and the images displayed may be highly generic images of types of objects rather than specific real-world objects. Links are made between the objects and the selected IA prompt, but they are minimal, tenuous, or unclear as to what the student is attempting to convey.</p>	<p>The exhibition does not reach the standard described by the other levels or does not use one of the IA prompts provided.</p>

Possible characteristics

Convincing
Lucid
Precise

Focused
Relevant
Coherent

Adequate
Competent
Acceptable

Simplistic
Limited
Underdeveloped

Ineffective
Descriptive
Incoherent

Assessment Rubric: TOK Essay

Does the student provide a clear, coherent and critical exploration of the essay title?

Excellent 9-10	Good 7-8	Satisfactory 5-6	Basic 3-4	Rudimentary 1-2	0
<p>The discussion maintains a consistent focus on the title and is effectively linked to areas of knowledge. Arguments are clear, coherent, and well-supported by specific examples. Arguments' implications are considered. There is a clear awareness and evaluation of various points of view.</p>	<p>The discussion is focused on the title and is effectively linked to areas of knowledge. Arguments are clear, coherent, and backed up by examples. There is awareness and some evaluation of various points of view.</p>	<p>The discussion is centered on the title and is supplemented with some links to areas of expertise. Arguments are advanced and supported by examples. There is some awareness of opposing viewpoints.</p>	<p>The discussion is related to the title and makes only superficial or limited connections to areas of knowledge. The conversation is mostly descriptive. There are few arguments presented, but they are unclear and lack effective examples.</p>	<p>The discussion is only tenuously related to the title. While there may be connections to areas of knowledge, any relevant points are either descriptive or consist solely of unsupported assertions.</p>	<p>The discussion does not meet the other levels' expectations or is not in response to one of the prescribed titles for the appropriate examination session.</p>

Possible characteristics

Insightful
Convincing
Accomplished
Lucid

Pertinent
Relevant
Analytical
Organized

Acceptable
Mainstream
Adequate
Competent

Underdeveloped
Basic
Superficial
Limited

Ineffective
Descriptive
Incoherent
Formless





Assessment Objectives

It is expected that by the end of the TOK course, students will be able to:

- Identify and analyze the various kinds of justifications used to support knowledge claims.
- Formulate, evaluate, and attempt to answer knowledge questions.
- Examine how academic disciplines/areas of knowledge generate and shape knowledge.
- Understand the roles played by ways of knowing in the construction of shared and personal knowledge.
- Explore links between knowledge claims, knowledge questions, ways of knowing, and areas of knowledge.
- Demonstrate an awareness and understanding of different perspectives and be able to relate these to one's own perspective.
- Explore a real-life/contemporary situation from a TOK perspective in the presentation

What is the significance of TOK?

TOK aims to make students aware of the interpretative nature of knowledge, including personal ideological biases – whether these biases are retained, revised or rejected.

It offers students and their teachers the opportunity to:

- Reflect critically on diverse ways of knowing and on areas of knowledge
- Consider the role and nature of knowledge in their own culture, in the cultures of others and in the wider world.

In addition, TOK prompts students to:

- Be aware of themselves as thinkers, encouraging them to become more acquainted with the complexity of knowledge
- Recognize the need to act responsibly in an increasingly interconnected but uncertain world.

TOK also provides coherence for the student, by linking academic subject areas as well as transcending them. It therefore demonstrates the ways in which the student can apply their knowledge with greater awareness and credibility.

